

INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGES: TRUTH & RECONCILIATION SUMMIT

University of Waterloo, October 14, 15, and 16, 2016

Summit Summary

1. Objectives and Short Description

The objective of the summit is to materialize the research and practice of “truth” and “reconciliation” with a focus on collaborative education and pedagogical history. We plan to study by creating a range of immersive academic and creative spaces through outreach and collaborative programming. A direct response to the Truth and Reconciliation’s Final Report’s Calls to Action (TRC), the summit is an outreach initiative that promises an intercultural calling-in of researchers, scholars, social justice advocates, elders, intergenerational survivors, artists, knowledge keepers, cultural and multidisciplinary practitioners and performers, educators, and students, among others to reflect on the consequences that emerged from the residential school legacy and the impact on educational paradigms. *Integrating Knowledges: Truth & Reconciliation Project*, will be the first event of its kind held at the University of Waterloo in that it partners departments within the University with the greater community to revitalize the relationships between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society in meaningful and sustainable ways. Furthermore, the summit is an entirely unique and unprecedented outreach event with its aim to generate and document creative solutions to immediate societal challenges by developing opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, artists and researchers across disciplines and communities to meet and collaborate in order to acknowledge and recognize Indigenous educational systems through communication methods and practices. Christine Welsh explains that differing perspectives between the colonizer and Aboriginal peoples require the “surrendering [of] our pre-conceived notions of the very nature of history – that is linear, progressive, date-and event-oriented– and adapting our thinking to fundamentally different aboriginal world-view which is cyclical and ultimately timeless” (16). The challenge to decolonize perspectives thus raises a critical question that is central to the summit’s objective: how can institutions implement Indigenous knowledges in a manner that is meaningful, sustainable, and substantive and in a way that will activate, in material practices, truth and reconciliation and the willingness to “surrender” pre- conceived notions of education, research and practice? John Ralston Saul reminds us that the “treaties were signed not by the government but by the Crown, and therefore by the state, in the name of the people. And while our obligations are legal, they are first of all ethical” (34). Saul presents a question that is at the core of the summit and reflects our commitment to take responsibility by endeavoring to answer it: we must “ask ourselves whether we want to play our role as citizens – as treaty people” (68).

2. General Context of the Outreach Program

A focus of the summit, to be situated on the University of Waterloo campus with off-site

locations, is to challenge the absence of acknowledgement of Indigenous epistemologies and address the impact of residential schools systems in Canada. As John S. Milloy argues, “the schools were, with the agents and agencies of economic and political marginalization, part of the contagion of colonization” (295). The erasure of languages, cultures, and histories has manifested in the exclusion of Indigenous pedagogical systems, a situation which continues to fortify a divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The university is situated on the Haldimand Tract; the ceded Six Nations’ territory is part of the Great Dish that was shared by the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. Hence, the summit will demand a great deal from the participating institutions, educators, and students as it addresses also very local colonial legacies and possibilities for creating decolonizing and inclusive pedagogies. The university, outreach collaborators, and audiences thereby become participants who play an active role in examining the sites of pedagogical history and in the remaking of renewed dialogical educational spaces. The outreach process for the summit has been underway since 2014, and the relationships forged over that period underscore the commitment of all our collaborators who are working together toward the summit’s objectives. The campus and its off-site locations are, in this sense, a catalyst to understanding the environment, jurisdictions, histories, and the past and present day implications of systems borne from the residential school legacy. The contemporary systemic consequences from the nineteenth-century government policies and mediated misrepresentations of indigeneity have been naturalized into Canadian educational institutions. Augie Fleras explains that “[...] the defining feature of systemic bias is its perceived normalcy — that is, a business-as-usual framework. An insistence on applying identical standards to unequal contexts unwittingly but routinely penalized individuals — even if the controlling actors and institutional routines themselves are free of open prejudice” (75). Educational systems, as a colonizing apparatus, still systematically delimit Indigenous scholarship, knowledge, and cultural entries into the national curricula. How then can the summit illuminate the hegemonic structures of oppression that “unwittingly but routinely penalize [other] individuals”? The summit’s participants will tackle this and other questions directly. The summit promises to be the ground upon which to gather and engage with the exchange of the plural formation of “knowledges” in order to materialize and illuminate the heterogeneity of Indigenous pedagogies.

3. Structure

The 3-day summit will engage with and circulate Aboriginal scholarship and knowledges in three ways: **1)** Collaborative outreach programming on and off-site, **2)** Keynote address and circle debates and discussions, **3)** Creative, performative and academic exchanges and presentations facilitated by leaders from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities; and **4)** Documentation and dissemination of the outreach model via a website and publication.

- a. **Roundtables (Circles)** Nine Circle sessions are structured to be open to the public with speakers leading discussion based on their prepared opening questions facilitated by a moderator.
- b. **Keynote** Cindy Blackstock Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, will open the summit with the keynote address. Blackstock’s

research interests in Indigenous theory and the identification and remediation of structural inequalities will be live streamed on the website and accessed by regional and national classrooms.

- c. **Performance-Workshop** During the summit, three actors from Indigenous theatre communities (Six Nations of the Grand, Toronto, Saskatoon) will work with three UWaterloo theatre students. They will workshop through performance practice the dimensions and challenges of truth and reconciliation. In her examination of Indigenous theatre as “good medicine,” Michelle LaFlamme reflects that “Aboriginal artists have created work that inspires others and, simultaneously, transforms communal and national grief through the ritual of witnessing and naming in commemorative performance” (109). The workshop’s goal is to make space for the audiences to witness and heal through the sharing of performance practice. The workshop’s culmination will be “An Offering” presented at the close of the summit. The workshop process and outcome will be documented for the website.
- d. **Connecting with audiences** With its free admission, the summit will draw in scholars, researchers, cultural practitioners, students, and the public to the university campus and its off-site locations among the larger communities. Six Nations Elected Chief Counsel Ava Hill reminds us of the importance for mainstream Canada to understand the history of residential schools and the implications: “They need to understand what happened to our people by the government of the day. It is to blame for many of the social problems still being experienced today” (Ruby 2014). Before we approach the complex meanings of “reconciliation” and “truth,” we must address the societal challenges that emerged from the residential school system and the impact to educational paradigms. To begin to do this work, the summit will address the existing dearth of knowledge about Indigenous cultures in Canada for students and faculty on campuses and for the general public. The website will house the summit process and outcomes gathered and offer an accessible resource before, during and after the summit.

Visit the *Truth and Reconciliation Response Projects* website for more information:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/truth-and-reconciliation-response-projects/>