



Reconciliation in Action: Deepening Awareness of Bias and Racism through Collaborative Introspection

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Abstract

In Canada, education is often referred to as the path to success. For youth to develop into responsible citizens, Eurocentric Canadian education systems claim that the attainment of educational credentials is necessary. However, the current educational attainment of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners in Canada is far below that of their non-Indigenous counterparts. The dearth of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing in provincially-mandated education systems hinders the success of Indigenous youth, limits opportunities for advancement, and promotes a system of learner inequity by fostering ignorance among educators. Through critical participatory action research, this study focused on determining the perceived challenges non-Indigenous educators experience when bridging Indigenous knowledges in a blended K-12 classroom. The purpose of this research was to determine how collaborative professional development aimed at promoting self-reflexivity and introspection could lead to a deeper awareness of power, privilege, bias and unacknowledged racism when bridging Indigenous ways of knowing and doing in teacher pedagogy. Over a three-month period, participants became more deeply aware of their own racist and stereotypical underpinnings and sought further support to engage with Indigenous knowledge systems in their daily pedagogical considerations. The results of this study showed that collaborative professional development promoted a deeper exploration of both past and present experiences, how those experiences shaped teachers' bias and unacknowledged racism relating to Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, and methods through which participants can continue to engage with reconciliatory education in their blended classrooms.

Keywords: Indigenous Education, Bias, Racism, Action Research, Collaborative Professional Development

Introduction

In recent years, the growing demand for reconciliatory justice and accountability in education has led to the increased adoption of initiatives focused on addressing both historical and contemporary issues of Indigenous peoples in Canada. In response to the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015), provincially-mandated education systems have revised curriculum to include Indigenous histories, worldviews, and knowledge systems in an effort to reduce harm and create inclusive and culturally-responsive classroom environments. While curriculum level change represents an important step towards reconciliatory education, it fails to address or confront the Eurocentric, colonized epistemological underpinnings of the educators themselves. Canadian educators, often beneficiaries of dominant colonial narratives steeped in Eurocentric pedagogical teachings, enter the classroom with unacknowledged biases, ingrained worldviews, and often unexamined assumptions about knowledge and learning. These biases do not disappear in the face of revised curriculum, but in many cases shape how reconciliatory education initiatives are interpreted, delivered, and even resisted in educational environments.

Professional development opportunities in Canada prioritize content knowledge, seeking to educate teachers on the when's, where's, why's, and even occasionally the how's of addressing Indigenous content in the curriculum. Critical self-examination and introspection are rarely, if ever, addressed, resulting in classroom efforts for reconciliation becoming superficial and performative. Indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives are often misinterpreted and misrepresented resulting in stereotypical understandings and the tokenization of Indigenous peoples lived experiences. The colonized structure of power and privilege are rarely challenged, and often shape dynamics and interactions in the classroom. Canadian educators are not neutral beings; Rather, they are individuals shaped by their own educational experiences, backgrounds, and belief systems. Teachers' epistemological underpinnings shape how they interpret and interact with the curriculum, assess knowledge, and engage with students whose worldviews differ from their own. Without examining educators' epistemological foundations, reconciliatory education initiatives risk being filtered through the colonized paradigms they seek to unsettle. This research explores how collaborative, introspective professional development can begin to address teachers unacknowledged positionalities, and explore how these positions impact their teaching practice. Rooted in principles of reflexivity, dialogue, and relational accountability, this research argues that professional development opportunities grounded in introspection and deep collaboration can begin to transform the colonized underpinnings that are prevalent in educators in Canada.

Literature

Through an exploration of contemporary literature, education systems in settler colonial nations such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand continue to be impacted by a legacy of settler colonialism. Misrepresentation and underrepresentation of Indigenous knowledge systems frequently lead to mythical, and often tokenized images of Indigenous

peoples, and result in educational inequities for Indigenous learners. Scholars Battiste and Henderson (2009) and Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argue that colonial education systems grounded in Eurocentric worldviews must undergo epistemological decolonization and curricular transformation if they are to address these inequities. Provincially-mandated school divisions in Canada continue to address curriculum reform. However, a growing number of scholars assert that reconciliation cannot be achieved through content revision alone. The current limitations of conventional professional development do little to address the ingrained epistemological understandings that many teachers bring to the classroom.

Teacher Professional Development

As stated by Freeman (2024), the conventional understanding of professional development starts from a premise of deficit and repair. Professional development for educators in Canada operates with the assumption that something in teaching needs to be improved or fixed in order to address concerns in student learning. National policy dictates systemic goals, determining why professional development is required, and what programs are needed to accomplish these goals. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015) spurred the national and provincial governments into making changes in the education of our learners, and thus professional development bodies designed programs to include necessary training and exposure to Indigenous knowledge systems in Canada. Howell and Ng-A-Fook (2022) claim that many Canadian educators hold a "distressingly limited" amount of knowledge of Indigenous peoples, histories, and contemporary issues (p. 20). This in part is due to a negligible amount of training or education regarding Indigenous issues (Milne & Witherspoon, 2022), as well as the labeling of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives as difficult (Douglas, et al., 2020) or irrelevant in an educators' teaching context (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018). Many provincially-mandated education systems in Canada have recently amended their teaching quality standards to address the necessity of including Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into teaching pedagogy, but have not considered current educators understanding or 'willingness' to comply with these new regulations.

Current professional development opportunities for teachers in Canada are focused on increasing the knowledge and understanding of Indigenous histories, practices, and perspectives. Land-based learning (McKim, et al., 2024), experiential learning (Battiste, 2002), and community building (Thomas, 2022) are just a few of the methods professional bodies utilize to increase Indigenous content knowledge for teachers. However, what professional bodies have failed to consider is how educators are viewing and interpreting Indigenous knowledge through their own colonized lens. In a study recently conducted by Oloo and Kiramba (2022), teachers show significant resistance to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in their daily pedagogical considerations. This

resistance is often linked to fear, denial, or lack of understanding, and used to distance themselves from acknowledging their own privilege and compliance with the inequity of educational opportunities available to Indigenous learners.

Educators Epistemologies, Bias, And Racism

Despite increasing institutional emphasis on reconciliation, many professional development models continue to treat teachers as neutral implementers of policy rather than as knowledge producers shaped by their own cultural and epistemological frames. Rice et al (2022) argue that many educators practice a purposive and willful ignorance of Indigenous issues as a way to insulate themselves from acknowledging the continued benefits of colonialism, as well as their culpability in maintaining colonized systems of educational oppression. This practice of distancing, which Dion (2016) termed the “perfect stranger” allows educators to remain unchallenged in their knowledge while simultaneously upholding the epistemological and ontological hegemonies that contribute to the objectivity of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ (p. 469). In a recent study conducted by (Author, 2025), educators often identify barriers to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in their daily pedagogical considerations. Fear of appropriation and reprisal were cited to be a strong hindrance for inclusion in the classroom, and served as methods for educators to distance themselves from acknowledging their responsibility to engage with Indigenous knowledges in the classroom. Vetter and Schieble (2015) underscore how deeply held beliefs—often unacknowledged—shape how teachers perceive students, interpret curriculum, and enact pedagogy. These beliefs are often racialized, classed, and gendered, reflecting broader societal inequalities. In the context of reconciliatory education, teachers may unknowingly reproduce colonial narratives, privilege Western knowledge systems (Author, 2025; Marom, 2018; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017), or resist Indigenous perspectives that challenge their existing worldview (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Braithwaite, et al., 2022).

Education in Canada continues to be both a target and tool of colonialism. Many Canadian educators, whose pedagogical considerations are often underpinned by Eurocentric ideologies, perpetuate colonized norms of teaching and learning (Sokal et al., 2020; Webb & Mashford-Pringle, 2022). Lorenz’s (2017) study emphasized that many educators are unaware of how “deeply embedded colonialism is within education” and often refuse to acknowledge how their actions in the classroom reinforce colonized understandings of knowledge (p. 91). Bennett (2021) has witnessed several educators who refuse to acknowledge racist or biased behaviour directed either to students or Indigenous content in the classroom. As Korzinski (2021) states, Indigenous and visible minority students are three times as likely to experience racial abuse, and often these instances of abuse are ‘discouraged’ by teachers or ignored completely. Kirkness (1999) claims that

many educators in Canada feel unable, or are unwilling, to address the deeply held beliefs that form a basis for their understanding of Indigenous peoples or knowledges. While professional development training on Indigenous content is essential, Koehler (2024) asserts that its success depends on educators' willingness to explore their own colonized understandings and perspectives to develop the skills necessary to authentically engage with Indigenous knowledges.

Collaborative Professional Development

While collaborative professional development has gained traction in educational settings for its potential to build community and foster shared learning, many existing models fall short in addressing the deeper introspective work necessary to surface and challenge educators' unacknowledged biases and racial assumptions. Current models often prioritize technical skill-building, curriculum implementation, and/or the exchange of best practices, rather than creating space for critical self-examination (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2020). As a result, they reinforce surface-level understandings of equity and inclusion without prompting educators to interrogate how their own positionalities and lived experiences shape their perceptions of students, pedagogy, and knowledge systems. Without intentional guided introspection and critical dialogue, collaborative professional development can inadvertently maintain the status quo by avoiding the discomfort and vulnerability required for meaningful reconciliatory transformation. Many collaborative professional development frameworks operate within a decontextualized structure that does not account for the pervasive influence of settler colonialism and systemic racism in education. These models often emphasize consensus and collegiality over disruption and accountability, leaving little room to confront difficult truths about complicity in upholding inequitable systems. For reconciliation-oriented education to move beyond performative gestures, professional development must center introspection as a core component, recognizing that equity work is not simply about what teachers do, but also about who they are, how they see the world, and what they are willing to confront within themselves. Without this critical inward turn, even the most well-intentioned collaborations may fail to produce the depth of change needed to transform classrooms into truly inclusive and decolonized spaces.

Methods

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized a critical theoretical framework that recognized participants' knowledge systems as culturally, linguistically, and contextually embedded. Critical theory is often described as interpretative and transformational as it seeks to understand

phenomena in its given context (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within this study, it was essential to acknowledge that participants' understandings were shaped and constructed through their individual lived experiences, while also acknowledging how social contexts and cultural narratives formed the basis of their own epistemological underpinnings. With this lens, participants were seen as active knowledge holders who brought implicit understandings and interpretive frameworks shaped by their everyday realities, historical experiences, and linguistic practices. This study focused not on eradicating these knowledge systems, but on deeply exploring the underlying biased and racist viewpoints that shaped how the participants viewed Indigenous knowledge systems in their pedagogical considerations. This critical theoretical framework shapes both the design and interpretation of the research, ensuring that participants' voices are not only heard but understood on their own terms.

Research Method

This study employed a critical participatory action research design to explore the epistemological underpinning of educators in K-12 blended classrooms. Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) is rooted in critical theory and informed by principles of advocacy, social justice, and relational accountability (Lenette, 2022). As a decolonial research methodology, CPAR utilizes reflexive and culturally grounded approaches to understand phenomena in its lived context. Utilizing a Critical Participatory Action Research framework, we explored how collaborative, introspective professional development can surface and address teachers' epistemological biases and assumptions in the context of bridging Indigenous knowledge systems into daily pedagogical considerations. The participants and I actively engaged in the cyclical nature of CPAR, creating spaces where we could critically examine how our epistemological foundations interacted with reconciliatory initiatives, and manifested in our classroom dynamics. This study explored perceived challenges that educators identify that limit their ability or willingness to engage with Indigenous knowledge systems, how their own epistemologies contribute to distancing methods, and how collaborative introspection can begin to unsettle unacknowledged instances of bias and racism in educators' pedagogical considerations.

Research Design and Participants

Epistemological bias and racism are sensitive topics for educators to explore in the context of bridging Indigenous knowledge systems in their classrooms. I aimed to recruit Canadian educators who were open to exploring their pedagogical and epistemological underpinnings with an open mind, and a willingness to engage in deep self-introspection. As Canada is a large country, I focused my recruitment to the province of Alberta, and

successfully recruited four non-Indigenous participants from different locations, diverse teaching grades and subject areas. Participation was guided by ethical protocols of informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. Respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility were embedded throughout the research study to ensure relational accountability between all participants. Guided by an Indigenous education colleague, the participants and I engaged in a multi stage study focused on exploring our own unacknowledged beliefs and understandings. The first stage explored our perceived barriers to bridging Indigenous knowledge systems in our blended classrooms. Once these barriers were collaboratively identified, stage two commenced with a guided exploration of pedagogical considerations that could fill in knowledge gaps, and address perceived barriers for implementation in our classrooms. In stage three, the participants and I spent three months actively engaging with and bridging Indigenous knowledge systems in our daily pedagogical considerations. The final stage offered the opportunity for deep self-reflection and introspection through collaborative discussions and reflective journaling.

Data Collection and Analysis

To gain a fulsome picture of the experiences of participant educators, and to provide opportunities for thoughts and opinions to emerge, this study employed semi-structured interviews, collaborative focus group sessions, and introspective journals as tools for data collection. Open-ended interviews were used at the beginning and end of the study to identify perceived barriers, explore participants' understanding of Indigenous knowledges, and identify experiences of engagement with Indigenous content in teacher pedagogy. These interviews were instrumental in articulating participants' positionalities, personal and professional histories, and perceptions of reconciliatory education. Focus group sessions were held at different stages of the research study, and provided an opportunity for participants to collaboratively engage in self-introspection, and explore opportunities for professional development with the guidance of our Indigenous education colleague. Through the entirety of the study, participants maintained introspective journals, documenting their increased self-awareness, learning, instances of struggle or resistance, as well as an exploration of one's own ontological belief system. Data analysis followed a critical manual thematic analysis approach outlined by Naeem et al. (2023). Aligning with the democratic principles of CPAR, participants were invited to verify transcripts and offer interpretations or clarifications to the raw data. Iterative cycles of immersion in the data (Green, et al., 2007), coding, interpretation, and member checking were performed over a four-week period. Initial codes were generated from individual interviews transcripts, focus group sessions, and introspective journals.

Findings

As this data is part of a larger study (Author,2025), this article will focus on examining how collaborative professional development can lead to the surfacing and addressing of unacknowledged positionalities, the manifestation of those positionalities in blended classroom practice, and how collaborative introspective professional development fostered professional growth and relational connection among educators.

Surfacing and Addressing Unacknowledged Positionalities

Collaborative introspective professional development sessions provided an opportunity for teacher participants to critically reflect on their social, cultural, and epistemic positions. Through collaborative discussions, participants determined that past exposure to biased and racist remarks of Indigenous populations was a key factor in shaping their epistemological understandings of Indigenous peoples and their lived experiences. Participant one recalled an incident where a primary school teacher used the phrase “stop running around like wild Indians”. At the time, the participant interpreted this as a directive to calm down and behave quietly. However, as an adult, they now realize that the phrase reinforced a negative bias that shaped how they viewed Indigenous people during their childhood. Participant two shared an experience from a family conversation.

I remember my dad complaining about Indigenous peoples and their fight for equal rights. I can’t recall what right they were fighting for but I remember my father saying ‘Oh well, if they want to go back to the way things were, give us all our technology back and they can go have their tipis again’. Unfortunately, at the time, that was the norm.

Within these collaborative introspective discussion sessions, participants often remarked that when someone shared a memory, it would often spark memories that had previously been forgotten. Participant three noted that after hearing the story of the teacher yelling at the students, it sparked a memory from primary school. This participant noted

One morning we were sitting in our desks taking attendance and the teacher called the name of a student who was absent. This student was Indigenous and one of my classmates asked the teacher why the student was always absent. Her response to this student was ‘Obviously, they’re just not interested in learning’. ‘None of them are interested’. I didn’t think much of it at the time, but looking back now I can see that this formed a stereotype that all Indigenous students weren’t interested in school.

Participant four supported this observation by referencing the portrayal of Indigenous characters in children's entertainment:

When I was little, different movies that I watched like Peter Pan or Mickey Mouse, because Disney was thought to be a safe thing to watch as a kid and so that's what we got to watch at home, just some of the imaging and how they depicted Indigenous individuals. That was terrible. How we degrade certain cultures and how they were viewed in society was incredibly awful.

Participants acknowledged that childhood exposure to biased language, social imagery, and cultural representations played a significant role in shaping their early perceptions of Indigenous peoples. With increased self-awareness and critical reflection, participants began to recognize that while their personal perspectives may have changed, stereotypical and racist representations of Indigenous individuals are still prevalent in social and educational settings. The participants in this study indicated that their current exposure to bias and racism toward Indigenous populations primarily stems from experiences within school and community contexts. Resistance from parents and students, as well as a lack of support or acknowledgment from educational colleagues and administrators, heightened participants' awareness of unacknowledged racist and biased beliefs in their schools. Participant three shared a recent experience with a school administrator

There was a day at the end of June where a group of Indigenous Knowledge Keepers came in and they brought all these teepee poles and we had this huge outdoor round dance with 600 people holding hands and going in and out and it was great. And then they kind of left their materials in our school gym and the next day we were supposed to have the grade six graduation or convocation, or whatever you want to call it, and the principal came in and said 'Oh, geez, there you go. What do you expect? There are all the tipi poles. Not a big surprise, I don't know what I was expecting. I knew they were going to disrupt and ruin our grade six celebration because they were too lazy to take them home'. So, to me that was kind of ironic because it was like one of our first big pushes to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, but it's interfering with our quite Eurocentric celebration. You know the feeling that came through loud and clear was that it was a great experience that we had yesterday, but now it's interfering with what's really important.

Participant two also related recent experiences from their school classroom claiming that many parents would excuse their students from learning about Indigenous knowledge systems or practices. These parents refused to acknowledge that these teachings

were part of the curriculum and degraded this knowledge openly in front of their children.

They're still at that age where they put a lot of stock in what other people say. So, the kids that were pulled out of the activities are definitely the ones that have a lot more negative view. I would say that it's still quite insular for going along with what their families believe or what they've heard from other people, and they're too young to recognize the systemic racism that's within that, or to even realize that that's what is happening here.

Manifestation of Positionalities in Classroom Practice

Through critical introspection, participant teachers in the study began to recognize how their internalized racist and stereotypical beliefs about Indigenous peoples, shaped by early socialization, media portrayals, and dominant colonial narratives, had influenced their professional practice. These introspective examinations prompted educators to acknowledge the subtle yet powerful ways in which their pedagogical choices could perpetuate Eurocentric norms. Participant three strongly expressed how Eurocentric beliefs dominated the Music program of studies in Alberta

We have a very Eurocentric understanding of what a lot of the fine arts, and especially music, should be. It's very much a Eurocentric curriculum, and it's sort of reinforcing all those Western musical ideals. We teach about Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, and others. We have to teach about 'world music' but that focuses more on Asian or African rhythms. Where is Indigenous music?

Participant four built off this discussion stating while they were teaching the science curriculum, it became apparent that most of the knowledge and understanding they were meant to convey to students reinforced a strong Eurocentric understanding

So, with my human sciences curriculum, most of our imaging is very, like very Eurocentric and some of the procedures also the same very Eurocentric. So, we're talking about shock. Are they cool and clammy? Are they pale? So, what does that look like in all cultures? The curriculum doesn't include many of our population, especially in the school that I've worked with. How can you tell if someone is in shock if they're not necessarily the type that are going to look paler than, you know, they do on an average day?

In one collaborative session, Participant one acknowledged that their teaching methods also

reinforced a very Eurocentric understanding of teaching and learning.

I think one area where I have found myself confronting my own unconscious bias at the time, but conscious now, was when I was taking the opportunity to do some land-based education. I took my students outside because we were trying to identify different nature sounds. As soon as we got outside my students, they all kind of scattered, and they were all doing their own thing, and for me, I felt very disorganized, and you know, I automatically wanted to bring everybody back in so that they were in my sphere of control. I realized that I had been trained in a way that made me think that I needed to have control over my students, and that I needed to direct them in their learning, and that really caused me to confront the way I manage my teaching.

As participant educators deepened their awareness, many identified specific teaching practices that implicitly reinforced colonial ideologies such as celebrating national holidays, relying on textbook narratives that centered a colonial viewpoint, or omitting Indigenous voices from literature and historical content. Through deep collaborative introspection this process challenged their unacknowledged viewpoints and emphasized the need for ongoing professional learning to create more inclusive and socially just educational environments.

Professional Growth and Relational Connection through Collaboration

Another key finding was the emergence of new understandings of what it means to be a teacher in the context of reconciliation. Participants began to reevaluate their professional identities; Not as experts or authorities, but as co-knowledge holders and learning facilitators. Participants demonstrated significant pedagogical growth through the incorporation of Indigenous teaching methods into their classroom practices. This evolution included a deeper engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, as well as a heightened recognition of the educational value of bridging Indigenous knowledge systems into daily instruction. Participants noted improved student attentiveness and engagement when employing these approaches. Participant three noted

When you've been doing sort of the same subject and grade level for almost a decade, like it's really easy to just the 'Oh I know what I'm doing' and not really question it not really try to switch it up. When I'm being intentional and trying to incorporate more Indigenous ways of knowing into what I'm teaching, I found that was really effective and really productive and ultimately really meaningful for the students. I'm more conscious and aware of it now.

Also supporting this stance, Participant two stated “I’m pleasantly surprised with how it impacted my students’ understanding. This gave another way for students to understand and build connections in our world”. Rather than attempting sweeping changes, participants reported that small, intentional steps led to meaningful transformation in their pedagogical outlook. Participant four highlighted the importance of gradual implementation, stating that the act of forming consistent habits around Indigenous practices made it easier to sustain them over time.

It’s almost like a habit we’ve created. Now we’re in the practice of it, and so because of that practice, it’s easier now. I’ve come to the realization where I don’t need to go big or go home. I’ve taken the time to put in small pieces and we’re going to build on that. I’m going to take it one step further. Even though I’m not confident in all things, I know that small pieces are going to build into bigger pieces.

This approach created space for confidence and capacity to grow incrementally. These shifts highlight the importance of reflective practice in challenging established routines and re-centering pedagogy around diverse knowledge systems. As participants continued to engage in this study, their acknowledgement of the relational connection and supportive structure of collaborative introspection contributed to their sense of professional growth and well-being. Participant four reflected that without the support of fellow participants

I don’t know if I would have been able to continue without us all going through what we’ve already been through. So, this process has provided an opportunity for that collaboration to happen. I didn’t know I needed this to make it happen.

Participant two also noted that without the support of their fellow study members they likely would have abandoned efforts for implementation at an early stage.

PD for me....it’s disjointed. They say ‘here are the things you can do’, and you try it once and it doesn’t work, and then I don’t do it. Whereas with this it’s because it’s developed in this collaborative way. It’s still mine but if it doesn’t work I have the opportunity to go back and say ‘I tried it, it sucked. What do I do now?’ and then we work on it together. I think about that a lot. I don’t think I would have done as much if I didn’t have other people to talk to.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the transformative potential of collaborative, introspective professional development. By surfacing unacknowledged positionalities,

fostering critical examination of pedagogical practices, and supporting meaningful professional and personal growth, collaborative introspective professional development can begin to address true reconciliatory education. The data highlights that educators, when engaged in collaborative, introspective dialogue with their peers, can confront the implicit biases and racist stereotypes they have internalized about Indigenous people and their lived experiences. As explored within the research, these biases, shaped through personal experiences, media, and institutional narratives, had remained largely unexamined prior to their participation in this study. The process of collective introspection served not only to recall moments of internalized racism, but also to contextualize them within the broader framework of colonial discourse and its persistence in contemporary education. As educators revisited formative experiences from classroom incidents, family beliefs, and media representations, they began to recognize and acknowledge how these experiences informed their own epistemological positions and influenced their perceptions of Indigenous knowledge and peoples. Participants noted that hearing others' stories at times triggered their own memories, indicating that these recollections had remained unchallenged until brought to light through collaborative discourse. This supports existing literature on critical reflexivity, which positions dialogue as central to developing self-awareness and dismantling dominant ideologies (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Goulet & Goulet, 2015). This study extends those insights by demonstrating that surfacing individual positionalities is not an isolated or individual task; it is a relational, ongoing process made possible through intentional, sustained introspective collaboration among educators.

Collaborative introspective professional development created a safe environment where educators were able to critically reflect on their social, cultural, and epistemic positions. This exploration was both uncomfortable and illuminating, serving as a starting point for deconstructing inherited norms and values. These moments were made possible by a shared commitment to relational accountability and an ethic of respect and care that framed the collaborative space. As participants began to determine how their positionalities had been and continued to be influenced, a deeper awareness of biased and racist viewpoints and how they manifested in their classroom environments became apparent. Participants collaboratively identified when pedagogical choices for content delivery, classroom management, and curricular resources aligned deeply with Eurocentric models of teaching. This recognition of embedded Eurocentric practices led participants to make more intentional shifts in their pedagogical considerations. The collaborative structure of this study emerged as a key factor in sustaining this transformation. Participants consistently reported that the ability to share, revisit, and refine their approaches within a supportive network gave them the confidence and motivation to persist, even when implementation was challenging. Unlike traditional professional development models that are often top-down and disconnected from daily classroom practice, the relational and iterative nature of this study's approach allowed for ongoing dialogue, adaptation, and

emotional and mental support.

This study contributes to the field of teacher education and reconciliation by demonstrating that collaborative, introspective professional development can serve as a powerful mechanism for surfacing and disrupting biased and racialized positionalities, reconfiguring pedagogical approaches, and fostering authentic professional growth. The sustained engagement with fellow participants fostered a sense of community and accountability that supported risk-taking and reflection. Educators noted that being part of a learning community committed to reconciliation and decolonization provided both motivation and moral support to persist through discomfort and resistance. The nature of collaborative introspective professional development allowed for diverse entry points and respected the lived experiences of participant educators. As education systems across Canada focus on meeting the Calls to Action (TRC, 2015), initiatives such as this provide a compelling model for how educators can move beyond performative reconciliation and toward substantive transformation rooted in relational accountability and critical introspection. These findings suggest that collaborative, introspective professional development can create the conditions for meaningful transformation in educators' beliefs, identities, and practices. When teachers are supported to confront their own unacknowledged biases and engage with alternative epistemologies, reconciliatory education moves beyond curriculum into the realm of relational, justice-oriented pedagogy. The findings of this study reveal a critical gap in reconciliatory education initiatives: while school divisions increasingly revise curricula to include Indigenous content and perspectives, many fail to support educators in undertaking the epistemological and identity-based work necessary to teach that content responsibly. As this research has shown, professional development that is collaborative, sustained, and introspective can serve as a powerful intervention, disrupting ingrained assumptions, surfacing hidden biases, and prompting educators to reimagine their roles in decolonizing the classroom.

Conclusion

This study explored the potential of critical participatory action research (CPAR) as a methodology to engage educators in deep, introspective professional development within the context of reconciliatory education. The findings highlight that meaningful reconciliation in schools is rarely achievable through curriculum revision alone. Instead, truth and reconciliation demand a fundamental reorientation of teachers' epistemologies, identities, and pedagogical practices; An endeavor that requires time, commitment, and critically introspective learning spaces. Reconciliation in education cannot occur without educators who are willing to confront their own roles in upholding colonial systems and who are supported to grow through that confrontation. When professional development is structured as a relational, critical, and participatory process, it can foster the

epistemological unlearning and pedagogical transformation necessary for reconciliatory education to move beyond symbolic gestures into meaningful practice. Educators must be supported in acquiring knowledge about Indigenous histories and perspectives, and also in deconstructing the colonial and racialized assumptions that often mediate how such knowledge is received and enacted. Without this critical work, reconciliatory education risks becoming another site of performative inclusion that ultimately reinforces settler colonial dominance. Collaborative introspective professional development provides the time, space, and support to do this difficult but essential work in community with others, reducing isolation and fostering a shared commitment to systemic change. By positioning teachers as co-learners and co-constructors of knowledge, this model aligns with Indigenous principles of learning and offers a sustainable pathway toward equity and decolonization in education. As such, it is not just a promising alternative, it is the future of professional development in an era of reconciliation.

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