

# **ADDRESSING CANADA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES THROUGH RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND SPIRITUALITY: UNEXPECTED PATHWAYS TO PEACE EDUCATION**

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## **Abstract**

In 2015, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) documented 94 calls-to-action in relation to the institutional and debilitating legacy of the Indian Residential School System towards Indigenous culture, language, identity, and knowledge in order to actualize reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Canada. In it, Justice Murray Sinclair explained that education caused much of the problem but is also part of the solution. Concurrently, the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) updated its policy on preventing discrimination based on creed that includes religious and non-religious systems that influence a person's identity, worldview, and lifestyle. In accordance, drawing on a framework of peace education, we present religious literacy and spirituality as pedagogy as potential responses to concerns raised by the TRC and OHRC, and as a means to inform and dialogue about Indigenous cultures and spirituality that have been silenced from public education for centuries. Thus, we reflect on further opportunities towards reconciliation and pathways to peace education in Ontario.

**Keywords:** religious literacy, spirituality, peace education, Indigenous identity, Ontario

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## Introduction

In the province of Ontario, the previous “common school” system taught a common curriculum embedded in founding principles based on Judeo-Christian religious beliefs. These guiding principles are still in place for secular public schools in Ontario today<sup>2</sup>. The concept of the common school was put forward in 1846 by Egerton Ryerson (1847) in Ontario. It was meant to be inclusive of all religions, including Catholicism, yet still reflect Protestant norms and values (Parker, 2016a).

One of Ryerson's (1847) many recommendations for the country's basic education system structure stated:

Religious differences and divisions should rather be healed than inflamed and the points of agreement and the means of mutual cooperation on the part of different religious persuasions should doubtless be studied and promoted by a wise and beneficent Government, while it sacrifices neither to religious bigotry nor infidelity to the cardinal and catholic principles of the Christian religion (pp. 51–52).

Parker (2016a) notes that, “Despite Ryerson's objections, Canada's constitution of 1867 maintained two separate, publicly-funded school systems: one based on Roman Catholicism, and the other on Protestant Judeo-Christianity. The latter is the public, theoretically secular<sup>3</sup>, school system in most of Canada today” (p. 130). Within this context of presumably religiously neutral public schools, the teaching of Indigenous spirituality is becoming more widely accepted and encouraged in Canada. Indigenous teachings encourage a restructuring of one's worldview to understand various traditions from varying perspectives. In schools there continues to be much controversy over rituals connected to various religious groups, such as smudging rituals, creating and honoring prayer space, and the celebration of non-Judeo-Christian holidays. One way to address such culturally-based controversies is for teachers to gain a greater understanding of their students' cultural practices.

In relation to Indigeneity, teaching about Indigenous cultural practices, such as smudging or connecting with ancestors, is one way to approach facilitating cultural connections. Yet, many educators remain unfamiliar with their Indigenous students' cultural practices. For example, Milne's study of 100 Ontario teachers (between 2012 and 2014) found that many educators lacked basic knowledge about Indigenous peoples in Canada:

There were educators I met who didn't know about residential schools. They didn't know about Indigenous people in Canada, Indigenous culture and heritage and history...Then there were teachers who knew a bit about it but still were unsure how to incorporate it into their classes, and maybe were too

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<sup>2</sup> The stipulation for Judeo-Christian teaching remains in Ontario's *Education Act* 264(1)(c): It is the duty of a teacher and a temporary teacher, “(c) to inculcate by precept and example respect for religion and the principles of Judaeo-Christian morality and the highest regard for truth, justice, loyalty, love of country, humanity, benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, purity, temperance and all other virtues” (Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2).

<sup>3</sup> The Protestant Judeo-Christian school system is theoretically secular because the stipulation for Judeo-Christian teaching remains in Ontario's *Education Act* 264(1)(c).

uncomfortable, and so didn't... The problem is that when you have people that are uncomfortable and intimidated, the result is that we have educators that may not be doing it at all (quoted, in Drinkwater, 2017, para. 4-6).

This lack of knowledge is detrimental as it contributes to the erasure of purposely omitted curriculum about Indigenous culture and worldviews that has existed for centuries in Canada and contributes to the maintenance of intergenerational trauma that Indigenous peoples experience from an individual, family, communal, and national level (see Menzies, 2010). This lack of knowledge is also a disadvantage for the growing Indigenous population as Indigenous communities grew more than four times faster than the non-Indigenous population since 2006, and presents an increasing population growth (Statistics Canada, 2018). Moreover, it challenges the Canadian political and education systems that are highly encouraging the understanding of Indigenous cultures at this time, as elaborated upon in our paper. Still most Canadian teachers were taught in school systems where Indigenous worldviews remained part of the null or purposely omitted curriculum; thereby creating a gap between their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous culture and their professional need to teach about it.

More recently, resources have been developed and made accessible to students to learn about Indigenous worldviews. For instance, in Ontario, World Religions courses explicitly include teaching about Indigenous worldviews. As students engage with learning about Indigenous spirituality, among other religious traditions, they deepen their religious literacy, generally conceptualized as a framework to understand the content, influence, and role of various religious traditions throughout history and today—and how this reflects the spirituality of students. From this understanding, teaching religious literacy through a dialogic, peace-based approach supports diverse students' inclusion and engagement. Thus, we contend that this approach of combining religious literacy and spirituality creates a form of peace education that can reconcile the null curriculum in Ontario. By connecting religious literacy and spirituality, Ontario World Religions courses can promote a different form of dialogue, listening, and respect. We conceptualize spirituality as a universal human experience typically involving a search for meaning in life and a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves (Carlson and Leonard, 2013). While spirituality may incorporate elements of religion, they are not the same.

To understand the importance of these approaches in the Ontario context, we begin by introducing the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples in relation to the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was an investigation into the legacy of the Canadian Indian Residential School System and institutionalized discrimination today — and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. Then, we discuss the Ontario Ministry of Education's *The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) juxtaposed by empirical findings regarding the teaching about Indigenous spirituality in the Ontario World Religions curriculum. Through the theoretical framework of peace education, we posit that the current Ontario World Religions curriculum can be a viable and existing path for Ontario educators to broach the topic of reconciliation and deal with the tensions that may rise through the approaches of religious literacy and spirituality as pedagogy. Specifically, we engage in critical reflection on the role of religious literacy, spirituality, and peacebuilding dialogue pedagogies in supporting and recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples, and we consider the following: (1) how a discussion on Indigenous rights and the recognition of Indigenous peoples relate to peace education in the Ontario context, (2) how a discussion on Indigenous rights and the recognition of Indigenous peoples relate to religious

literacy in Ontario, (3) how a discussion on Indigenous rights and the recognition of Indigenous peoples necessitate consideration of Indigenous spirituality in a religious literacy classroom, and (4) how to teach about diversity and spirituality through religious literacy and peacebuilding dialogue pedagogies. Thus, the first half of the paper traverses the varied complexities of the political, social, and legal tensions in Ontario today, while the latter half of the paper discusses how religious literacy and spirituality as pedagogy can inform peace education to meet the needs of contemporary Ontario teachers. Although our focus lies in our milieu of Ontario, we hope that our discussion offers relevant ideas for consideration in other diverse global contexts as well.

### **Indigenous peoples: Experiences and current issues**

Until 1996, the Canadian Indian Residential School System mandated Indigenous children to attend boarding or day schools that aimed to replace their culture with the adoption of an English or French culture. Whenever they exhibited Indigenous language, culture, or knowledge, they were severely reprimanded and, in countless cases, subjected to physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuses (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1998). Although Catholic and Protestant orders established such schools before Canadian confederation in 1867, under the *Indian Act* (1876) the Canadian government officially endorsed and permitted the existence of this assimilationist system from the 1880s to 1996 as well. These schools were established for youth from seven to 15 years of age across Canada who were First Nations, Métis, or Inuit – the three groups of Indigenous peoples who live in Canada. As the federal government subsidized the schools based on student enrollment, schools were eager to increase their school population despite the lack of training for the teachers, the lack of heating and adequate bedding, and in the face of meagre food supply and poor classroom facilities for the students (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d.) This resulted in horrific schooling experiences for Indigenous and the few non-Indigenous children who attended them (Barrera, 2018).

In 1886, Daniel Kennedy, renamed by a principal who was unable to pronounce his given name of Ochankuga'he, described his initial impressions of residential schooling:

At the age of twelve years, I was lassoed, roped and taken to the Government School at Lebrét. Six months after I enrolled, I discovered to my chagrin that I had lost my name and an English name had been tagged on me in exchange...In keeping with the promise to civilize the little pagan, they went to work and cut off my braids, which, incidentally, according to the Assiniboine traditional custom, was a token of mourning—the closer the relative, the closer the cut. After my haircut, I wondered in silence if my mother had died, as they had cut my hair close to the scalp (TRC, 2015b, p. 173).

Other individuals shared the confusion faced by Kennedy, too. In some cases, this confusion lasted even after their schooling, as expressed by John Tootoosis:

...When an Indian comes out of these places it is like being put between two walls in a room and left hanging in the middle. On one side are all the things he learned from his people and their way of life that was being wiped out, and on the other side are the whiteman's ways which he could never fully understand since he never had the right amount of education and could not be

part of it. There he is, hanging in the middle of two cultures and he is not a whiteman and he is not an Indian... They washed away practically everything from our minds, all the things an Indian needed to help himself, to think the way a human person should in order to survive (TRC, 2015b, p. 190).

Although Tootoosis and his father believed that the residential school system could potentially offer them educational benefits to work in the nearby communities of Saskatchewan, Tootoosis realized that the English language he learned from the French-speaking nuns was not sufficient. Rather, it left him with a Cree and French accent and limited prowess in the English language, in addition to a lack of identity. Professor Blair Stonechild of the First Nations University of Canada, who also attended the residential schools, echoed this sentiment. He remarked that, “There is no question that the whole purpose of the schools was to undermine our understanding and perception of our self and our community” (Blair, 2016, p. 13).

It is estimated that about 150,000 youth passed through the Residential School System, but the legacy of the System spans seven generations and has influenced the educational, health, and economic discrepancies that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples throughout Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1998). This disparity has propagated generations of legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial discrimination towards Indigenous peoples, who manifest the results of this inequity through alcohol and drug abuse, high levels of depression, imprisonment, and suicide among the young and old, and low levels of self-respect (Castellano, Archibald & DeGagné, 2008; Jacobs, 2000; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d). This inequity was intentionally created via the *Indian Act*, which has been maintained for generations (Scrim, 2017).

In 1920, the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott documented the agenda for cultural genocide and assimilation in a speech stating that, “our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic” (National Archives of Canada). In 1969, this initiative to terminate Indigenous identity endured as the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* aimed to end Indian status and expire the Treaties that were previously established by the federal government and First Nations (see the *Statement*, 1969 and “The White Paper,” n.d.). Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015, contemporary measures and public voices have challenged this deep seeded discrimination in Canada (see Friesen, 2018; Johnson, 2018; Scrim, 2017).

### **Political and Legislative Responses: The TRC and OHRC**

In December 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada published a report detailing ways for the Canadian government and people to address the debilitating legacy of the Indian Residential School System—a legacy that is compounded by discrimination today—towards Indigenous culture, language, identity, and knowledge in order to actualize reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Through the 6,200 statements that were gathered from members of the Indigenous community, 42 of the 94 calls-to-action specifically relate to how the legacy should be addressed and 52 offer recommendations on how the government, judicial system, religious orders, media, etc. can mend their relationship with Indigenous peoples of Canada today. Within the 94 calls, the word “education” is listed 28 times. Despite this seemingly low

number, Justice Murray Sinclair, the Chair of the Commission, noted that the education system caused the problem and is therefore pivotal in reconciliation (“Will truth,” 2015.)

Due to the discrimination against Indigenous people, the calls-to-action are far-reaching into many facets of society, and require various solutions, including a legislative approach. Thus, perhaps to coincide with the TRC publication, the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (OHRC) updated its policy on preventing discrimination based on creed in December 2015. This conception of creed includes religious and non-religious systems that influence a person’s identity, worldview, and lifestyle and the protection of creed is now mandated across all Ontario sectors and communities, including school settings. In conjunction with this legislative approach and Justice Sinclair’s call for education to be part of the solution, we raise the role of the public school teacher in this discussion and suggest that the Ontario World Religions curriculum can be a means to address this social and political calling in Canada today. This corresponds to the requirement in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s *The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) to integrate Indigenous histories, cultures, and perspectives in the Ontario curriculum as well.

### **The Ontario Curriculum**

Since 2007, *The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education) has guided curricular and pedagogical changes in Ontario. As such, the two Ontario World Religions curricula — the *World Religions and Belief Traditions in Daily Life* (HRF3O, Grade 11, Open) and *World Religions and Belief Traditions: Perspectives, Issues, and Challenges* (HRT3M, Grade 11, University/College Preparation) — encourages teachers to include content on Indigenous spirituality (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b). This is evident in the following examples:

*World Religions and Belief Traditions in Daily Life* (HRF3O, Grade 11, Open):

- B3.3 Explain the impact of including “creed” as a protected ground of discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code
- C1.2 Identify major figures from the history of various world religions and belief traditions, and explain their origins, roles, and contributions
  - Teacher prompts: “How did Baha’ullah contribute to and influence the Baha’i faith?” “How have the Haudenosaunee been influenced by those born outside their nation, such as Peacemaker?” “How does the significance and role of Jesus of Nazareth differ in Christianity and Islam?”

*World Religions and Belief Traditions: Perspectives, Issues, and Challenges* (HRT3M, Grade 11, University/College Preparation):

- C2.2 Identify and explain concepts associated with the journey of life and the quest for meaning in various religions and belief traditions (e.g., karma, jihad, nirvana, vocation, the Jewish covenant, the Aboriginal sacred path)
  - Teacher prompts: “How is the individual’s spiritual struggle known as jihad expressed at different moments in a Muslim’s life?” “How does the First Nation concept of walking the sacred path incorporate ideas about physical, emotional, environmental,

- and spiritual healing?” “How do the concepts of samsara, nirvana, and dharma depict the journey of life?”
- D1.3 Describe actions people perform to fulfil the expectations of their particular belief tradition (e.g., Aboriginal respect for and protection of the environment, charitable giving, zakat)
    - Teacher prompts: “What are the duties of Roman Catholics as outlined in the Works of Mercy?” “How might Muslims fulfil the religious obligation of zakat?” “How have First Nation beliefs about the natural world inspired the spawn-on-kelp sustainable fishing industry?”

Altogether, Table 1 indicates the number of prompts per course that mention Indigenous spirituality in order to encourage teachers to incorporate Indigenous culture where possible.

**Table 1: The inclusion of Indigenous culture in the Ontario World Religions curricula**

Course	<i>World Religions and Belief Traditions in Daily Life (HRF3O, Grade 11, Open)</i>	<i>World Religions and Belief Traditions: Perspectives, Issues, and Challenges (HRT3M, Grade 11, University/College Preparation)</i>
Percentage of times Indigenous spirituality is mentioned in an example and teacher prompt	37%  (In 23 out of 62 specific expectations).	40.8%  (In 29 out of 71 specific expectations).
Specific examples and teacher prompts that explicitly refer to practices, beliefs, influential figures, or sacred teachings of Indigenous spirituality	C – 1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 2.4, 3.1; D – 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 2.1, 2.3, 3.2; E – 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4; F – 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4.	B – 1.1; C – 1.4, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4; D – 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4; E – 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4; F – 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 4.2.

This inclusion of Indigenous spirituality in the World Religions curricula guides our interest in bridging religious literacy with the practice of spirituality as pedagogy, and offers a means to address TRC recommendations 48, 49, 60, and 64 (TRC, 2015a). These recommendations address religious leaders and denominational schools specifically and relate to the fact that Christian traditions were historically presented as superior to Indigenous traditions in residential schools (TRC, 2015b). In an effort to not repeat this practice in public education, the teaching about Indigenous spirituality in a religious literacy course offers equitable footing to discuss them together in a Canadian classroom. However, despite the

teacher prompts in the World Religions curricula, it is clear that Ontario teachers often lack the necessary understanding of Indigenous spirituality to enable them to teach about it from an approach of reconciliation (Milne, 2017).

At present, there is a debate about including the topic of Indigenous spirituality in the Ontario World Religions curricula, offered at the Grade 11 level, and Indigenous education in the overall Ontario curriculum (Crawley, 2018; Newhouse, 2018). Canadians have generally lacked a clear understanding of the pervasiveness of Indigenous discrimination for centuries due to the omission of Indigenous culture from the education system itself (Milne, 2017). As a result, teachers who grew up in the system are now being tasked to reconcile these new demands and will need to cultivate these understandings at a personal and professional level.

As the public school becomes a site of inherent political contention, teachers may choose to shy away from addressing complicated conflictual and contentious issues, leaving students to resolve interpersonal conflicts that arise from different cultural misunderstandings by themselves. Teachers are more likely to avoid inviting discussion on conflicting perspectives, instead choosing to play it safe by sticking to the dominant, prescribed curriculum, which, invariably, does not reflect the perspectives of minority groups (Parker, 2016b). As a result, instead of creating an environment that facilitates critical reflection on contesting beliefs to foster a deeper understanding of the “other”, they close the doors to opportunities for deeper learning (Houser, 1996). This avoidance and desire to leave conflictual issues untouched and unexamined can lead to misguided perceptions, which fuel underlying tensions and deepen the potential for future conflict.

Yet, some teachers, despite limited support, have found ways to honour the integration of Indigenous knowledge. Parker (2016a) describes a critical incident in a Grade 4 Ontario classroom, where one Christian student targeted a Muslim student for not worshipping “the real” God. The teacher used this religious conflict as an opportunity to discuss diverse religious perspectives by drawing on an Indigenous creation story to illustrate the diversity of perspectives related to religion, spirituality, and creationism. Such teaching methodologies illustrate the power of peace education and peacebuilding dialogue pedagogies that offer tools and support to facilitate religious conflict, and honour and integrate marginalized or silenced perspectives. However, many teachers still do not feel prepared to address contentious issues in the classroom, particularly those connected to students’ cultures and religious identities (Bickmore, 1999, 2005).

### **Peace education as a theoretical framework**

Peace education, conceptualized by Harris and Morrison (2012), is a philosophy and a process of skill development that “involves empowering people with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to create a safe world and build a sustainable environment” (p. 9). By questioning structures of direct and indirect violence that manifest in everyday life, and by discussing alternatives, peace educators create in their students a desire to problem solve and hone skills to manage conflict non-violently, such as listening, reflecting, and cooperating (Harris, 2009; Harris and Morrison, 2012). Under these circumstances, teachers create conditions to successfully contribute to peacebuilding and citizenship education, and enhance nation building; by connecting students’ identities to curriculum content, they are motivated and empowered to participate in democratic dialogue in the classroom (Hemmings, 2000; Parker, 2016a). Still, there are many challenges to implementing such pedagogies, as many educators may not feel equipped to facilitate peacebuilding pedagogies, due to, for instance, lack of confidence, time constraints, or access to training.

To support the mandate of the TRC in Ontario today, federal and provincial governments and ministries of education are requiring educators to teach about and offer the skills to analyze the history of Canada in relation to the omission of Indigenous culture and spirituality as a means towards reconciliation. In doing so, teachers could draw on peacebuilding pedagogies to guide students to question the direct and indirect forms of violence promoted historically via the Indian Residential School System and government policies that is maintained today through generational trauma, racism, and institutional biases that are discussed in the TRC. As a result, students could understand the saliency of the OHRC's protection of creed. Again, as Justice Murray Sinclair notes, while violent and discriminatory education (through residential schools) contributed to the further marginalization and violence on Indigenous peoples, education still carries the possibility of becoming part of the solution. For this purpose, educators who respond to the 94 calls outlined in the TRC by identifying ways in which Indigenous knowledge could be integrated into the curriculum should engage in peace education. Concretely, one open and explicit way to engage in this specific peace education is to inform and discuss Indigenous knowledge and history in Canada through religious literacy classes and programs.

In recent decades, scholars have discussed the importance of religious literacy—generally understood as the topical knowledge pertaining to the content, influence, and role of various religious traditions throughout history and contemporaneously—and its impetus to foster social cohesion and understanding in societies at the local, national, and international levels (see Jackson, Miedema, Moore, and Prothero). In North America, Moore (2006, 2007) and Prothero (2009) have been outspoken about how religious illiteracy contributes to the promotion of prejudice and antagonism. In pursuit of identifying ways to build a more religiously literate society, Moore has offered two publically accessible Massive Online Open Source Courses (MOOCs) from Harvard University: “Religious Literacy: Traditions” and “Scriptures and Religion, Conflict, and Peace.”

Moore and Prothero’s concerns regarding religious illiteracy and the antagonism it may perpetuate holds relevancy in the Canadian context, as instances of religious discrimination and religiously motivated hate crimes have risen in recent years (Keung, 2016; Paperny, 2017), noted in Table 2<sup>4</sup> (Allen, 2015; Leber, 2017; Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2018).

**Table 2: The number of reported religiously motivated hate crimes in Canada towards Jewish people and Muslims by year (2013 to 2017)**

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Hate crimes towards Jewish people	181	213	178	221	360

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada clarifies that in the reporting of hate crimes “some populations could be targeted based on either hatred of their religion or their race/ethnicity (or both). Where a hate crime incident may involve more than one motivation (e.g., religion and race/ethnicity), the incident is reported by police according to the primary motivation determined by the circumstances of the incident” (Allen, 2015). Violations can be non-violent, such as advocating genocide, and violent in nature including assault with a weapon and uttering threats. Statistics Canada specifies examples and categories in <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/dailyquotidien/181129/t001a-eng.htm>.

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Hate crimes towards Muslims	65	99	159	139	349
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From 2015 to 2017, in Toronto, the most populated and ethnically diverse city in Ontario and Canada, the Toronto Regional Police reported that religion was the main motivator for hate crimes each year (“Reported hate crimes”, 2018)<sup>5</sup>, where 43.3% of hate crimes in 2015 and 45.5% in 2016 were based on religion (Intelligence Services, 2015, 2016). In January 2017, six people were killed and nineteen others were injured after a mass shooting at a mosque outside Quebec City. Following this in February 2017, Toronto protesters blocked Muslims from entering a mosque with calls to ban Islam, among other incidents (Nasser and McLaughlin, 2017). In July 2018, these trends spiked greatly in the Greater Toronto Area as incidents of religious hate towards Muslims included physical and verbal threats to bodily harm, assault, or death at local grocery stores, community centres, bus shelters, and popular public areas (Rosella, 2018).

In consideration of these instances, one may be quick to adopt the American conceptions of religious literacy that Moore and Prothero have advocated as a potential means to mitigate hostility. However, Moore and Prothero’s conceptions are developed from their positionality as American scholars and therefore do not address the unique context of the Canadian landscape, especially the quickly evolving Canadian context in light of Canada’s TRC. Alternatively, Robert Jackson (2014) offers another conception of religious literacy and discusses the need for all educators to teach about both religious and non-religious worldviews. Such an approach is more aligned with the Ontario curriculum. Although his perspective originates in the UK and extends to other parts of Europe, we invite the consideration of an adapted approach in Canada that incorporates Indigenous spirituality within an understanding of religious literacy in the Canadian context. Thus, to extend Moore and Prothero’s conceptions and adapt Jackson’s approach, we believe that a form of religious literacy in Ontario can address aspects of the 94 calls-to-action by teaching *about* Indigenous spirituality through spirituality as pedagogy in the Ontario World Religions classroom. As educators respond to the 94 calls, we invite them to see their role as promoters of peace education.

### **Religious literacy classrooms**

While religious literacy programs exist in Canada, studies of a comparable framework to that of the Ontario World Religions courses are not abundant. Rather, the Modesto City’s School District (MCS) 9<sup>th</sup> Grade *World Geography and World Religion’s* course in Modesto, California offers potential consideration for Ontario as it also acts as the single introductory course on world religions that is offered in high school. The MCS course attracted and continues to attract much media and academic attention, as it remains the only compulsory religious literacy program required for graduation within an American public school (see Fraser, 2016; Lester, 2013; Wertheimer, 2015). In particular, studies have found that the program is able to foster respect among its diverse students (Chan, unpublished; Lester, 2013).

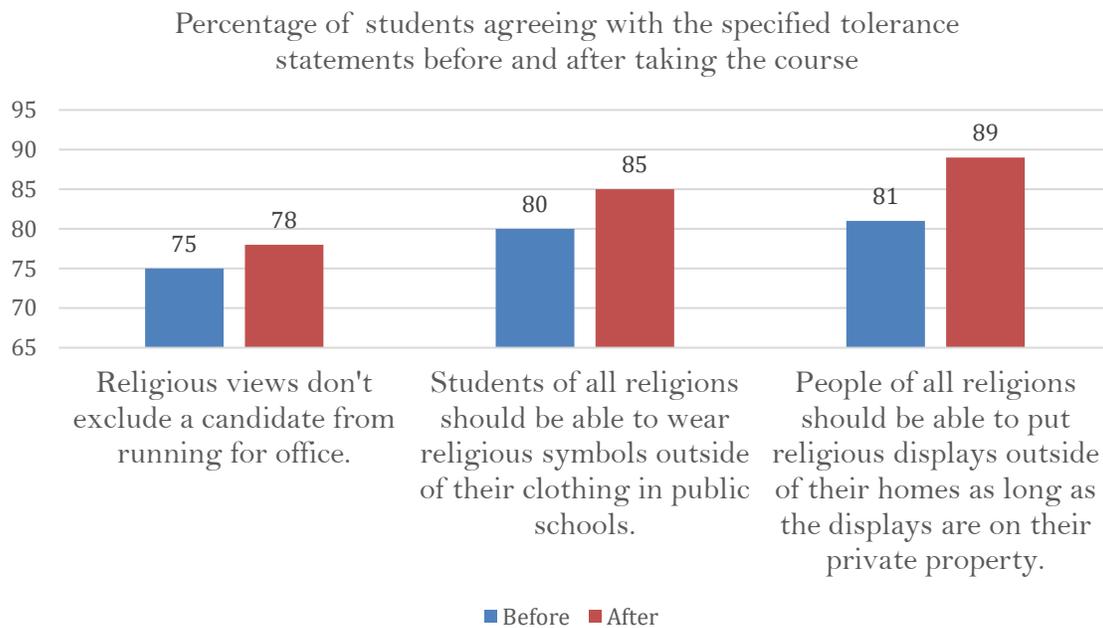
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<sup>5</sup> The detailed Hate Crimes Report 2017 has yet to be posted online but details have been shared with media sources.

Established in 2000, the MCS *World Geography and World Religions* (WGWR) course is unique in its history, structure, and student demographic as seven local teachers developed it to address the relevant needs of students and the school community (YT interview by Chan, January 31, 2015). The teachers observed a need for further geographical knowledge and a dearth of religious discussion in the middle school curriculum, and thus designed the WGWR program, which offers nine weeks of World Geography curriculum, followed by nine weeks of World Religions curriculum. In the latter nine weeks, students spend the first two weeks discussing the place of religion in American society vis-à-vis the First Amendment, the separation of Church and State, and Roger Williams, a 17<sup>th</sup> century British-American Christian minister who advocated for freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state. Students are also taught the rights, respect, and responsibility for all and of all in discussing different religions during the remaining seven weeks, allowing students to learn about the beliefs and practices most common to Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Located in the California Central Valley, Modesto had an estimated population of 212,175 in 2016 (US Census Bureau, 2017), comprised of a large Christian population with a minimum of 125,000 and a correspondingly large aggregate population of 6,000 Hindus, 5,000 Sikhs, 2,000 Muslims, and 4,000 Buddhists, some who are professed animists in 2005 (Lester, 2013)<sup>6</sup>. Despite the religious differences in the community, this program garnered unanimous support from teachers, school administrators, parents, religious leaders, and other community members.

In one particular study on the significance and impact of the WGWR course, Lester



and Roberts (2009) attempted to measure the course's effects on: (1) respect for rights in general, (2) respect for religious diversity, and (3) students' level of relativism. In a survey specifically related to the world religions' component of the course, students were asked if they agreed or disagreed with statements such as "People of all religions should be able to

<sup>6</sup> Jews were also noted as a long-standing community in Modesto but approximate numbers were not listed in Lester's book.

put religious displays outside of their homes as long as the displays are on their private property” or “Students of all religions should be able to wear religious symbols outside of their clothing in public schools.” Pre and post course surveys showed a statistically significant increase in students’ willingness to agree with these statements. As follows from the histogram in Figure 1, students’ tolerance for religious views, symbols, and displays increased, consistently and statistically significantly after taking the course. These findings suggest that by the end of the course, student perceptions towards others with different religious beliefs improved significantly.

**Figure 1: Tolerance by students before and after taking the WGWR course (t-tests comparing target group with previous test, \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ,  $N = 345 - 365$  (Lester 2013, p. 116).**

Following successful implementation and outcomes, and in the face of enthusiastic community support, the California Assembly Committee on Education recommended that the WGWR program be “considered for adoption by other school districts in the state” (California Assembly Committee on Education, 2014). In response to this Bill, over 300,000 Sikhs residing in California issued a statement declaring the course had helped Sikh students feel more accepted, to better understand respect and practice responsibility. More recently, Chan’s study (2016-2017) exploring the impact of the WGWR also raised positive sentiments from various students. In her study on religious bullying and religious literacy, three MCS alumni (among five who were surveyed) said that the course changed how they perceive others, and five current MCS students shared explicit comments expressing a positive attitudinal change towards people of different beliefs as a result of the course. While this is not a representative sample, it suggests that religious literacy has the potential to foster respect, and thereby address religious bullying.

To date, no study has reviewed the potential for the Ontario World Religions course to foster respect in a manner akin to that of the WGWR. However, the current Ontario programs offer content knowledge and include a less prominent but more incorporated review of law<sup>7</sup>. Per the findings from the WGWR, a similar practice of discussing the rights, responsibilities, and respect for all can elicit the listening, reflecting, and understanding that our conception of peace education embodies. Furthermore, for Ontario and Canada specifically, a legislative foundation that calls for the rights, recognition, and respect of Indigenous peoples can counter the legislation that sustained discrimination towards

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<sup>7</sup> For example, expectation F3.4 from the “World Religions and Belief Traditions” course states: Analyse how specific laws or historical events have affected relationships between the state and groups holding particular religious beliefs (e.g., anti-conversion laws in India; the Iranian Revolution of 1979; the French Loi no. 2004 228 on secularism and conspicuous religious symbols; restrictions on the use of the Lord’s Prayer in public institutions in Ontario; secularization in Turkey after the First World War; the status of religion under and after Soviet communism; residential schools legislation and First Nation communities in Canada).

Teacher prompts: “What was the reason for the French legislation on secularism and conspicuous religious symbols, and what response has it prompted?” “Why was the inclusion of smudging during the swearing in of Paul Martin’s cabinet a milestone in the relationship between the Canadian government and Canada’s Aboriginal people?” “How is the role of Buddhism as the state religion reflected in the relationship of the people of Thailand with their monarch?” “To what extent should elected officials in Canada allow their faith to influence how they carry out their public functions?”

Indigenous peoples in the past and present. Thus, if coupled with a legislative rationale, the Ontario religious literacy programs can potentially inform students about the inequities that Indigenous peoples continue to struggle with today as grounded in government policies, while empowering students to respond on the same footing through legislative measures that exist in Canada.

Yet, this consideration only addresses the institutionalized struggles discussed in the TRC. To address the affective, long-term, intergenerational conflicts (see Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman, 2014; Menzies, 2010) and foster respect and understanding, we invite educators to re-examine the approach taken in the Ontario World Religions courses and consider spirituality as pedagogy. These courses offer opportunities to discuss Indigenous spirituality, but a review of the curriculum requirements in the courses show that knowledge-based words, such as describe, explain, identify, and compare,<sup>8</sup> are used to measure a student’s level of content knowledge, noted in Table 2. These courses do not explicitly address the desire for reconciliation in the TRC based on the mending of relationships and harm that was incurred at the affective level. We assert that teaching content knowledge cannot achieve this goal of reconciliation.

**Table 3. A tally of evaluative words that are used to describe expectation of students in the Ontario World Religions curricula**

Evaluative words to describe each specific objective <sup>9</sup>	<i>World Religions and Belief Traditions in Daily Life*</i>	<i>World Religions and Belief Traditions: Perspectives, Issues, and Challenges*</i>
Explain...	19	27
Identify...	13	16
Define...	1	2
Analyse...	1	7
Describe...	13	7
Compare...	1	1

<sup>8</sup> Course expectations include: E1.4, “*Describe* how major historical events and movements have shaped the daily practices of various religions and belief traditions (e.g., ahimsa in satyagraha, the prayer book movement in Anglican Christianity, the residential schools experience for First Nation and Métis people).” Italicized emphasis ours.

<sup>9</sup> Aspects of Table 2 raise a discussion on how one should word curriculum so that measurable skills can be evaluated; however, that discussion lies beyond the scope of this paper so is not addressed here.

Classify...	0	1
Evaluate...	2	2
Critique...	0	1
Demonstrate an understanding of...	2	0

\*These totals differ from the numbers noted in Table 1 because they reviewed different aspects of the specific curriculum expectation. These counts also exclude the specific objectives for the specific expectations in section A of the curriculum here <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/ssciences9to122013.pdf>.

The affective requirement of the TRC can only be fulfilled when educators go beyond the limits of the written curriculum itself. “Defining”, “classifying”, and “critiquing” content, noted in Table 3, does not necessarily change one’s perceptions and feelings towards a group of individuals so that a relationship can be formed or mended. Moreover, there is a tendency for world religions teaching to understand and represent all religions and belief systems through a Westernized lens (Smith, 1978). Although knowledge-based words in Table 3 do not necessarily constrain a teacher to solely Western-centric discussions of religious literacy, we consider Bickmore and Parker’s (2014) suggestion that using peacebuilding dialogue pedagogies to guide curriculum engagement with alternative viewpoints can contribute to the inclusion of diverse, multiethnic, and multicultural students in the classroom. Such pedagogies are encouraged in the World Religions curricula and thus, we consider how peacebuilding dialogue pedagogies, where the exercise of dialogue engenders peace education, can expand the potential for integrating religious literacy and spirituality into public schools.

In a study with racialized students in Ontario, Parker (2016b) found that when teachers acknowledged power dynamics within the curriculum and explicitly integrated perspectives from the diverse cultural knowledge representing students in the class, these students made relevant connections to their own identities and to their peers, which enhanced learning within their socio-political context. Without consciously creating these opportunities for sharing diverse viewpoints, classroom activities, and discussions, teachers could lose the potential to encourage tolerance for diverse and dissenting viewpoints, and risk further marginalizing or silencing ethno-cultural or religious minority students. Thus, a teacher’s acknowledgement of the diverse identities, particularly religious identities, and conscious efforts to include the voices of all students effectively guides the class to openly acknowledge, discuss, and build understanding of social, cultural, political, ideological, and religious based conflict. In doing so, teachers successfully create conditions that contribute to peacebuilding and citizenship education, ultimately enhancing citizenship. As a result, this practice of peacebuilding dialogue with open acknowledgement and discussion of conflict and

the intentional inclusion of student voices in a religious literacy class could present pathways to peace education and address the calling of the TRC and the protections in the OHRC. Moreover, opportunities for peacebuilding dialogue increase awareness of structural powers that inhibit possibilities for the inclusion of diverse perspectives, which is a clear intention of the TRC's goals for integrating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum.

In *The knowledge seeker: Embracing Indigenous Spirituality*, Professor Blair Stonechild (2016, p.15) speaks about his own experience in a residential school and his own struggles to understand his culture:

The reality of residential schools is that it severed relationships with family, with community, with culture, with past, and with identity, and in that sense became an extreme form of cultural genocide. Among the litany of ills identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is the erasure of the Aboriginal spiritual worldview.

Here, he speaks to the social, cultural, ethnic, and spiritual deterioration that the residential schools propagated amongst Indigenous communities. As some Christian pastors, priests, and nuns were the strongest proponents of the Residential School System, it is even more salient for educators to be mindful of their unconscious or conscious Judeo-Christian bearings, which are grounded in educational institutions, practices, and curricula in public educational spaces that guide their teaching about Indigenous spirituality in the school systems.

Therefore, to respond to the justifications of the TRC as educators, teachers must look beyond the Ontario World Religions curricula, albeit its potential as a religious literacy program to foster respect like the WGWR, and consider their personal stance and lens, and that of their students, in order to engage in peacebuilding dialogue accordingly. Ontario teachers are encouraged to self-reflect and analyze the curriculum to ensure inclusion of all worldviews, regardless of their level of representation in the local context; thereby fostering an open and explicit discussion with the self and their students through peacebuilding dialogue pedagogies, which encourage opportunities to discuss conflict openly while also honouring and integrating marginalized or silenced perspectives.

Furthermore, despite the multiple expressions of Indigenous spirituality and cultures that exist, many Indigenous cultures and spirituality are rooted in the desired balance between the four aspects of the medicine wheel<sup>10</sup>, where aspects of Indigenous culture are represented in a quartered wheel that requires a balanced representation to maintain balance in one's life and with the world. Whenever an aspect of the medicine wheel is curtailed, the discomfort at the individual level is compounded at the societal level, since Indigenous spirituality embraces a worldview where all peoples are connected to one another and their land. As such, one's soul and well-being cannot be at peace if another portion of who they are (as an individual or group) is struggling. An example would be the need to balance one's emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical health; when one aspect such as mental health is disrupted, the rest of one's being flounders. From this perspective, we can understand affectively the struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada today, and understand that this requires an affective response. As an affective response, we invite educators to consider

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<sup>10</sup> For further information about the medicine wheel, visit the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition resource here: <https://onlc.ca/resource-post/teachings-of-the-medicine-wheel-unit-2-unit-description/>

spirituality as pedagogy to build empathy, thus enabling space and opportunities for achieving the well-being and empowerment of all students and Indigenous communities.

### **Spirituality as pedagogy**

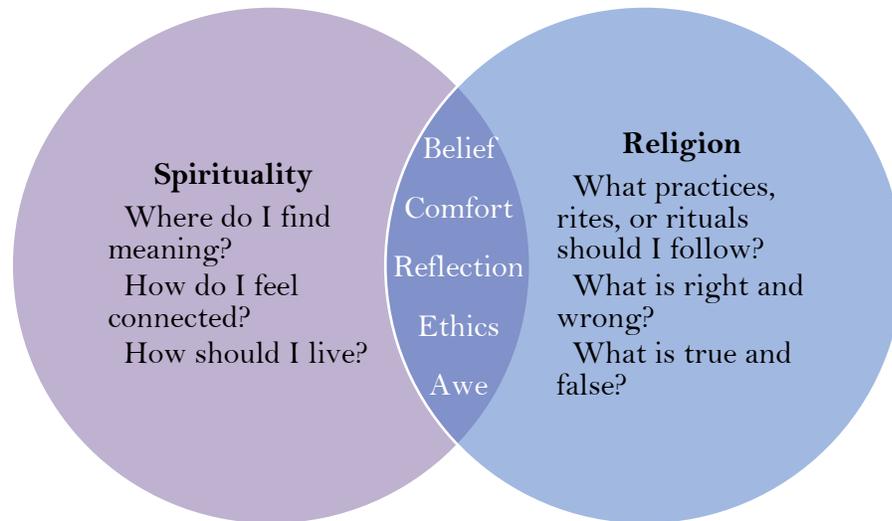
Chief Wilton Littlechild, one of the three Commissioners of the TRC, shared that:

One recurring message for me throughout the public hearings (held during the TRC) was the necessity for the essential step of returning to spirituality through our languages, cultures, and land. We have all been guided in our journey by the seven universal gifts, sacred teachings towards having good relations or better relationships with mutual respect (TRC, 2015b, p. xviii).

Alongside Chief Littlechild, we recognize that knowledge and understanding alone will not guarantee peaceful or harmonious co-existence between people of differing social, political, and religious ideologies and that further effort is needed to overcome the complexities within and across religious and non-religious groups. For some groups within diverse societies, cultural and spiritual meanings attached to religion do not define them, but rather historical considerations and connections to the land constitute the basis of their identity and a fundamental principle towards a quest for peace, such as the First Nations of Canada. To better understand the nuances across the many religious and non-religious groups, we argue for the need to extend the understanding of religious literacy programs into one that considers the intricacies of spirituality, understood as a universal experience to find meaning and connection to something bigger, and incorporates this need to build empathy and understanding in one's pedagogical practices. This practice would also apply to the OHRC conception and protection of creed that includes all religious and non-religious aspects of one's identity too. In doing so, we invite educators to consider including teaching about spirituality in the Ontario curriculum, thus offering consideration for worldviews and beliefs that include—and go beyond — the realm of religion. This approach is encapsulated in Dossey, Keegan and Guzzetta's (2004, p.91) conception of spirituality as:

The essence of our being, which permeates our living and infuses our unfolding awareness of who and what we are, our purpose in being, and our inner resources; and shapes our life journey.

Spirituality has also been defined variously, mostly as a religious dimension associated with philosophical, social, or political movements such as liberalism, feminist theology, and environmentalism or green politics (Snyder and Lopez, 2007). However, in seeking to define spirituality, Koenig et. al., (2012) and Cobb et. al., (2012) posit that the spiritual dimension is deeply subjective and thus, there is no single authoritative definition of spirituality. It involves deeply personal, subjective experiences: perceptions of self, and our connection with others, our environment, and the universe. Hence, spirituality can be understood as what influences individuals at the deepest level of thought and behaviour, and by so doing, enables oneself to find a sense of meaning, purpose, and place in our community, culture, and the world.



**Figure 2: Relationship between religion and spirituality, adapted from University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality & Healing website:**  
<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/what-spirituality>

Yet others describe spirituality as a broad concept that welcomes many perspectives: a universal human experience typically involving a search for meaning in life and a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves (Carlson and Leonard, 2013). Some find their spirituality intricately connected to their religion or ideology, while others seek it through connection to nature, art, or a social/political cause. Culliford (2011) does not negate the relationship between spirituality and religion and sees spirituality as an “active ingredient” of not only major world religions, but also some humanistic ideologies. As such, the emphasis in spirituality relies on subjective experience, as well as the values and meanings in one’s life and their expression of self in search for fulfilment, personal growth, or transformation (Griffin, 1988; Saucier and Skrzypińska, 2006; Sheldrake, 2007). Therefore, while spirituality may incorporate elements of religion and share overlapping interests, they are not the same. Figure 2 illustrates two overlapping circles that demonstrate the relationship between spirituality and religion.

Figure 2 illustrates the emphases in the understanding and expression of spirituality, compared to those of practice and belief within religions. In conversations on religious literacy and spirituality, it is important to recognize and discern personal experiences in both religious and spiritual domains as a matter of respect for the worth of each student’s personal needs. It is also vital in recognizing the pluralism of personal creeds, enabling teachers and Ontarians the appropriate framework to protect against the discrimination of creed in the OHRC. Hence spirituality in our conversation pertains to classroom experiences of raising and discussing the questions that are in the core of the quest for spiritual self, contemplating the questions of meaning of life, and and sharing their understandings across the creeds. In this way, drawing on Culliford’s (2011) and Dossey, Keegan and Guzzetta’s (2004) approach, we view spirituality broadly as a dimension of human experience which focuses on the attitudes, values, and motivations that influence our practices.

In schooling today, spirituality is increasingly becoming another way of conceptualizing inclusivity (Dei, 2002; Shahjahan, 2005, 2009, 2016; Wane, Manyimo, and Ritskes, 2011). However, Dei et. al., (2000) posit that spirituality has always been part of the schooling experience for many learners, whether or not this is acknowledged by educators,

as spirituality in education recognizes the existence and reality of the ontologies, epistemologies, and the axiologies of European and non-Eurocentric traditions in knowledge production. It acknowledges the diversity in society and reflects the idea that cultural or Indigenous non-Eurocentric values can contribute meaningfully to student learning and growth, and to education in general. Ultimately, spirituality in education is an appreciation of, or the quality of being concerned with, the human spirit beyond material or physical considerations in the schooling context (Culliford, 2011). This practice of spirituality then reinforces the importance for teachers to understand their students' identities to foster a welcoming and inclusive classroom.

Within an educational system, such as in Ontario, that is largely Eurocentric and founded on Judeo-Christian principles, a consideration for spirituality will require shifts in priorities both in curriculum content and pedagogy. This shift demands that education deal rationally and ethically with curricular content to address distortions and negations of non-European peoples and their traditions, through recognition, authentication, and validation of their ethnic, cultural, and Indigenous selves, paving the way for multi-centric educational experiences, opposed to ones that are Eurocentric. To this point, Dei (2000, p.12) states emphatically:

When educators deny or refuse to engage spirituality and spiritual knowing, their educational practices can be destructive of the goal of education to transform society. Spiritual knowing must be utilized to involve and energize schools and local communities.

As such, employing spirituality as pedagogy in schooling involves the affirmation of various forms of knowledge and knowledge production/systems of students represented in the classroom, and allows for curriculum content to reflect cultures and historical narratives of all members of the class and their communities. In this light, employing spirituality as pedagogy in conjunction with religious literacy ensures all students learn about the basic tenets and practices of different religions and worldviews and the diverse means of practicing and expressing it, and further develops their abilities to understand the complexities of the lived experiences of each religious and non-religious individual. To foster peace education through spirituality as pedagogy, we also encourage the sharing of personal stories and collective experiences in various contexts to foster an environment for peacebuilding dialogue (Parker, 2016a). Through dialogue, educators and learners can “foster spiritual growth while strengthening the connections between the learner, knowledge, and process of schooling...that develops learners and educators' spiritual interconnectedness in relation to learning, schooling and the community at large” (Wane et al., 2011, p. xv.; Dei, 2002).

Additionally, spirituality as a pedagogy encourages inquiry-based learning where students ask questions and evaluate information themselves. Olson (2000) notes that spirituality in learning and pedagogy is critical for transformative teaching, given that much of what can be considered “universal” in spirituality has manifestations in different ways of knowing and asserting oneself. Thus, situating spirituality in curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching practice for religious literacy and peace education will serve as a unifying force in the diverse classroom, allowing students to find common ground for positive peer engagement and self-reflectiveness in view of pluralism in ethnicity, religion, and culture. Practicing spirituality then becomes a positive force and an effective tool for fostering a safe, empathic learning environment, and for sustaining active, social discourses of peace.

In its totality, the adoption of spirituality in education has implications beyond the classroom as it involves the affirmation of various forms of knowledge and knowledge production/systems and encourages inquiry-based learning that cultivates peace education. Spirituality can pave the way to build equitable structures in schools, guiding educators and students to practice inclusion. In combination with religious literacy, spirituality can contribute to promoting peaceful coexistence through respect for difference and diversity, because it encompasses and goes beyond simply knowing the cultures, religions, and ethnicities represented in the classroom, to seeking to understand them. It thereby offers a framework to understand the nuances of one's identity and a people's history. Today, equitable structures in education are needed as "new investments in education are not reaching many of the children who need the most help because long-identified barriers to learning are not being addressed" (McMurtry and Curling, 2008, p. 3). For this reason, spirituality as a pedagogy presents a means of addressing many of the concerns raised by the TRC for the consideration and inclusion of Indigenous peoples' worldviews in education in Canada, which also works to protect against discrimination based on creed per the OHRC.

While there is an urgent call for creative solutions to overcome the systemic challenges within the educational system and equitably meet the needs of a diverse and multicultural student body, little has been done to take advantage of all the possibilities that spirituality offers as an educational philosophy, or as a pedagogical practice. This is partly due to the pervasive perception and apprehension that "spirituality" as an academic discipline is vague and does not have any semblance of the rationality which characterizes Eurocentric education, deeming it scientific or logical enough to merit acceptance as an academic discipline. Additionally, though the concept of spirituality is broad and complex, conceptualizing it as a component of religion and not a secular philosophy has been a great disincentive. Nevertheless, Hindman (2002) advocates for spirituality in the classroom, affirming that:

Spirituality is not something we have to add to the curriculum, or infuse into students' lives...It is already there. The question is what spirit shall be affirmed and nurtured. The task is to increase awareness, open eyes to see... (p. 181).

Hindman calls for the recognition and development of personal identities and worldviews, which can be practically accomplished by fostering not only religious literacy, but also an inclusion of Indigenous knowledge as a means to foster peace education through spirituality as pedagogy. Educators also need to increase their own awareness so that their lessons reflect this and as a demonstration of their commitment to ensuring that their students are affirmed, nurtured, and aware in turn.

### ***Conclusion***

The Indian Residential School System is a result of historical colonialism that began when the first French and English settlers arrived, and continues in ongoing forms of discrimination in modern-day Canada. The legacy of the System is compounded by the persistence of legislation and educational practices that have been forced upon Indigenous peoples for centuries. Thus, the aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission tackle a massive cultural, social, and political reality in the framework of contemporary Canada. Its calls-to-action are far-reaching and will take considerable time to dismantle the legacy of the System. As educators, we have considered how the Ontario public educational system could

respond to the 94 calls-to-action, especially in light of Justice Murray Sinclair's declaration that while education contributed to the loss of Indigenous culture in Canada, it can also be part of the solution.

At present, the existing World Religions public school curricula offer an avenue to begin explicit conversations about the TRC in relation to Indigenous cultures and spirituality. However, our review of the curriculum and the limited knowledge about Indigenous cultures and spirituality among Canadian teachers suggests that this curriculum could be improved to address the TRC's 94 calls-to-action. While studies have shown that religious literacy programs can potentially foster respect among students who may have previously expressed hatred towards marginalized religious groups, we encourage the Ontario World Religions teachers to discuss the historical and contemporary legislative initiatives that inform the conversation on Indigenous communities of Canada. In doing so, teachers could encourage students to critically reflect on how current policies might address specific discriminatory policies in the past, while also identifying the discriminatory policies that still persist and warrant a further recognition of indigeneity in the public-school classroom. Additionally, to offer a more equitable space in response to the forced religious instruction and the unwarranted harm that religious leaders imposed on Indigenous youth in the Residential School System, it is important to create opportunities for knowledge sharing and dialogue about Indigenous culture and spirituality in a religious literacy classroom. The intersection of histories past and present can intersect in World Religions public school classrooms and, through the vehicle of spirituality, promote peace education in Ontario.

Considering spirituality as pedagogy to extend the work of religious literacy educators will ensure the individual experience is understood and recognized—one that involves contemplation of the student's identity, the teacher's identity rooted in the Judeo-Christian milieu and curriculum of Ontario public education, and a clear recognition of the spirituality of Indigenous individuals in Canada. By acknowledging the different stories, experiences, and expressions of Indigenous culture and spirituality, the calls for the TRC are acted upon, an understanding of creed per the OHRC is established, and peacebuilding dialogue and relationships can be promoted in schools where, typically, the discussion of Indigenous traditions was omitted from Canadian curricula for centuries.

We hope by widening the conversation on peace education and embracing a broader discussion of religion and spirituality in public education, readers will ponder the benefits that can be achieved, not only in Canada, but also in all pluralistic democracies. Through our examples and analysis of the Ontario and Canadian context, we hope that our discussion will inspire similar action in educators and policymakers in other countries, especially those that are currently rebuilding relationships with their local Indigenous communities, actions that ensure a school curriculum that reflects the contemporary need to develop religious literacy and an understanding of spirituality in order to give efficacy to peace education programs, and thereby facilitate greater social cohesion.

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