

Reconciliation in Action: An Analysis of Canadian National Healing Forests

by

Margaret McLennon

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Supervisor: Lisa Binkley

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AUTHOR: Margaret McLennon

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Abstract

The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada is one that is strained due to a history of cultural assimilation and genocide, fulfilled by the residential school system. Reconciliation is a non-linear, constant process in which these relationships are mended through bringing awareness to our common history, an acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). This study aims to add to the growing literature on reconciliation, filling a gap on the impact of Indigenous and Canadian settler community partnerships. The Canadian wide National Healing Forest (NHF) initiative is analyzed to understand how the community and nature focused project contributes to the reconciliation process in Canada. To do this, the literature, theories and case studies detailing the reconciliation process were analyzed to understand the most prominent and frequent elements which Indigenous scholars have outlined as: awareness, relationship and restitution (Clarke, 2015; Petoukhov, 2013; Watson, 2020). These elements are compared to the significant themes that arose from relevant media sources detailing the NHFs in a framework analysis. This study revealed that the NHF initiative is one that is in line with the literature and theories outlining the reconciliation process. The National Healing Forest initiative involves fostering community collaboration and healing in nature leading to strong community connection and empowerment.

Key words: Reconciliation, Healing, Nature, Media Content Analysis, Framework Analysis

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With due notice, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the founders of the National Healing Forest initiative, Peter Croal and Patricia Stirbys for your constant correspondence and guidance.

I would a like to thank the land that I am situated on. Growing up in Unama'ki (Cape Breton) as a settler, I am deeply grateful to be welcomed on these lands that I call home. I honor the Peace and Friendship treaties that were signed, setting the terms of coexistence between settlers and the Mi'kmaq nations in 1726. This coexistence recognizes that the Mi'kmaq people hold rights and are a self-governing nation. It also recognizes that we all have a responsibility to uphold the treaties and work towards building respectful relationships. I'm committed to working on decolonizing myself, which involves constantly examining my beliefs and myself in relation to the land and Mi'kmaq people in Mi'kma'ki. We are all Treaty People.

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CHAPTER 1.Introduction

1.1 Situating myself

It has only been since starting my undergraduate degree that I have embarked upon a journey of decolonization. Through the classes I have taken on Indigenous history and contemporary issues as well as land-based learning in Canada, I am learning to recognize more truly my social position and acknowledge the privilege that I have unintentionally and subconsciously benefitted from in my life. The study of de/colonization and Indigenous issues in my courses caused me to take a closer look at the injustices that Indigenous people face every day here in Nova Scotia and throughout Canada. Outside the discomfort of the decolonization process, there is a responsibility that I feel I have as I move forward, especially for this thesis, which is to help other non-Indigenous people become more aware and respectful of Indigenous experiences, knowledge and sovereignty to move Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships forward in allyship. This responsibility is necessary if I am going to contribute to the literature on reconciliation in some way. I am committed to being part of contributing to a social movement that recognizes Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, so that those living in Canada can better understand and respect our rich, diverse cultures..

1.2 Definition of terms

There are terms in this thesis that are important to define in order to clarify intended meanings. I will use the term “Indigenous” to refer to a global community of people whose cultures and languages are shaped by a profound connection to a specific land-base, and who inhabited these homelands since time immemorial. They are the first peoples who have maintained distinct cultures and claim status to these lands.

It is critical to define reconciliation, a central term that guides this study.

Reconciliation suggests a past action of wrongdoing that has impacted a relationship. It also implies that it can be done through an act of coming together. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), reconciliation is about bringing awareness to our common history to renew relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. The TRC defines Reconciliation as

Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

It involves but is not limited to, healing for all Canadians, building relationships and an opportunity to move forward with respect (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

1.3 National Healing Forest Initiative

The purpose of a National Healing Forest (NHF), provided by the founders of the initiative, Peter Croal and Patricia Stirbys on the National Healing Forest website, is to create a network of forested healing spaces across Canada (National Healing Forest, 2015). In 2015, Peter Croal and Patricia Stirbys agreed to work together to develop the concept of these spaces. The initiative is action-oriented as it aims to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities together to create spaces in nature that serve to honour residential school victims, survivors, and their families, as well as missing and murdered Indigenous women and children in the welfare system (National Healing Forest, 2015). The intent of the spaces is to establish a network across the country where survivors, families and all Canadians can

meditate, reflect and heal together. They additionally provide an educational opportunity for Indigenous people to share their experiences and for non-Indigenous people to learn about the realities of these tragedies.

A healing forest space is developed on public, private, or commercial lands and minimal infrastructure is needed (National Healing Forest, 2015). All resources needed for the healing forest come from existing community, provincial, or federal programs devoted to reconciliation (National Healing Forest, 2015). The National Healing Forest provide community organizers with an electronic file that can be used to create and install a National Healing Forest plaque. Each community or individual decides for themselves what their healing forest looks like and how it functions (National Healing Forest, 2015). The only provision is that the forest is created and used in the spirit of reconciliation, healing, shared understanding, and respect (National Healing Forest, 2015). There are currently ten National Healing Forests that span across the country. The spaces are all unique in their design, infrastructure and practice though they share the same goal and message.

1.4 Background

The residential school system in Canada, which was still in effect until the last one closed in 1996, was a government initiative focused on the assimilation of Indigenous children into dominant culture (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in residential schools, where their languages and cultural expressions were forbidden (MacDonald and Hudson, 2012). It is known that children were psychologically, physically and sexually abused, and it is estimated that over 6,000 children died in residence (Barnes & Josefowitz, 2019). The residential school experiences have profoundly affected the survivors and their families (Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established by the federal government to gather evidence and report on the experiences of those who were part of the residential school system. In its final report, the TRC generated 94 “Calls for Action,” which address policy and healing for Indigenous people and all Canadians (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The TRC (2015) estimates that 80,000 survivors of residential schools are living in all regions of Canada today.

The Calls to Action are primarily directed towards the government, educational institutions and health systems (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). According to two Indigenous scholars, Eva Jewell and Ian Mosby (2019), their analysis of Canada’s progress towards completing the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action suggests that progress has been limited and the number of completed Calls to Action has only moved from a total of 8 in 2018 to 9 in 2019. There is a large need for non-Indigenous people to work towards reconciliation in Canada in ways that extend beyond state-based strategies (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Craft & Regan, 2020; Nagy, 2020; Jewell and Mosby, 2019). In other words, decolonization and reconciliation must include real social action and cannot just be an academic or symbolic metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

There is much debate in the literature over what reconciliation means, how to carry it out, and if reconciliation can even be achieved (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; Craft and Regan, 2020; Nagy, 2020; Jewell and Mosby, 2019; Tuck and Yang, 2012). Indigenous scholars have outlined three important elements that consistently surface when defining reconciliation: awareness, relationship and restitution (Clarke, 2015; Petoukhov, 2013; Watson, 2020). I will expand further on these elements to analyse the National Healing Forest initiative in its function towards healing and reconciliation.

There is some research on Indigenous and non-Indigenous community partnerships but none that is specifically directed towards the honouring of residential school survivors and making stronger relationships between non-Indigenous citizens and Indigenous people. There is ample research on partnerships between Indigenous knowledge and perspectives being integrated into education systems and the health care system in Canada (Allen et al., 2020; Stansfield and Browne, 2012; Koerner et al., 2009). There is also literature on Indigenous community development as well as community partnerships, particularly in Australia (Adams & Faulkhead, 2012; Dudgeon & Pickett, 2000; Nickson et al., 2011; Bartleet et al., 2014). These community partnerships argue that a perspective on reconciliation needs to be grounded in ways of working together in an empowered and collaborative manner (Tiwari et al., 2019). The processes need to be based on cooperation and respect for the best qualities and aspects of both cultures.

It is suggested that community connection and collaboration fosters mutual understanding and respect (Denis & Bailey, 2016; McGuire & Denis, 2019; Bartlett et al., 2012). This can be seen in the Two-Eyed-Seeing approach. Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall developed the idea of "Two-Eyed Seeing" to describe learning to see the strengths of Indigenous knowledge with one eye and the strengths of Western knowledge with the other (Bartlett et al., 2012).

It has long been understood that forests have a healing, spiritual, calming, and nurturing effect on people (Antonelli et al., 2019; Brymer et al., 2010; Reese et al., 2019). Research shows that walking in a forest can reduce stress, boost moods and lower blood pressure and heart rates (Antonelli et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2018; Janeczko et al., 2020). The health benefits of forests are significant because nature is a key factor of the healing process

for Indigenous people as their cultural practices and worldview place high value on the natural world (McDonald et al., 2014).

1.4 Statement of the Problem

There remains a deeply engrained relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada that is rooted in the colonial efforts of assimilation and genocide (Watson, 2020). This relationship requires the attention of the Canadian settler society to ensure that these tensions are addressed using approaches that centre the rights and goals of Indigenous communities (Watson, 2020).

As mentioned, there are many ways to define and practice reconciliation. Many of the existing frameworks are based on reconciliation between Indigenous peoples in Canada and the Canadian education system, health care system and the state, which do not include a community-led level of engaging all citizens. Again, according to Indigenous scholars, the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action are not being completely met. As argued, reconciliation requires action from all settler Canadians, not just the state and industry.

1.5 Purpose of Study

This study aims to help fill the research gap on community level reconciliation in action. The study will analyze the effectiveness of the Canada wide initiative, on contributing to the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Based on the existing framework that is built upon awareness, restitution and relationship, this thesis will discuss how the National Healing Forest initiative fits into this framework. Additionally, based on the literature and case studies of the collaboration of communities and partnerships promoting reconciliation and community development, this thesis will discuss the aspects that the NFH initiative provides in these capacities. It will also help to understand how nature is

an important element for healing, which is relevant as it adopts an Indigenous view of healing.

1.6 Research Question and Methodologies

This study seeks to answer the following question: does the National Healing Forest initiative in Canada facilitate effective reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities? To accomplish this, the NFH initiative will be analysed comparatively to the framework of community-based reconciliation and case studies of Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships. This study rests on a qualitative analysis of the literature and a content analysis of 28 news articles, NHF websites and social media pages; these were selected as there is limited literature on the initiative and these online sources provide information about National Healing Forests that can only be found in the media. The analysis will identify themes in the literature review and codes from the content media analysis of the National Healing Forest initiative, then the codes are compared to the frameworks, theories and models of reconciliation and case studies of partnerships. This works to identify the function of the initiative in contributing to reconciliation in Canada.

1.7 Significance of the study

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on methods for reconciliation. By compiling information from the literature on how to effectively contribute to reconciliation and following other frameworks for community-based reconciliation, it will help to understand the ways in which the National Healing Forests contribute to reconciliation in Canada, as Canada is on the precipice of action-oriented reconciliation.

1.8 Limitations

This study only looks at information which is available through public online platforms that are published both by forest founders and community members as well as news outlets. In future studies, it will be beneficial to speak directly with forest members and communities to obtain a better understanding of the impacts of the initiative.

CHAPTER 2. Literature Review

This literature review explores the theories and frameworks of reconciliation and collaboration in the context of fostering Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships on a community level in Canada. In addition to looking at the opportunities and the limitations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada, I will discuss definitions of reconciliation and collaboration theory as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships. This literature review will additionally seek to contextualize how community partnerships can facilitate reconciliation and healing within above mentioned frameworks. I will discuss the importance of reconciliation on the community level to facilitate community empowerment and restitution for Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Understanding these frameworks and theories will put the National Healing Forest initiative into perspective regarding the question of whether it is effective in facilitating reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

2.1 Reconciliation Definitions and Frameworks

The definitions of reconciliation are expansive and cover many overlapping concepts, such as respect, trust, healing, reparation, social cohesion, coexistence, justice, and peace (Avruch, 2010; Petoukhov, 2013; Seils, 2017). Official apologies and truth commissions are becoming more popular as procedures for dealing with human rights violations (Corntassel &

Holder, 2008). Both are meant to transform intergroup interactions by putting a stop to a history of wrongdoing and paving the way for positive political and social ties to move forward (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; Hayner, 1994). The most important claims for these commissions, especially with respect to the goal of reconciliation, are their construction of justice, social-dialogue and restorative truths of the past (Allan et al., 2000; Seils, 2017). Primarily, the emergence of social truth requires the convergence of individual memories into collective memory, of singular narratives into a grand narrative (Avruch, 2010; Petoukhov, 2013; Hayner, 1994; Seils, 2017). The literature provides a general, global understanding of the aspects of reconciliation as a mechanism of truth seeking and transitional justice (Allan & Allan, 2000; Avruch, 2010; Petoukhov, 2013; Seils, 2017).

Insofar as it aims to transform Canada from less just to more just relations, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada is regarded as a transitional justice mechanism, as it defines reconciliation as “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” (Nagy, 2020; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). While Canada's TRC shares the same goal of enabling justice and social truth, the reconciliation framework in Canada looks at how political and legal systems, educational and religious institutions, industry, and civil society function in ways that are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Lachance & Rose, 2020; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The involvement of government, church and institutions is a major factor in the work towards reconciliation in Canada (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; Rose and Lachance, 2020).

However, state-led reconciliation processes are fundamentally problematic for Indigenous peoples (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; Jewell and Mosby, 2019; Tuck and Yang, 2012). One study looked at how apologies and Truth and Reconciliation commissions are

used in four nations with large Indigenous populations: Canada, Australia, Peru, and Guatemala (Corntassel and Holder, 2008). The reconciliation process in each case separated the purpose of reconciliation from the agenda of Indigenous self-determination (Corntassel and Holder, 2008). As a result, state-centered methods failed to hold governments fully accountable for previous wrongdoings and failed to improve inter-group relations (Corntassel and Holder, 2008). It is suggested that there is a disconnect from the reconciliation process on a community level, owing to the perception that the government and institutions bear the majority of the responsibility for reconciliation (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Craft and Regan, 2020; Nagy, 2020; Petoukhov, 2013). The literature emphasises the necessity for a community-based push to move beyond the mandate and toward community-level re-storying (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; Craft & Regan, 2020; Nagy, 2020; Jewell and Mosby, 2019; Tuck and Yang, 2012). This involves non-Indigenous citizens working towards reconciliation with Indigenous communities in ways that extend beyond state-based strategies. This thesis seeks to understand how the National Healing Forest initiative aims to do this.

Although there is much debate in the literature on the definition of reconciliation, Indigenous scholars have outlined three important elements that consistently surface: awareness (responsibility), relationship, and restitution (Clarke, 2015; Petoukhov, 2013; Watson, 2020). To have a good grasp on reconciliation processes between communities, implementing these three aspects are essential. It is also important to add the work towards reconciliation is continuously evolving and there is no end to the ongoing process.

2.1.1 Building Relationship

Throughout the literature, meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are highlighted as an important element of a movement or journey of

reconciliation (Clarke, 2015; Petoukhov, 2013; Watson, 2020). Although the literature implies that reconciliation is primarily about bettering intergroup interactions, many change theories suggest that changes must first occur within the individual (Denis and Bailey, 2016; McGuire and Denis, 2019). A central objective of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was to foster healing and reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples (Denis and Bailey, 2016). Yet, after six years of events and publicity, one study looking at how non-Indigenous participants understand their role and goals in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation process, found that nearly one in five settler Canadians remains oblivious to the TRC and most have not participated in reconciliation efforts (Denis and Bailey, 2016). Non-Indigenous participants had visions of reconciliation that were broadly aligned with core aspects of the TRC's vision, such as an emphasis on respectful relationships, historical awareness, cultural understanding, healing, and 'closing the gap' on socioeconomic and health outcomes, but they were largely disconnected from larger movements of decolonisation and reconciliation (Denis and Bailey, 2016). This thesis seeks to provide a way to understand how to bridge that individual disconnect through community connection, partnerships and nature.

2.1.2 Awareness

Although some scholars have explored Indigenous and non-Indigenous responses to the TRC, there is minimal research on the specific pathways that lead Canadian citizens to pursue reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (Denis and Bailey, 2016; Nagy, 2020; Jung, 2018). There is an abundance of survival testimonials provided to the public from the TRC and through the media to shed light on the truth and experiences of residential school survivors. But, according to some studies, many settler Canadians continue to downplay the truth and scale of the harms of residential schools (Nagy, 2020; Jung, 2018). While there are

many reasons for settler denial, philosopher Anna Cook (2018) argues that we need to “complicate the assumption that non-Native Canadians simply need to hear testimonies of residential school survivors in order to challenge their historical amnesia”. It is thus suggested that non-Indigenous efforts to engage in reconciliation must continue beyond the life of the truth commission into community (Cook, 2018; Nagy, 2020; Tuck and Yang, 2012).

The usefulness of intergroup contact in lowering anti-Indigenous racism is limited without meaningful conversations and critical reflection on the effects of colonialism, according to Jeffrey Denis's (2015) research of Indigenous-settler relations in small-town Northwestern Ontario. Intergroup contact, according to Denis (2015), is less likely to deconstruct – and may even strengthen – attitudes and behaviours that maintain colonial structures if these conversations are ignored.

It is argued by many scholars that awareness and recognition without action or witnessing is not enough to change settler beliefs and work towards a mutually respectful relationship (Cook, 2018; Nagy, 2020; Watson, 2020; Tuck and Yang, 2012). As Cook (2018) discusses, the TRC was “immersed” within, “framed by,” and “embraced” the politics of recognition and was therefore “incapable of addressing settler ignorance or transforming relationships”. Non-Indigenous citizens, it is suggested, must open their hearts and minds to Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world in order to adequately give witness in the context of Indigenous genocide (Nagy, 2020). Speaking the truth about what happened in our common history is a step toward reconciliation, which necessitates fostering open and honest communication free of guilt and an emphasis on attitude-shifting (Denis, 2015; Nagy, 2020). This thesis aims to look at how communities can work in partnership to address settler ignorance and to engage in meaningful relationships.

2.1.3 Indigenous restitution and healing

Supporting Indigenous peoples' cultural resurgence and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, self-determination and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential (Clarke, 2015). It is additionally revealed that spiritual healing is crucial for all people involved in the process (Corntassel, 2009; Denis and Bailey, 2016). It is clear that healing is a major factor in the reconciliation process. It is discussed that reconciling the past is part of moving forward on the healing journey (Denis and Bailey, 2016; Nagy, 2020). Healing through reconciliation involves creating space for survivors to be heard, to feel safe and be empowered to take ownership over their own experiences (Corntassel, 2009; Denis and Bailey, 2016; Nagy, 2020). Effective healing in Indigenous understanding focuses on interconnectedness between family, community, culture and nature (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004).

2.2 Collaboration and Empowerment Theory

As previously mentioned, reconciliation focuses on the necessity for renewed or respected ties with Indigenous Peoples and creating a national narrative (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Again, there is a need for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to work together to facilitate this relationship, awareness and Indigenous restitution (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; Craft & Regan, 2020; Nagy, 2020; Jewell and Mosby, 2019; Tuck and Yang, 2012). The relevant literature on collaboration points to giving attention to group processes, employing participative and dialogic processes, managing tensions, sharing agendas, and participating in informal networks (Colbry et al., 2014). It is shown in the literature that communicative processes are the principal activity of collaboration (Colbry et al., 2014; Heath & Frey, 2016). As the literature posits, dialogue is a discourse in which two or more individuals in a partnership think together and when you

think jointly, you don't regard your own position as final (Colbry et al., 2014). Additionally, the notion that individuals ideally share power is frequent in the literature on collaboration (Colbry et al., 2014; Heath and Frey, 2004). Individuals participating in a collaborative effort, especially community collaboration, must understand and be willing to commit to long-term engagement (Heath and Frey, 2004). According to the research, individuals gain increased efficacy in collaborating, a greater appreciation for participatory processes, greater collaborative communication competence, identification with group goals and the collaborative group's culture, a greater understanding of the complexities and boundaries of others, increased knowledge of the partner community, greater trust of other individuals and increased political power (Colbry et al, 2014; Heath and Frey, 2004).

Empowerment-oriented partnerships, according to collaboration theory, improve wellbeing while simultaneously aiming to alleviate difficulties and create opportunities for members to grow knowledge and skills (Fawcett et al., 1995; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; (Zimmerman, 2000) Empowerment refers to collaborative action to improve the quality of life in a community and the linkages between communities at the community level (Fawcett et al., 1995; Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). Participation with others to attain goals, efforts to get access to resources, and understanding of the socio-political climate are all essential components of empowerment collaborations (Zimmerman, 2000). Collaborative planning, community action, community change, capacity building, and outcomes are all part of the empowerment process in community partnerships (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Thus, it may be understood that these theories may serve as a way to build relationships, awareness and empowerment that will be assessed in this case study.

2.3 Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Partnership

The literature shows that non-Indigenous researchers, scientists and industry are using a Two-eyed seeing approach and collaboration processes with Indigenous communities and organizations (Bartlett et al., 2012; Whiting et al., 2018; Zurba et al., 2016; Zurba et al., 2021). Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall defines Two-eyed Seeing as learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all Indigenous and non-Indigenous, working together to create meaningful and more equitable collaborations between knowledge systems (Bartlett et al., 2012). Various studies document the benefits of integrating traditional knowledge with non-Indigenous science for partnerships in ecological research and industry (Berkes et al., 2007; Ens et al., 2015). Partnerships with Indigenous Nations are often based on a community approach (Berkes et al., 2007; Nickson et al., 2011). One example that demonstrates this is a research project conducted in collaboration with the Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission, an Indigenous community in Cape Breton, along with researchers at Cape Breton University to understand and evade an oyster parasite (Pinchin, 2021). It is described as a supergroup of sorts, relying on high-tech devices as well as traditional knowledge (Pinchin, 2021). It is suggested that community connection and collaboration with Indigenous Nations fosters mutual understanding and respect (Bartlett et al, 2012; Denis & Bailey, 2016; McGuire & Denis, 2019; Pinchin, 2021).

There is ample research on partnerships between Indigenous knowledge and perspectives being integrated into education systems and the health care system in Canada (Allen et al., 2020; Koerner et al., 2009). There is also literature on Indigenous community development as well as community partnerships, particularly in Australia (Adams &

Faulkhead, 2012; Dudgeon & Pickett, 2000; Nickson et al., 2011; Bartleet et al., 2014; Tiwari et al., 2019). These community partnerships argue that a perspective on reconciliation needs to be grounded in ways of working together in an empowered and collaborative manner (Bartleet et al., 2014; Tiwari et al., 2019). The processes need to be based on cooperation and respect for the best qualities and aspects of both cultures.

Community connections and having compassion for people are related to action for reconciliation (Watson, 2020; Tiwari, 2019). Community connection is identified as an important factor for Indigenous wellbeing and way of life (Corntassel, 2009; Lafrenière et al., 2005; Nickson et al., 2011; Tiwari, 2019). There is little literature on the effects of community collaboration or partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to create spaces for reconciliation in Canada. Though, there is some discussion of the relation between University research and Indigenous community collaboration which concludes that this collaboration can create spaces for reconciliation and can be empowering for Indigenous people (Corntassel, 2009; Lafrenière et al., 2005; Koerner et al., 2009). Additionally, in 2009, the community-led demolition of Peake Hall Residential School in Port Alberni, British Columbia, offered insight into one community partnership event emphasizing the connection between truth-telling and acting to restore justice (Corntassel, 2009).

It is believed that collaboration can be an action to change behaviour that will contribute to reconciliation (Lachance and Rose, 2020). In a study of relationships between Australians and Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders, when individuals learn about Indigenous peoples and cultures through personal experience, they are more likely to consider the relationship as highly important compared to when people learn from the media, highlighting the benefits of personal, collaborative interaction (Tiwari et al., 2019).

2.4 Nature as Healing

The evidence that exposure to forests can be beneficial to people is fast growing (Antonelli et al., 2019; Brymer et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2018; Janeczko et al., 2020; Reese et al., 2019). The use of nature as a therapeutic resource has a long history (Franco et al., 2017). It has long been believed that excessive nervous tension, over-anxiety, hasty disposition, impatience, and irritability were thought to be caused by overexposure to manufactured environments (Franco et al., 2017). Research shows that walking in a forest can reduce stress, boost moods and lower blood pressure and heart rates (Antonelli et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2018; Janeczko et al., 2020).

According to research conducted in both Japan and China, the practise of Shinrin-Yoku (SY), also known as Forest Bathing, has been connected to a myriad of positive health benefits for the human physiological and psychological systems (Antonelli et al., 2017; Hansen et al., 2017). SY is a traditional Japanese practise of actively engaging all five senses while immersed in nature (Hansen et al., 2017). In the 1980s, SY became popular in Japanese medicine as a vital component of preventative health care and treatment (Hansen et al., 2017).

Neurasthenia, often known as the "west cure," was an ailment characterised by sorrow, anxiety, insomnia, and headaches that was commonly treated with nature therapy (NT) (Hansen et al., 2017; Song et al., 2016). The NT conceptual model begins with a "stressed state" at the top and progresses to "restorative effects" of nature (forests, flowers, etc.) where there is a notion of improved "physiological relaxation" and "immune function recovery" responses (Hansen et al., 2017; Song et al., 2016).

The health benefits of forests are significant because nature is a key factor of the healing process for Indigenous people as their cultural practices and worldview place high value on the natural world (McDonald et al., 2014).

2.5 Indigenous Healing

Survivors, intergenerational Survivors, and communities require indigenous-led healing techniques that rely on the teachings, cultural practises, and worldviews of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples (Nickson et al., 2011). While different Indigenous Nations have diverse beliefs and cultural practises, it is thought that the majority of Indigenous cultural and spiritual well-being is strongly linked to divine beliefs, land, and community (First Nations Health Authority; Kimmerer, 2015; Nickson et al., 2011). Indigenous cultures, in general, but not exclusively, recognise that human health is inextricably linked to environmental health (First Nations Health Authority; Kimmerer, 2015). Indigenous cultures and contemporary researchers remind us that we live in a world in which everything is connected, and nature continues to contribute its gifts in a co-creative partnership for everyone's health and well-being (Burhardt, 2000; Kimmerer, 2015).

In examining the facilitation of healing for First Nations people in British Columbia, The Aboriginal Healing Foundation states that the goal of healing for Aboriginal people “is concerned with obtaining and maintaining balance between the four dimensions of the person: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual”. It is also seen that effective healing in Aboriginal understanding focuses on interconnectedness between family, community, culture and nature (Prout, 2012; Twiari et al., 2019; Wesley-Esquimaux et al., 2004). Furthermore, a people-centred and people-directed approach is required in order for Aboriginal people to develop culturally appropriate treatment techniques that will assist them in overcoming social

problems originating from the historic trauma they have endured (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004). One study examines healing approaches that helped Indigenous people achieve interdependence to illustrate the importance of connecting in First Nations healing practices (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004). Existing research shows that Indigenous people in Australia and around the world regard family and community as crucial mediators of their perception of health and wellbeing (Prout, 2012). For many Indigenous peoples, wellbeing is a community idea formed by a set of interrelationships, the most important of which are family and land.

It is argued that healing for Indigenous peoples must include a discussion of identity and colonization (Lavallee & Poole, 2010). The cultural identity of Indigenous peoples is one of the primary aspects that has been attacked through the Residential School system in Canada (Lavallee and Poole, 2009). Land-based activities such as harvesting, education, ceremony, recreation, and cultural-based counseling are all components of the integrative process described as 'land-based' healing (Redvers, 2020). These Land-based practices are centered in Indigenous pedagogy and recognize that cultural identity is interwoven with and connected to land (Redvers, 2020).

CHAPTER 3. Research Methodology

3.1 Design

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which National Healing Forests contribute to the facilitation of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada. The methodological frameworks that are used to explore the research question are a combination of thematic analysis, media content analysis and framework analysis. To establish the effectiveness of the NHF initiative, a content analysis of

the media coverage of the initiative was compared to the frameworks, theories and models of reconciliation and case studies of partnerships.

These methods are being used due to the fact that the majority of information on National Healing Forests is found in online articles, online newspapers and websites or social media. Because this study aims to answer if the initiative is contributing to reconciliation in Canada, there must be a clear and holistic understanding of what reconciliation is and how to act towards it. Analyzing the media content surrounding the initiative comparatively with the literature will aid in understanding the function and impact of the NFH in contributing to reconciliation.

This analysis happened in three steps, first a literature review detailing examples of reconciliation and its definition was analyzed by qualitatively coding the themes that arose, inductively. Second, a media content analysis was conducted from social media and news media covering the NHF initiative across Canada. And lastly, the themes that arose from the literature review encompassing reconciliation and community collaboration were compared with the codes that were found in the media content. This works to identify the function of the initiative in contributing to facilitating reconciliation in Canada.

3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative approaches

This research uses a qualitative approach as it compares the themes and patterns that emerge from reconciliation frameworks, models and theories as well as previous partnership case studies to the content from the media covering the NHF initiative (Gale et al., 2013; Graneheim et al., 2017; Lind et al., 2017). The themes from the media content are coded quantitatively to understand the frequency in which the themes are discussed in the media.

This study employs both inductive and deductive reasoning, which will be explained further in each case.

3.3 Thematic Analysis

The first step of this study was a thematic analysis of the frameworks, theories and models from the literature. Thematic analysis is a type of data analysis that allows you to look at data sources in terms of their main concepts or themes (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The key themes are identified after accumulating the material from the literature (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Pascoal et al., 2014). This is accomplished by inductively coding the themes and patterns that emerged from the literature on reconciliation, collaboration, and healing. Inductive coding generates codes from the qualitative data (Kitchin and Tate, 2000; Linneberg, 2019; Maine et al., 2017). It is a bottom up approach where codes are developed through the analysis of the data (Kitchin and Tate, 2000; Maine et al., 2017). This categorizes the themes that arise to understand the aspects attributed to the frameworks, theories and models in the literature.

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis to identify themes and build a thematic map. The steps are to become familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define themes and write up (Pascoal et al., 2014). It is important to distinguish the elements that contribute and describe the reconciliation process to create a framework for the media content to be compared to. The themes that arose from the literature were grouped into the three elements of reconciliation as described by Indigenous scholars; awareness, relationship, restitution. Sub themes that relate to the key three elements are also important; collaboration, empowerment, healing and nature. After defining the themes, they are categorized, representing the aspects of effective reconciliation.

The three main themes were placed in a word document table to be compared with the results of the content media analysis side by side.

3.4 Media Content Analysis

A media content analysis is used to study a wide range of data drawn from various media contents including radio, television news, online news articles, online websites and social media platforms, and newspapers (Bhatia et al., 2013; Stroobant et al., 2017). This exploratory research is based primarily on Lasswell's content analysis approach (Janowitz, 1968). The purpose of his content analysis method is to describe the characteristics of the document's content by examining who says what, to whom, and with what effect (Devi Prasad, 2019; Janowitz, 1968). A content media analysis is used as a qualitative research method to identify certain patterns, words, themes or concepts in recorded communication and different forms of media such as online news articles, tv news coverage, social media, websites etc. (Seuring, 2012). It thus examines the presence, meanings and relationships of such words, patterns, themes, or concepts (Bhatia et al., 2013). They can also make inferences about the producers and audience of the media analyzed (Stroobant et al., 2017). It should also be pointed out that content analysis can be purely descriptive, insofar as it is engaged in comparing one type of content with another type of content (Stroobant et al., 2017).

The National Healing Forest initiative has been consistently reported on since the first one was developed in 2015, up until the present in 2021. Following the method of other media analyses, a total of 28 published online news articles detailing the initiative published from 2015-2021 and all National Healing Forest websites and social media platforms were located for analysis (Bhatia et al., 2013). The content from these media platforms is analyzed

to identify words, phrases and images and their patterns and relationships as well as the impact of the media coverage of this initiative on the public. This enables an understanding of which demographics are engaging in the initiative, how these communities are working together and to identify the possible impact of the initiative in how it facilitates reconciliation and healing.

The themes that are identified in this step are done in a mixed approach of deductive and inductive coding. Themes and codes are pre-selected in a deductive reasoning technique based on existing literature or previous theories (Gale et al., 2013; Linneberg, 2019; Maine et al., 2017). The pre-selected codes are the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis from the literature in the first step of this study. This step also uses inductive reasoning as themes are formed from the data through open coding, followed by refinement of themes (Maine et al, 2017). It is suggested that a combined approach is a favourable option (Maine et al., 2017). This is true for this study as it has specific themes to investigate but also makes room for other unforeseen features to emerge.

3.5 Framework Analysis

The last method that is used for analysis of the National Healing Forest initiative, is a framework analysis. This strategy looks for similarities and differences in qualitative data in order to draw descriptive and/or explanatory inferences based on themes (Gale et al., 2013; Goldsmith, 2021). The framework analysis' goal is to find, explain, and analyse essential patterns inside and between cases and themes of the phenomenon of interest. Data is sifted, plotted, and classified according to significant concerns and themes during the study (Goldsmith, 2021; Thórarinsdóttir and Kristjánsson, 2014). The matrix output, which consists of rows (cases), columns (codes), and summarized data, is a distinguishing feature of this

method. It provides a structure into which the researcher can methodically condense the data in order to analyze it by case and code (Gale et al., 2013). Charting involves summarizing the data by category to generate a matrix. The different codes that arise from the thematic and content analyses, such as spreading awareness or education for example, will be charted to do this.

CHAPTER 4. Results

The data gathered in this study highlight the relationship between key themes found in the literature and in the media covering the National Healing Forest Initiative. First, the literature is analyzed to identify the three main themes that contribute to reconciliation as described in the literature. The themes identified in the media are then grouped together with the themes in the literature, creating an understanding of how the initiative fits into the theories detailed in the literature and identifying their role in facilitating reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

4.1 Literature Review Analysis

The themes that arose from the literature on reconciliation between communities are grouped into three main parts; relationship, awareness and restitution. Sub themes that are related and crucial to understanding the processes of reconciliation are collaboration, empowerment and healing. These themes and their importance to the reconciliation process following the TRC report are discussed here further.

Due to the strenuous relationship that residential schools and other forms of Indigenous erasure caused between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, the process of reconciliation involves creating better relationships between them. These relationships are built through mutual respect, compassion and community connection.

It is identified that the reconciliation process must involve uncovering the truth of Canada's history through recognition and open, honest conversation. To do this effectively, Canadian settler society must engage in community action or witnessing, which is listening and learning directly from Indigenous people, especially survivors and elders, instead of from the media (Corntassel, 2009; Denis and Bailey, 2016; Nagy, 2020). Non-Indigenous citizens, it is suggested, must open their hearts and minds to Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world in order to adequately give witness in the context of Indigenous genocide (Nagy, 2020).

Restitution as described in the literature is the process of giving back what was taken. In this case, this looks like giving back land and agency to Indigenous people in Canada. For Canadian citizens who do not have the authority to give these to Indigenous people, restitution may look more like cultural resurgence. It is critical to support Indigenous peoples' cultural resurgence and integrate Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, self-determination, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process. (Clarke, 2015). It is additionally revealed that spiritual healing is crucial for all people involved in the process as trauma or feelings of guilt might be experienced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Corntassel, 2009; Denis and Bailey, 2016). Healing through reconciliation involves creating space for survivors to be heard, to feel safe and be empowered to take ownership over their own experiences (Corntassel, 2009; Denis and Bailey, 2016; Nagy, 2020).

One way to learn, share and build stronger relationships centring Indigenous practices, is through working together in an empowered and collaborative manner (Bartleet et al., 2014; Tiwari et al, 2019). Collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities points to creating equal, long-lasting and respectful relationships as both parties

gain an increased knowledge and trust of the partner community (Colbry et al, 2014; Heath and Frey, 2004). Empowerment through collaborative action, improves wellbeing and the linkages between communities at the community level which is a crucial component of reconciliation (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). The literature on collaboration theory found key themes such as partnership, equality and dialogue and empowerment theory with themes of collaborative action, community change, capacity building, community action and improvement of quality of life (Fawcett et al., 1995; Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995).

Indigenous cultures, in general, but not exclusively, recognize that human health is inextricably linked to environmental health (First Nations Health Authority; Kimmerer, 2015). Land-based activities such as harvesting, education, ceremony, recreation, and cultural-based counseling are all components of the integrative process described as ‘land-based’ healing (Redvers, 2020). These Land-based practices are centered in Indigenous pedagogy and recognize that cultural identity is interwoven with and connected to land (Redvers, 2020). Themes surrounding healing in nature found in the literature are; therapeutic, forest bathing, positive health benefits, Indigenous medicine, cultural identity, spirituality, community and land-based education.

4.2 Media Content Analysis

Following Lasswell's content analysis approach, the questions that are explored in this analysis are: who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect? The first phase of this analysis dives into the design, location and partnerships that make up each National Healing Forest found through media that is published by the founders of the initiative and the respective forest creators on social media, blogs and NHF websites or webpages. The second

looks more closely at the news articles reporting on the local forests and the initiative more broadly to understand what is being said about the forests and by whom.

The founders of the initiative, Peter Croal and Patricia Stirbys, lay out their vision for the initiative and each National Healing Forest project on their website as well as their blog in TreeCanada. As a way to keep people up to date on National Healing Forests across the country, they set up a website where information can be found for each NHForest. There is a page where each forest can be seen in its respective province and details on its location and creation can be found. In addition to this information, the website includes information on the objective of the initiative and the history of the residential school system.

Peter and Patricia are also co-authors of a blog posted in TreeCanada, where they explain their vision that inspired the initiative and explain how people and communities can create their own (Croal & Stribys, 2021). Their vision for the project is to establish a network of Healing Forests across the country where survivors, families and all Canadians, can come together to reflect, meditate, heal and participate in ceremonies to better understand the legacy of the Residential School system, and move forward in a positive way. They explain that any community or institution can create their own Healing Forest through thoughtful organization. It is anticipated that the creative ideas coming from each community across the country results in unique and rich approaches to healing and reconciliation using forests and green spaces as the foundation. Patricia and Peter make an effort to express that they are not in any way to be seen as managing the Healing Forest process, though they are happy to share experiences to help communities move forward with their own local Healing Forest. They emphasize that this is a grassroots, community developed, community led and community managed process. The two requests that Peter and Patricia have are that the Healing Forest is created in the spirit of healing and reconciliation, and that the location of the Healing Forest

is shared with them so that it can be added to the National Healing Forests map on the website. By the design of the initiative, it gives clear instruction of what is required for a forest to be a National Healing Forest which includes it being in nature and made in partnership to work as a vehicle to better relationships and more understanding between communities and giving memory and discussion to the atrocity of the Residential School system. The ambiguity of the rest of the design leaves the respective forest makers to create their own unique forest which reinforces the importance of working together on projects, bringing two different perspectives together, i.e Two Eyed Seeing, creating mutual respect and understanding.

Each National Healing Forest has a website, webpage or social media where information on the location, design and partnerships are provided. This explains how individual forests involve communities, which communities or institutions are assisting in the creation of these spaces, and whether the spaces are created in Indigenous ways. See table 1 to see the information. The results are presented here then further discussed in the following chapter.

	Location	Format/Design	Partnerships	Website and Social Media
Edmonton Healing Forest (2015)	Alberta. Along a popular trail in Edmonton River Valley Road, near Victoria Park	Hearts in a variety of materials including paper, cloth and wood - containing messages of support for survivors of residential schools. The display also included ceremonial flags, medicine pouches and signs.	School children, Edmonton residents and members of RISE — Reconciliation in Solidarity Edmonton. City is involved in an upgrade of the forest.	RISE website: http://risedmonton.ca/about-rise/ RISE Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/RISEdmonton/
The Misiwe Ni Relations Healing Lodge (2016)	Ontario. In Manotick within the Relations Lodge	Offers programs for Indigenous youth using land-based healing such as medicine walks and traditional ceremonies. Nearby is a heart shaped garden bordered by 150 stones	Created in ceremony with local elders, children and community members. The lodge is run by an Indigenous woman, Jenny Sutherland.	Website: https://misiwerelations.ca/healing-forest-heart-garden/ Social media: https://m.facebook.com/MisiweNiRelationsHealingLodge
Fitch Bay National Healing Forest (2018)	Quebec. On Terry Loucks' private property located on Abenaki land	Open Forest with eight different theme gardens	Terry worked with Métis friend Paul Carignan and Abenaki elders from the community of Odanak.	Social media: https://www.facebook.com/fitchbaynh5/?modal=admin_todo_tour
Noojimo'iwewin Gitigaan Healing Garden (2018)	Ontario. In Toronto at St. Matthews United church at the corner of St Clair West and Rushton Road	Small green space with over 100 species of native plants.	Stewarded by members of the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Group at St. Matthews United Church and guided by elder Peduhbun Migizi Kwe/ Catherine Brooks.	Web page: https://www.stmatthews.org/indigenous-peoples-solidarity-grou
Perth Healing Forest (2018)	Ontario. On the Ribbon of Life in Last Duel Park	A large rock installation in the centre of the park with a National Healing Forest plaque written in Anishinaabemowin and English.	Volunteers make up the Perth Healing Forest committee who connected with the surrounding Cree community for a ceremonial opening of the forest. The Forest received support from the municipality.	Social media: https://www.facebook.com/Perth-Healing-Forests-168539690456876/
Abegweit Healing Garden/Scotchfort Reserve Healing Forest (2019)	Prince Edward Island. Scotchfort Reserve in a revitalized vacant plot of land.	A walking trail, fire circle and handcrafted benches are built among trees and hopes to expand with an interpretive trail with signs.	Developed by Brendan Kelly and Leigh Gustafson in partnership with Roddy Gould from Abegweit First Nation.	Most information can be found on the web page from the National Healing Forest website: https://www.nationalhealingforests.com/pei
Kapabamayak Achaak (Wandering Spirit) Healing Forest (2019)	Manitoba. St. John's Park, Winnipeg on Treaty One land. On the grounds of St. John's Anglican Church. Bordered by Main Street and many schools	Gathering spaced based on medicine wheel. Four large grandmother stones, with artwork by Indigenous artist Natalie Rostaddejarlais mark the four directions.	Anglican Church supports the forest along with the city, province and local charities. Elders blessed the forest and gave it its name and design. Working with neighborhood schools and communities to develop Indigenous land-based learning curriculum.	Social media: https://www.facebook.com/KapabamayakAchaakHealingForest https://twitter.com/HEWinnipeg https://www.instagram.com/healingforestwinnipeg/
Ottawa Healing Garden (2019)	Ontario. Shared property of First United and All Saints' Westboro Anglican in a busy Ottawa neighborhood	A built pathway and grandmother rock with signs inviting visitors to talk or contemplate residential schools.	First United Church and All Saints Westboro Anglican Church invited Anishinaabe Kwe community and elder Grandmother Francine Payer, who blessed the garden with smudging.	Website: https://www.firstunitedchurchottawa.org/pages/our-healing-forest-and-our-building
Gibson's Healing Forest (2020)	British Columbia. Within White Tower Park and the Charman Creek ravine	Still in progress	Town of Gibson's staff proposed the idea of the forest to a representative of the Squamish Nation and another from the Syiyaya Reconciliation Movement to further conversations and relationships.	Web page: https://gibsons.ca/community/healing-forest/
Riverside Knowledge Path (2020)	Nova Scotia. On the property of Riverside School in Albert Bridge, Cape Breton	In the centre of the forest is a large concrete slab painted to look like a medicine wheel. There are informational signs and mindful messages along the path. Many of the projects along the path were done by the students.	The school is in partnership with researchers at Cape Breton University as well as hereditary chief of the M'ikmaq Grand Council and Associate vice-president of Indigenous Affairs and Unama'ki College at Cape Breton University.	Website: https://www.riversideknowledgepath.ca/ Social media: https://www.facebook.com/riversideknowledgepath/

Table 1. Results from Social Media and Websites.

The data above shows that all of the developed Forests are located in nature. Seven of the ten healing Forests are found within central or popular areas of the town or city making it accessible for community members to engage with the space. Three are located in parks or trails, three are located on church property, one on public school property, one on reserve

land next to an Indigenous wellness centre, one is located within an Indigenous relations lodge and one is on private property, located on Abenaki Land. Six forests are created in partnership with schools or have involved school children in the process of the creation and maintenance of the local forest. Three forests were created in partnership with churches and six have support from municipal, provincial and/or federal governments. Each of the forests are supported by Indigenous communities and support Indigenous ceremony and/or artistic installations. Nine out of ten of the Forests have an educational aspect whether it be a plaque with information or an opportunity to learn more on a website or social media. It can be understood that the healing Forests are embodying the process of reconciliation through relationship, awareness and restitution as they are created through nature, education, and empowering partnerships with Indigenous ceremony and expression.

Twenty local, five national, three University news outlets and one national magazine have reported on the forests in online articles. These news outlets are public, wide-reaching and directed towards the general population of Canada. These articles help to understand what is being said by the communities about the initiative and their forests, what is being portrayed to the public from these outlets and how the initiative might contribute to reconciliation and community development.

The themes found in the articles can be grouped into the three main themes found in the literature on reconciliation; relationship, awareness and resurgence. The themes can be seen in the table below along with the amount of articles the theme is present.

Relationship

Building better relationships
(14 articles)

Respect
(10 articles)

Community action (10 articles)

Collaboration
(8 articles)

Memorial (8 articles)

Long term commitment
(6 articles)

Equality (4 articles)

Awareness

Learning/ Listening
(22 articles)

Students
(13 articles)

Raising awareness
(7 articles)

Reflection
(6 articles)

Discussion/ Conversation
(6 articles)

Legacy (4 articles)

Resurgence

Indigenous Tradition (16 articles)

Healing from nature (14 articles)

Ceremony/ smudging (14 articles)

Community connection
(10 articles)

Indigenous medicine/plants
(9 articles)

Indigenous art
(7 articles)

Table 2. *Results from 28 online articles from 2015-2021 on National Healing Forests.*

CHAPTER 5. Discussion

Combining the results from the literature and the media, the themes that arose which contribute to reconciliation in Canada are relationship, awareness and resurgence. Each theme is further discussed with its relevance and relation to the results of the media content analysis.

5.1 Relationship and Reconciliation

For over a century, the Canadian government adopted policies with a central goal of assimilating Indigenous peoples and stripping away Indigenous consciousness (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). Backed by these assimilationist policies, the government removed many First Nation, Métis and Inuit children from their families—some forcibly—and placed the children in Indian Residential Schools (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). These schools were church- or state-run institutions where over 150,000 Aboriginal children were forbidden to express their culture, practice traditions or speak their first languages (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012). With the last school closing in 1996, the effects of the abuse and mistreatment in the schools have a lasting impact on the Indigenous population and their relationship with Canadian institutions and citizens. The truth and reconciliation commission defines reconciliation as “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Of the 94 Calls to Action, many are clearly aimed at the government and institutions to take action in mending this broken relationship, but the spirit of the TRC’s work suggests the participation of all Canadians. It is suggested that there is a disconnect from the reconciliation process on a community level, owing to the perception that the government and

institutions bear the majority of the responsibility for reconciliation (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Craft and Regan, 2020; Nagy, 2020; Petoukhov, 2013). This shows that there is a need for non-Indigenous citizens working towards reconciliation with Indigenous communities in ways that extend beyond state-based strategies, with the goal of improving intergroup relations.

The involvement of government, church and institutions is a major factor in the work towards reconciliation in Canada (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; Rose and Lachance, 2020). The majority of the current forests have received funding from an institution or are directly affiliated with a church, school or city. Importantly, these institutions are not in control of the process as the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members are the drivers of the initiative. Three of the forests are made in collaboration with and receive funding from churches, five received municipal government support and one is on school property, funded by a local University as well as municipal and provincial government. Though they are supporting the creation and maintenance of the Forests, community members are the drivers of the projects. In Edmonton this is made clear as the government made promises to the forest creators that did not receive any follow through, which happens frequently as government actions are often performative.

National Healing Forests require community action and collaboration at a grassroots level by design. Founder Patricia Stirby says “I like to see this primarily as a community project, as a project that we all take responsibility for, and not something that we turn over to the government to take on, not something that ends up being a photo-op or a series of photo-ops,”. The communities are asked by the founders to work in collaboration to create a space that is used jointly. A critical factor is engaging members of local Indigenous groups with the broader community from the outset. “The committee process is a form of reconciliation in

itself,” Peter Croal says himself about the initiative. From the media, it is clear that Indigenous communities are actively involved in the process. Stephen Augustine, a hereditary chief and associate vice-president at Cape Breton University responsible for Indigenous affairs at Unama'ki College says, "This is actually reconciliation in action, they're actually reaching out to Indigenous people, local Indigenous people". This creates a foundation for building meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Community action and building better relationships are two themes heavily present in the media, demonstrating that the NHF initiative is actively working towards reconciliation as defined by the TRC and beyond into community.

Working in collaboration creates opportunities for relationship building (Colbert et al., 2014). collaborative partnerships involve a greater understanding of the complexities of others which creates a level of mutual respect and trust. Developing mutual respect is an outcome of collaboration due to perspective sharing and equality in power. Respect is discussed in half of the articles and equality in a few. The design of the initiative is one that decentralizes power, making the partnership equal. It can be understood that the process of collaborating on this project involves demonstrating or acting with respect for each party. It is also posited that individuals participating in a collaborative effort, especially community collaboration, must understand and be willing to commit to long-term engagement (Heath and Frey, 2004).

Six of the articles provide that a NHF is not short-term work, but rather requires long-term commitment. Healing from the atrocity of residential schools is not a short or easy task. The healing Forests by design support this as the project requires frequent engagement and maintenance as the space is used as a lasting memorial for residential school survivors and place of healing in a natural environment.

Empowerment-oriented partnerships, according to collaboration theory, improve wellbeing while simultaneously aiming to alleviate difficulties and create opportunities for members to grow knowledge and skills (Fawcett et al., 1995; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; (Zimmerman, 2000) Empowerment refers to collaborative action to improve the quality of life in a community and the linkages between communities at the community level (Fawcett et al., 1995; Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995).

The National Healing Forest initiative aims to build better, lasting relationships between the communities at the community level. They also serve to improve the quality of life in the community as the forest is to be created in the spirit of healing, both healing the broken relationship and healing from trauma in a natural environment. Through collaboration, we begin to make a future where indigenous peoples are respected and included, where we all engage together and abandon the “us and them” divide that characterized our history.

5.2 Awareness and Reconciliation

Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have vastly different world views and perspectives. The strained relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities is partly due to a lack of understanding of these perspectives. Additionally, understanding the truth of Canada’s history helps to ensure that mistakes like these do not repeat and helps the nation heal from its past. Part of the Truth and Reconciliation’s (2015) mandate is to increase public awareness and the history of the system "so that native and non-native relationships can be one where there is more of an understanding on the traumatic history that has happened." There is an abundance of survival testimonials provided to the public from the TRC and through the media to shed light on the truth and experiences of residential school

survivors. But, according to some studies, many settler Canadians continue to downplay the truth and scale of the harms of residential schools (Nagy, 2020; Jung, 2018). It is thus suggested that non-Indigenous efforts to engage in reconciliation must continue beyond the life of the truth commission into community (Cook, 2018; Nagy, 2020; Tuck and Yang, 2012). Transformation through education, or reconciliation through truth-telling and responsible listening would mean claiming a genuine, supportive responsibility for the colonial past. Additionally, awareness and recognition without action or witnessing is not enough to change settler beliefs and work towards a mutually respectful relationship (Cook, 2018; Nagy, 2020; Watson, 2020; Tuck and Yang, 2012).

As mentioned, community action is a theme that appears ten times in the articles and is a major requirement for the project. The initiative is demonstrating that the community collaboration of creating a healing space meets the process of reconciliation as described by the TRC and beyond into community. It is believed that collaboration can be an action to change behaviour that will contribute to reconciliation and better relationships (Lachance and Rose, 2020). One case study identifies that, when individuals learn about Indigenous peoples and cultures through personal experience, they are more likely to consider the relationship as highly important compared to when people learn from the media, highlighting the benefits of personal, collaborative interaction (Tiwari et al., 2019).

The National Healing Forest initiative is designed for perspective sharing and understanding on Indigenous experience and truth of the residential school system. The collaborative nature of the initiative allows for a Two Eyed Seeing approach where Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives are integrated. The forests encourage a personal connection between both groups which makes understanding perspectives and experiences more impactful.

The usefulness of intergroup contact in lowering anti-Indigenous racism is limited without meaningful conversations and critical reflection on the effects of colonialism (Denis, 2015). Speaking the truth about what happened in our common history is a step toward reconciliation, which necessitates fostering open and honest communication free of guilt and an emphasis on attitude-shifting (Denis, 2015; Nagy, 2020). As collaboration theory suggests, communicative processes are the principal activity of collaboration (Colbry et al., 2014; Heath & Frey, 2016). Dialogue is a discourse in which two or more individuals in a partnership think together and when you think jointly, you don't regard your own position as final (Colbry et al., 2014).

In the media, dialogue or conversation is a recurring theme, seen in six articles, showing that this collaboration is creating more opportunity to create more understanding. The national healing forests give opportunity for non-Indigenous citizens to learn directly from Indigenous people including residential school survivors. With many forests having a space to sit, reflect or read about Indigenous experience, it encourages non-Indigenous people to gain a deeper understanding of our past history and different perspectives. Founder Patricia Stirbys comments that “we have a history in Canada that many still do not understand. Through really listening, together we will reconcile this painful past in a good way.” Listening and learning are found in twenty two of the articles which identifies it as a significant component of the national healing forest initiative. As mentioned, listening and learning directly from the Indigenous community is more impactful than learning online or in the media.

Another important aspect of reconciliation is incorporating the younger population into reconciliation frameworks to continue the work toward a better future. It is important that the next generations understand Canada's true history and continue our responsibility to

ensure Indigenous peoples healing, restitution, and ways of being. Six of the forests include school children in the process of the forest and many are located central to different schools. Riverside's Knowledge Path is on public school property and integrates Indigenous culture and ecological knowledge into their curriculum. The Path is currently home to an outdoor classroom, a performance stage, a sharing circle, educational signage and special events, all contained in a well-groomed gravel walkway. The Path provides an engaging experience for students to learn about traditional Mi'kmaq culture and teachings, and skills. The school has used the space for storytelling, including inviting Mi'kmaq elders to speak to students. Dr. Stephen Augustine expresses, "I am so proud of this school — our young people have the vision, the strength and the backbone and they are the future of our culture and our society". Rachele Carlisle, an Indigenous researcher and educator at Seven Oaks School Division, brings her students to the Wandering Spirit Healing Forest as a way to move education outside of the traditional classroom. "Initially this space was to be used as a place to learn and a place to go to; to bring students to learn about culture, and history, and to connect the past to the future to the present. And it's also reflecting our Indigenous ways and in our curriculum, as well," said Carlisle, who is also a member of the planning group.

5.3 Resurgence and Reconciliation

Although the National Healing Forests are a place of education for many, the primary purpose of the forest is to facilitate healing and act as a memorial for residential school survivors and their families. Supporting Indigenous peoples' cultural resurgence and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, self-determination and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential (Clarke, 2015). Restitution, as described in the literature is an act of returning something that was lost or stolen to its owner,

in this case that would be giving land or agency. Instead of using this term, resurgence is more appropriate as it refers to practices of Indigenous self-determination, cultural renewal as well as land restitution.

It is clear that healing is a major factor in the reconciliation process. It is discussed that reconciling the past is part of moving forward on the healing journey (Denis and Bailey, 2016; Nagy, 2020). Healing through reconciliation involves creating space for survivors to be heard, to feel safe and be empowered to take ownership over their own experiences (Corntassel, 2009; Denis and Bailey, 2016; Nagy, 2020). Effective healing in Indigenous understanding focuses on interconnectedness between family, community, culture and nature (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004). Healing aims to reaffirm cultural value as well as identity.

The National Healing Forests give opportunity to Indigenous communities to heal from the past with community and in nature through their own expression. The forests are primarily dedicated to residential school survivors and their families, creating places where they can find comfort and peace. They allow for healing in a way that centralizes Indigenous ways of healing.

The design of the NHF initiative is grassroots and supports a circular approach based on the medicine wheel. The symbol represents equity where no one person has an elevated position, which is how the partnerships in this initiative are described. This idea of a circle extended even into the overseeing organization of the forest in Winnipeg, as they explain they do not have a hierarchical structure as organizations would often do with a chair, the board, CEO, presidents etc. because this is not in line with Indigenous culture. And in both founders of the Wandering Spirit Healing Forest, Val and Lee Anne's words, it is colonial. Instead, they call themselves the Keepers of the Forest.

Healing is a holistic, community building spiritual practice (McCormick, 1997). As mentioned, community is an important factor in the healing process for Indigenous people. Furthermore, a people-centred and people-directed approach is required in order for Aboriginal people to develop culturally appropriate treatment techniques that will assist them in overcoming social problems originating from the historic trauma they have endured (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004). This initiative is one that demonstrates strong community connection. Community connection is a prominent theme in the media, highlighting that the initiative is community focused which helps drive the reconciliation process in a way that incorporates Indigenous values. Each forest is made jointly with surrounding Indigenous communities which all have different perspectives and ways of being. The design of the initiative supports individual and cultural expression as each community chooses what is included in each forest. A good example is in Winnipeg, where the design of the forest is based on Anishinaabe tradition, with a circular layout of trees and benches facing inward to encourage contemplation. It also has a medicine wheel garden and a plaque from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to commemorate its designation as a Healing Forest.

Additionally, Indigenous tradition and ceremony are important to the healing process. Indigenous tradition is found most frequently in sixteen articles and ceremony in fourteen. All of the forests so far have undergone a ceremony led by Indigenous community members to acknowledge the memory of residential school survivors and the land that the space is on. Indigenous traditional plants are often integrated into the forests through ceremony or being planted on the site.

Another way that Indigenous expression is tied into the initiative is through art and nature. Art can be a great way to commemorate history and invite a new future. Art can

support healing, conversation and learning. It can also involve a process that builds partnership and community. The use of Indigenous artistry such as painting and woodwork is seen at seven of the forests. The National Healing Forests are also used for many Indigenous events including smudging, drumming and sharing circles, storytelling,

Population and environmental health research illustrate a positive relationship between access to greenspace or natural environments and peoples' perceived health, mental health, resilience, and overall well-being. The health benefits of forests are significant because nature is a key factor of the healing process for Indigenous people as their cultural practices and worldview place high value on the natural world (McDonald et al., 2014).

Healing in nature is a code that is found in fourteen of the articles. Land-based activities such as harvesting, education, ceremony, recreation, and cultural-based counseling are all components of the integrative process described as 'land-based' healing (Redvers, 2020). These Land-based practices are centered in Indigenous pedagogy and recognize that cultural identity is interwoven with and connected to land (Redvers, 2020). Land based learning is another important code that was found in the media.

Stirbys and Croal realized that natural spaces have the power to help heal the emotional wounds caused by the legacy of residential schools in Canada. This style of project is a great opportunity to learn about the history or racialized groups in Canada, about local plants and native species, and about the connection between humans and the land. "We want to see people coming together outdoors to learn, reflect and honour," said Peter Croal. "So much of the work on residential school issues has been done inside buildings, such as hospitals, churches and courts. But it's in nature that the real healing can happen."

CHAPTER 6. Conclusion

To conclude, the National Healing Forest initiative does fit into the reconciliation framework as described by the literature and relevant theories. The Healing Forest project is focused on reconciliation and healing, with the goal of creating a national network of healing forests where survivors, families, and all Canadians can come together to reflect, meditate, heal, and participate in ceremony in order to better understand the legacy of the residential school system and move forward in a meaningful way. The health benefits of forests is a key feature of the National Healing Forest initiative to bring healing to a nation and its people from the tragic history between the Canadian government and Indigenous people. The significant themes that arose from the relevant media content on the National Healing Forest initiative are consistent with the framework of reconciliation based on the three prominent themes and supported by the relevant theories. Until the Healing Forest project was developed, there were no designated places in the natural environment used as sacred places for reconciliation. Eugene Arcand, Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Residential School Survivor, said of the project, “The Healing Forest project is important. It will help survivors and their families with healing and reconciliation”. Many elders hold that protecting land and ensuring that the sacred aspects of land are honoured is the first step toward healing. The Healing Forest initiative is an example of this. Citizens and community action are the focus areas of the effort, which involves numerous levels of cooperation from various sectors of Canadian government and institutions. The decentralization of power, community action and healing in nature are the most important contributions from the initiative to reconciliation in action.

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