

## Reconciliation at RRU: Developing vertical and horizontal actions for transformation

Our vision at Royal Roads University is to connect people, ideas and experiences to change lives and the world. One critical way we are called to help change lives and the world is to work towards reconciliation. We take the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the Principles of Indigenous Education (2015) adopted by Universities Canada very seriously.

There is some contention in the emerging reconciliation discourse about the use of the words “reconciliation”, “Indigenization” and “decolonization”, but rather than allow this to detract from the real work that needs to be done, it has been suggested that all are fundamentally connected to Freire’s notion of “conscientization” (1970) as applied to making change to achieve the objectives each of these words implies. Reprising earlier works, Freire expands the notion of conscientization, or critical consciousness as it has been interpreted, in his 1968 essay “Education as the Practice of Freedom” published in *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973). He describes critical consciousness as an approach to seeing our place in the world from social and political perspectives, with each person taking an active role in creating democratic structures.

Writing from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Darlaston-Jones, Herbert, Ryan, Darlaston-Jones, Harris and Dudgeon (2014) assert that,

Calls to indigenize the academy or curriculum are implicitly asking for an overlay or inclusion of Indigenous content, preferably by Indigenous peoples, as a mechanism to incorporate histories, traditions and knowledges that are divergent to the dominant perspective(s). However we question whether this approach is sufficient as there is no requirement on the part of the dominant group to question their role or position relative to that of Indigenous Australians. Consequently we ask if it actually changes the norms to deconstruct racial, social and cultural dominance in the context of colonized spaces. (p.86)

The Truth and Reconciliation’s Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) provide direction for both the service of Indigenous peoples, and in the broadest sense, for the service of all peoples, addressing the need for what Smith (2003) calls the vertical and horizontal aspects of critical consciousness work in higher education. In this framework, it is not sufficient to do things for Indigenous peoples, but rather that both work *by and for* Indigenous peoples and work *with and for* Indigenous and settlers are necessary. Smith’s vertical actions include Indigenous-led research, academic programs and services for Indigenous students while horizontal actions include institutional strategic commitments, governance structures, policies and processes, inclusive practices and more that investigate power and colonialist perspectives and integrate indigeneity into the institution.

The following framework for action is proposed for discussion based on Smith’s structure. By assisting and supporting Indigenous and Métis students in achieving their education and career goals, educating settler members of our university community about the persistent legacy of colonialism and the

histories, cultures and integral role of Indigenous peoples in Canada and finding good ways to work together, we can make a difference in lives and our world.

### A framework for action

Domain	Vertical	Horizontal
Critical consciousness raising	Support for self-development, resistance to colonialism and racism	Information, education and opportunities to engage in deep learning
Governance	Elders Circle, Opportunities for Indigenous students to create self-governing organizations	Elders Circle, Indigenous members of the Board of Governors and internal decision-making groups
Human resources	Indigenous faculty and staff delivering Indigenous education and services	Indigenous faculty and staff employed in all areas of the university
Indigenous education	Programs and courses for Indigenous students based on Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies	Adding Indigenous epistemologies, pedagogies and content to existing courses across all programs
Recruitment	Targeted marketing collateral (online and print), recruitment plan and implementation	Indigenous presence in all marketing collateral (online and print)
Research	Protocols and accommodations for research conducted with Indigenous peoples and communities	Indigenous research ethics policy and protocols, disciplined process to respect Indigenous communities
Student services	Indigenous financial aid and awards, support services for Indigenous students	Individual advising for students, faculty and staff
Cultural celebration	Indigenous graduation recognition ceremony, Indigenous student events, Indigenous events for the university community	Indigenous events for the university community
Visual cultural representation	Evidence of representation of ancestral culture online and in physical environments	Indigenous art and imagery in a wide range of online and in physical environments
Local community relations	Relationship building with Chiefs and councils, Elders, community members	Opportunities for interaction and relationship building between Chief and councils, Elders and community members and institutional leaders, faculty, staff and students

Once actions have been outlined, it will be important to determine priorities, the resources necessary to execute them and the best organization structure to support their long term success.

## References

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