

Remembrance across Borders

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Remembrance across Borders: A Dialogue on One Educator's Experience of Studying Indigenous Education in Germany

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This article examines remembrance as an intersecting site for Indigenous and German studies. Attending to the practice of remembrance, it looks at learners' relationships with different, difficult pasts as a way of teaching towards better futures. The authors—weaving together the voices of student and instructor—explore a future teacher's intersectional experience of taking an Indigenous Education course in Canada while simultaneously teaching in an international placement in Germany. Examining her experiences of studying Canadian Indian Residential School history while also visiting Holocaust memorial sites, this educator considers complex questions of pedagogy, memory, and social change through a transdisciplinary dialogue.

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Remembrance is a potential site for Indigenous studies and German studies to intersect, engaging in a mutual dialogue on history, memory, learning, and social justice. Attending to the practice of “remembrance as a difficult learning” that “can hold open the present to its insufficiency” (Simon, “Touch” 77), this article looks at an intersectional learning experience: namely a future teacher's experience building relationships with different, difficult pasts and her ensuing inspiration to teach towards better futures. Fitting approach to content, our examination takes a dialogic form, foregrounding relationality and understanding across difference. We write this article collaboratively through two interwoven voices: that of former student (Maia Morris) and former instructor (Aubrey Hanson). As part of my teacher education program, I (Maia) had the distinctive experience of taking an Indigenous Education course in Canada while simultaneously teaching in an international placement in Germany. The circumstance that offered me

this experience was my enrolment in the Teaching across Borders (TAB) program offered by my host institution, the University of Calgary. Alongside this examination, I (Aubrey) frame Maia's narrative with an instructor's viewpoint and with additional critical perspectives. I show how, by reflecting on her own experiences of studying Canadian Indian Residential School history while also visiting Holocaust memorial sites, Maia provides nuanced provocations for further inquiry. Through both structure and content, we set up a dialogue between teacher and learner perspectives, as well as between Indigenous studies and German studies. To create this dialogue structurally, we take up reflexive writing done by Maia when she was a student in an Indigenous Education course taught by Aubrey, quoting from and responding to that text as a primary source throughout our examinations here. Through this approach, we create a relational, back-and-forth consideration to think through perspectives that are both divergent and confluent.

Through our interwoven voices in this article, we consider questions of remembrance and experiential learning in relation to historical legacies of genocide and erasure. In this consideration, we acknowledge that such legacies in Germany and Canada are importantly distinct, attending to Indigenous conceptions of relationality, as in "ethical relationality" (Donald, "Indigenous Métissage" 543). Respecting that they are distinct, we contend that bringing these histories into conversation with each other can open up significant understandings around memory and social responsibility. Such understandings can help to shape decolonization work that counters the historical amnesia that can undermine structural change in Canadian-Indigenous relations (Martin 49). The dialogue between Canadian and German historical remembrance, intertwined with the dialogue between teachers' and learners' perspectives, highlights the potential for social transformation at this particular intersection of Indigenous studies, German studies, and social justice education.

In what follows, we first introduce ourselves and provide some personal context on the circumstances that have shaped the explorations made in this article. Second, we provide background information on the international program (Teaching across Borders) that Maia experienced and the possibilities it offered for intercultural education, beginning to examine the reflexive piece she wrote at the end of her Indigenous Education course. Third, we take up the notions of remembrance and difficult knowledge through an in-depth examination of Maia's text, exploring the challenges and insights arising from her learning experiences in Germany. Finally, we provide a brief conclusion reiterating the significance, to us, of transdisciplinary relationships between German and Indigenous studies.

Positioning Ourselves and Personal Context

In keeping with protocols for Indigenous research and with the personal type of scholarship in which we are engaging, it is important for us to introduce and position ourselves here in relation to the explorations we are pursuing.¹ We agree with scholars like Absolon, Graveline, Kovach, and Wilson that it is important to acknowledge positionality and to speak from our particular locations and experiences. Although we are writing collaboratively across this article, we are also each writing in our “First Voice” (Graveline 116), grounding the perspectives shared in our individual experiences and selves. Through this positioning we intend to acknowledge our locations within the complex social, cultural, and historical terrain that this article necessarily invokes. In this ethical and humble spirit, we provide personal introductions here.

MAIA MORRIS: I identify as a Canadian of settler ancestry, with family origins in Germany. I am an elementary educator, and I am currently teaching in a vibrant classroom in Calgary, Alberta. In terms of my education background, I have a BA in communications studies and a B.Ed. specializing in elementary sciences, both from the University of Calgary. The experience I describe in this article took place during the second year of my two-year B.Ed. program. Because I have always enjoyed complementing study with travel experiences, I was keen to apply to the TAB program, and was rewarded with a placement in Hamburg, Germany. I had previously

participated in international travel and exchanges during my BA degree, exploring food and culture across Spain and accentuating my understanding of communications by studying publishing media at Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom. Between my enthusiasm for travel and cross-cultural learning and my family heritage, which I wanted to explore further, I was highly grateful for the chance to spend ten weeks in Germany. I embarked on the placement with enthusiasm, ready to take the two required B.Ed. courses (Indigenous Education and Interdisciplinary Learning) online and keen to experience the work and travel experiences promised by my TAB placement in Hamburg.

AUBREY HANSON: Within my ancestry and upbringing on my mother's side of the family, I embody an Indigenous-German connection. I have Métis ancestry on my mother's mother's side and am a member

of the Métis Nation of Alberta. My mother's father was of German ancestry, and both of my grandparents were quietly proud of their cultural heritage. (My father's side, naturally, has its own stories as well.) I am currently a faculty member at the University of Calgary, where I teach and carry out research in Indigenous education and curriculum studies. In particular, my work focuses on Indigenous literary arts and on social justice education. I have a modest academic background in German studies: I took a handful of courses in German language, culture, and literature during my undergraduate studies, and I specialized in language and culture education during my B.Ed. degree. I taught German very briefly during my high school teaching career to one energetic grade 11 and 12 split class. My own love of international travel and cross-cultural learning,

alongside the month-long teaching placement I had carried out in Germany during my own B.Ed. degree, meant that I was enthusiastic about supporting my students in the TAB program. While I had some questions about teaching the Indigenous Education course online, such as whether I would be able to build supportive relationships with learners in a digital environment, I was interested in what unexpected learning might emerge as the students were immersed in their international teaching and learning experiences.

Intercultural Education and the TAB Program

This article emerges out of experiences during the fall term of 2016, during which I (Aubrey) was teaching our institution's undergraduate course in Indigenous Education, entitled (at that time) First Nations, Métis and Inuit History, Education and Leadership (we have since adopted the shorter title Indigenous Education). Maia was a student in my online section of the class, which was a dedicated section for students participating in the TAB program. TAB is an optional experience offered to our B.Ed. students, in which they carry out an in-school placement overseas. According to my colleagues Ron Hugo, Roswita Dressler, Colleen Kawalilak, and Colleen Packer, TAB is a "co-curricular service opportunity" rather than a formal internship or practicum, and it offers students "the opportunity to step beyond the comfortable and engage in a culture vastly different from their own in order to inform their teaching practice here in Canada" (66). TAB students engage in a range of reflective work (Dressler et al). As our writing

in the following suggests, this opportunity to step outside of her comfort zone was a significant one for Maia as a future teacher. Fall 2016 was my second time teaching the Indigenous Education course to TAB students. That fall, I taught students placed widely across the globe: in Germany, Japan, Spain, Vietnam, Brazil, and Australia (even more placement destinations and course sections have been added to the program since 2016).

The Indigenous Education course, meanwhile, is an intensive grounding for our pre-service teachers: we (the instructor team) do our best in one term to provide students with the context, knowledge, theoretical frameworks, and self-reflexivity that they will need to engage with Indigenous people and content in their future careers. In our institution, this course has been mandatory for the B.Ed. program since 2013, in keeping with the goals set out by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education in 2010. Shifts in the social and policy landscape surrounding the course have made the work we do together in that course feel even more urgent for our future teachers. The *Final Report* and *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in 2015 and the new provincial legislation governing the professional practice of teachers being implemented in 2019 (Alberta Education, *Overview*)—both of which call for educators to address Indigenous histories and perspectives through classroom practice—are two prominent examples of this current context for our program.

Maia found both challenges and opportunities at the juncture of TAB and Indigenous Education. As she introduces her reflections on the course—the following is the first section of her 2016 writing—she points to the complexity and richness of her learning situation:

As I write this, I am at the end of my Indigenous Education course, and I would like to take an opportunity to reflect on the unique nature of the learning experience I have had over the past semester. The unique nature I am referring to is the fact that I have been abroad in Hamburg, Germany, taking part in the Teaching across Borders program. I was placed in a school here, but I have also taken the opportunity to explore as much of Germany as possible, and it was through this exploration that I found my inspiration for this reflective piece. The lens provided by this culturally immersive experience was a bit of a strange one through which to consider the topics presented in our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education (FNMI Ed) course. It has been a unique challenge to consider and connect to the experiences and histories of Indigenous people in Canada while living halfway across the world, closer to where colonizing forces originated than to home.

However, I think that while this experience was difficult at times, it also provided a sense of critical distance and a chance to draw connections between peoples and histories, between Canada and Germany, that I would not have otherwise seen. This new perspective was revealed to me slowly, becoming increasingly clear as I spent more time in Hamburg and especially so when I took ten days and travelled around Germany.

In examining her experience, Maia recognizes what was “unique” and “difficult” about it, pointing to the distance between her first-hand travels in Germany and the territories and histories she was studying online. However, she is also able to find opportunities and “a chance to draw connections”: this chance has been the spark for our critical examinations here.

Alignment between the learning opportunities called for by TAB and by the Indigenous Education course might seem either self-evident or obscure: they are distinct learning experiences but also possibly akin. On the one hand, both experiences offer opportunities for students to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds, ancestries, and identities; to be confronted with cultural difference; to engage with and grow understanding around that difference; to wrap their tongues and minds around languages and world views other than their own; to learn some of the particularities of complex (and sometimes challenging) places, histories, cultures, peoples, and systems (particularly education systems); and to interrogate their deep-seated assumptions, habits, and beliefs. Both experiences provoke students to reflect on multiple ways of knowing, being, and doing, both in and beyond the world of schooling. Further, in both their placement and their class, they occupy the two related-yet-distinct roles of teacher and learner.

On the other hand, the learning in these two experiences is distinct. The work of Indigenous Education calls students to connect deeply with, and know more about, the ways and stories of their home place of Moh'kins'tsis and of Canada more broadly. The learning in Indigenous Education is place based and situated firmly in relation to this land. Students taking the course online are doing so at a distance from their day-to-day relationship with Indigenous communities and from the places that matter to their learning. Furthermore, engaging with the people, cultures, histories, languages, and places of countries like Japan or Germany does not directly draw students into learning more about the place now known as Canada: those places have their own stories as well. Ultimately, these two learning experiences are both related and unique. It is at this space of challenge and possibility that we—Maia and I—have found a complex intersection between German and Indigenous studies. Specifically, we turn to the site of remembrance.

Remembrance and Difficult Knowledge

The critical practice of remembrance takes on immense significance when it comes to dealing ethically with difficult histories. Within and beyond German Studies, extensive scholarship exists on the topic of memory cultures, including by scholars A. Assmann, J. Assmann and Czaplicka; Carrier; Erll; Huyssen; Nora; and Tamm. In this article, we understand remembrance in the sense that it is used by culture and education scholar Roger Simon.³ He invokes a sense of “public memory” that “moves remembrance beyond the boundaries of the singular corporal body” and that “is grounded in a shared pedagogy” (“Touch” 62). His is a formulation that describes “learning across generations, across boundaries of time, space, and identifications” (62), engaging memory in the public sphere in critical ways. We understand Simon to mean a collective and purposeful engagement with memory in grappling with history. Practices of remembrance, Simon suggests, are helpful in channelling “human aspirations to make present a world yet to be realized”; they are hopeful practices but only effective as such if we are “attending to practices of remembering as a difficult learning, a learning that can hold open the present to its insufficiency” (77). Remembrance, in this sense, is an active practice of infusing meaning into historical events through their relation to the present; it is a calling into question of the present at the same time as a remembering of the past. In other words, the present is called to account now for the ongoing workings of the past. Remembrance goes beyond mere historical knowledge.

Our decision to take up the notion of remembrance in this article traces back to Maia’s encounter with German understandings of memory and culture while living abroad in her TAB placement. In her 2016 reflective piece, she shares that she learned about Germany’s culture of remembrance during her travels. She describes having met a professor who shared a conversation with her group and introduced them to this concept:

The German “culture of remembrance”—as University of Hamburg professor Markus Friederici so eloquently put it during a campus tour he shared with our TAB group—is prevalent throughout the country. However, it became very clear as we visited museums and exhibits in Berlin, Nuremberg, and Munich.

Particularly significant for Maia’s learning on this topic was a visit to a Holocaust memorial site. She explains how, while she had been developing an understanding of remembrance culture, the concept “was brought into sharp relief with a visit to the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site.” Her experiences there provoked deep critical thought, as she describes here:

The five-hour guided tour revealed aspects of the Holocaust that were entirely new, sickening, and terrifying to me. I found I was hesitant to engage in this learning, resistant even, and I was thankful that my travelling companions had such a vested interest that I was compelled to go along. This visit was an experience that I will remember for the rest of my life, one that has deeply impacted my view of history and the human experience.

Maia's initial resistance, followed by her feelings of being "deeply impacted," suggest that this trip to Dachau was both difficult and transformative for her.

These experiences compelled Maia to bring her learning in Germany into dialogue with her learning in our course. She explains in her writing:

The intense experience of place and dark history in Germany, in conjunction with the topics of our Indigenous Education course, gave me reason to pause and reflect on the parallels to our Canadian context. What I hope to explore in this reflective writing is how we learn about trauma and atrocity—as students, as Canadians, as human beings. I think that this line of questioning and reflection will be immensely valuable to me as a future educator.

I found it striking, as a reader and as an educator, that Maia's reflections on our shared learning in Indigenous Education took this direction. Rather than simply sticking to the course material—which might have had the effect of keeping the difficulty at a distance, in some ways—Maia took a relational approach, examining the implications of both her learning experiences for her understandings. She took on the challenge, in other words, of grappling with two distinct histories, struggling to understand them both on their own terms and as interrelated. It was her own unique learning journey that set her up to experience both of these things in the same time frame—the circumstance of studying Indigenous Education while also experiencing German culture and history—but Maia embarked on the reflexive work necessary to uncover some critical understandings of what that relationality might reveal. One immediate and important element of her inquiry was to position herself as a learner in relation to her own country's history, and to ask questions about how people in Germany, as learners, encounter their history.⁴ Hers is a vital question: how do "we learn about trauma and atrocity—as students, as Canadians [or Germans], as human beings"? What might Maia and I understand, together, by looking at how remembrance takes shape around two distinct histories, and by acknowledging the relationality between them?

In conceiving of relationality in this article, we invoke the notion as a central principle: as a way of being and knowing that informs much Indigenous scholarship. For me (Aubrey), relationality permeates my understandings. I resonate deeply with Cree scholar Shawn Wilson's emphasis on relationality as central in Indigenous scholarship, holding together the epistemology, ontology, axiology, and methodology of his work: Wilson shows how "an Indigenous research paradigm is relational and requires relational accountability" (71). I understand myself always as a "Self-in-Relation" (Graveline 57) and recognize that relationships entail reciprocity: relationality creates a "delicate web of rights and responsibilities" (Justice 154).⁵ Indigenous scholars, such as Absolon Donald, Graveline, and Wilson, have shown how relationality can inform, shape, and guide research. In our explorations here, we see it as vital to articulate a framework for understanding difficult aspects of German and Canadian histories in relation to each other. It is not acceptable to us to conflate or universalize these distinct histories, as we discuss further in the following.

To mitigate that risk, and to proceed in a good way, we therefore attend to what Papaschase Cree scholar Dwayne Donald has shared in the notion of "ethical relationality" ("From" 10). Donald's understandings of ethical relationality help to guide his methodological approaches to research and are firmly rooted in Indigenous (for him, Cree) onto-epistemological frameworks and are inseparable from our relationships with the natural world, as the following descriptive passage illustrates:

Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of organic connectivity that becomes readily apparent to us as human beings when we honour the sacred ecology that supports all life and living. [...] Ethical relationality does not deny difference nor does it promote assimilation of it. Rather, ethical relationality supports the conceptualization of difference in ecological terms as necessary for life and living to continue. It guides us to seek deeper understandings of how our different histories, memories and experiences position us in relation to one another. ("From" 11)

What is particularly significant to us for our purposes in this article is that ethical relationality entails recognizing difference at the same time as honouring connectedness. This notion of relationality emerges through and along with Donald's formulations on "Indigenous Métissage," a "research sensibility" that enables Donald to understand through interweaving ("Indigenous Métissage" 534). As an approach to analysis or interpretation, this weaving enables researchers to bring multiple distinct strands (histories, cultures, narratives, learning journeys) together without collapsing or

equating them. The resulting interwoven “braid” offers a new set of understandings, rich with resonance, contradiction, rupture, and affinity. In this article, as we write in two voices and explore distinct difficult histories, it is important to us to bring this principle of ethical relationality to our writing. While we do not engage deeply in *Métissage* or conceptual weaving here, we are still setting perspectives side by side and bringing them into dialogue through interwoven voices. We want to examine them as discrete yet interconnected, different yet mutually implicated.

It is significant for us to proceed ethically, with care and intention, because the histories we are examining in this dialogue are deeply difficult. A great deal of critical discourse has preceded our work here, and we must navigate well amid the trouble spots that have been identified by earlier scholars. Recognizing relatedness as well as difference is necessary in our explorations here. For instance, in her reflective writing, Maia discusses her desire to share the kind of deeply impactful learning experience she has had with her future students:

I hope that one day I will be able to take my students to visit a memorial site and deliver an experience like the one I was fortunate enough (and of course unfortunate enough) to have at Dachau. I want to have an idea of how to make this very difficult learning elicit a response in my students that is productive, spurring forward momentum and social change rather than just the unavoidable heaviness that comes with the territory.

This passage is complex. While acknowledging that her learning was ultimately very positive—in that she was “fortunate” to be able to push into more socially responsible understandings of atrocity—she struggles also with the difficult histories that have precipitated her learning experience—in that she and others are also “unfortunate” to have this learning set before them. While exploring the tensions there, Maia also experiences a push and pull between the “heaviness” of this “difficult learning” and her desire as an education to spur “forward momentum and social change”—presumably rather than being debilitatingly weighed down by difficult histories. The impulses arising from this learning are deeply connected but also contradictory. In reflecting back on these writings now, we attend to the work of scholars who have gone before us in examining difficult histories and learning.

To address further the notion of “difficult knowledge” in relation to remembrance, we turn again to Simon, who raises this notion amid his considerations on the importance of public memory and the complexity of pedagogical work around difficult histories. For instance, he analyzes the

willingness of institutions, like museums, “to initiate practices of remembrance related to conflict, violence, loss, and death, topics often characterized as ‘difficult knowledge’” (Simon, “Afterword” 193). In his own scholarship, Simon has examined a range of difficult contexts, including Indigenous histories of colonialism in Canada and Jewish histories of persecution and genocide in Europe (Simon, “Touch” and “Museums”).⁶ In grappling with difficult histories, Simon calls for a critical practice of remembrance, such that “taking one’s historical inheritance seriously requires a commitment to critically engage a past that is both inspiring *and* despairing” (193). In the context of our analyses in this article, we take seriously Simon’s caution against oversimplifying difficult histories in the service of pedagogy: he warns that “attempts to instrumentalize historical narratives risk impoverishing the challenges that a critical historical consciousness must confront” (199). In our learning and teaching, we hope to engage and foster the kind of critical historical consciousness that may enable meaningful dialogues between learners and between disciplines, in the service of education for more socially just futures.

Learning from the care with which Simon navigates these interrelated historical narratives, we recognize the risk—entailed in discussing difficult histories in Canada and Germany together—of universalizing or equating them. It is morally offensive to erase the specific nature of the atrocities committed against Jewish and other marginalized people during the Holocaust. Maia was quick to emphasize that in her original piece:

One quick disclaimer, however, before I proceed—in no way am I attempting to draw direct lines of comparison between the Holocaust and residential schools, colonialism, or any other aspect of the experiences of Indigenous peoples. What I do want to explore are the ways in which we as Canadians learn about and process the historical atrocities committed by our ancestors against Indigenous peoples—and how they compare to the ways in which the German people have done the same.

As Michael Gray cautions, it is a potential pedagogical pitfall for educational work to universalize the Holocaust—to treat it as a ubiquitous phenomenon, to use it as a metaphor to teach other lessons, or to generalize about its events in order to examine the present. Such universalization, Gray warns, “marginalises attempts at historical explanations of the Holocaust, questions such as why it happened, how anti-Semitism became genocide and why people are willing to participate in such murderous policies” (73). Careful education on this topic warrants respectful consideration of its historical specificities (Gray; see also Morris; Samuels; Short and Reed; and Stevick and Michaels).⁷

The history of the Indian Residential School system is also unique, and it is necessary for educators seeking to teach about this topic to consider its specificities with care. For instance, it is vital to recognize and examine the assimilative policies underlying the system, its relation to the Indian Act, and its placement within Canadian colonial history, as scholars like Battiste, Loyie, Milloy, and Woolford point out (see also TRC, *Final Report*).⁸ Maia was confronted with a particularly striking example of the need for such care as she worked through her reflections:

I think what really sparked my idea for this comparison was a *National Post* article that I encountered shortly after the visit to the Dachau Memorial Site. Posted by a friend on *Facebook*, it was the title of the article that caught my attention: “At Least 4,000 Aboriginal Children Died in Residential Schools, Commission Finds.”

Some discussion of this number is warranted. The article mentioned here (Postmedia News), which was still making the rounds on social media in 2016 (well after its original release date in 2014), shared the information that emerged during the TRC’s inquiries into children’s deaths in the Indian Residential Schools system. Volume 4 of the TRC’s *Final Report* shares figures that support the numbers stated in that article—namely “2,040 students” whose names are known and “1,161 reported deaths of unnamed residential school students” (137). The report also describes how the work of determining an accurate number of deaths was hindered—for instance by the lack or destruction of records—and how analysis of existing “documentary evidence” was not yet concluded (137). The report is careful to emphasize the importance of this work, in that it “is necessary to properly honour the memory of the children who died in Canada’s residential schools” (2). Around the same time, Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of the TRC, shared in other media that, even with incomplete information, the TRC was able to estimate that more than “6,000 residential school students” had died (Schwartz). The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation is currently continuing the work of compiling a more complete “Memorial Register” through careful analysis of existing evidence. Apart from that context, when she ran across the *National Post* article mentioned above, Maia found that the number made a significant impression on her, an impression to which she responds here: “I think this was because of the stark, numerical ‘4,000’—a huge number when thinking about each of those lives as an individual with a family, a history, a network of potential.”

Her reflections on this numerical reporting led her to consider the impact that numbers, as compared to individual stories, have on people who are learning about histories of atrocity. She considers what she has been seeing in Germany:

In many of the Holocaust memorials and exhibitions, I noticed that numbers were often conspicuously absent, because (as one exhibition panel explained), we as human beings cannot meaningfully internalize or process death in such massive numbers, and so if we are repeatedly faced with them, we often become numb to the subject matter, shutting down emotionally and empathically. The museum at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin shows us some numbers, yes, but also makes a few lives extremely personal with faces, families, histories, and excerpts from correspondence taking a prominent place in the exhibition. It was seeing that “4,000” after experiencing the mourning and memory of millions that really struck me.

In this passage, Maia suggests there is a need for people encountering difficult histories, as learners, to remain open to the feelings that arise rather than “shutting down emotionally” and blocking out the learning. Effective memorial practices, she implies, open up ways for learners to wrap their hearts and minds around difficult material, making information “personal” and tangible rather than providing only “massive numbers” that people “cannot process.” As educators, we both wonder about our complex responsibilities in leading students through such emotionally demanding learning experiences. Certainly, we continue to see how the distinct histories in Canada and Germany require attentive understanding—something that learners and educators must work through together.

For Maia, one point of distinction between the two difficult histories she was learning about in 2016 was the factor of time. She explains:

Canada’s history of cultural atrocity against Indigenous peoples is so much more recent, with the closure of Saskatchewan’s Gordon Residential School occurring only in 1996 (Alberta Education, *Walking Together*), and so we do not have the infrastructure of memory that exists here in Germany. I know for myself that I am guilty of a kind of wanton ignorance, of believing that this dark history is not my history, that it occurred long ago and there is nothing I can do about it now—and I also believe that this is true for many Canadians. As Kimberly Murray, executive director of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission puts it, “I think people can make it OK in their minds when they tell themselves it happened a really long time ago. I think it makes it easier for them to accept. But that’s not the reality” (PostMedia News). The reality that Murray speaks

of is one which, a mere eight years ago, former prime minister Stephen Harper stood up and made an attempt to acknowledge in his 2008 Statement of Apology to Former Students of Residential Schools. Though the speech was received with mixed feelings from many Canadians, I believe that, with the words “Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country,” we began the process of collectively and publicly revealing a part of our history that is very difficult to acknowledge and engage with. The fact that this speech was given only in 2008, and the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report released just last winter (in 2015), it’s not necessarily surprising that many Canadians have not officially had the time to fully realize and process the extent of oppression and violence associated with the settlement and colonization of Indigenous lands. However, it also means that there is no excuse to avoid this difficult work going forward.

These reflections point to a few important dynamics that are central to our examinations here. First, the dimension of time in public consciousness is contradictory when it comes to residential school histories: these events are perceived as having happened a “long time ago” or, alternately, in the very “recent” past. In her work to unpack these contradictory perceptions, Maia turns to self-scrutiny, acknowledging her own record of “ignorance” and of distancing herself from what she saw as “not my history.” Coming to grapple—alongside her work in our course—with the national reconciliation events in the public sphere, namely Harper’s official apology and the work of the TRC, Maia posits that a growing public recognition of colonial “oppression and violence” in Canada demands that non-Indigenous people participate in the “difficult work” of reckoning with the past.

Reflecting on her recent experiences with memorial practices in Germany, Maia looks to the visible “infrastructure of memory” she identifies around her. She writes:

This is one area where I think we can learn from Germany’s example of bringing light to dark history and working as a country to remember in a manner that provokes learning and change. Apart from the numerous physical memorials that I saw throughout the country, there is an education aspect to the culture of remembrance as well. Our tour guide at the Dachau Holocaust memorial, with ten years of guiding experience and officially

certified by the Dachau Memorial Site, explained to us that German students must visit a concentration camp memorial site at least three times throughout their schooling. I believe that this aspect of historical education is essential to present and future generations, and in Germany there is an underlying sense of “never again” that I felt informed many of their ways of being, doing, and remembering.

Maia’s own learning at Dachau was in itself a significant place-based learning experience: as Simon might point out, she was encountering one of the necessary “forms of public history that encourage us to engage historical inheritance not as a patrimony to be acquired and admired, but as a form of work that requires commitment and thought” (“Museums” 115). The remembrance work that accompanies such inheritance “can help open up existing relations and practices to continual critique and the difficult (and often conflict ridden) work of repair, renewal, and reinvention” (115).

For Maia, encounters with remembrance culture prompted a series of reflections on whether we have analogous practices of remembrance in Canada and on how they might be linked to transformative action. A linking concept here is how non-Indigenous people and governments in Canada understand and enact apologies. She argues:

Though we have our own forms of acknowledgement and education, the permeation of remembrance into culture is not as present in Canada. Settler scholar Paulette Regan examines the role of apology and testimony in relation to Canada’s colonial history: “From a pedagogical perspective, official apologies by their nature may act as a catalyst in that they increase public understanding of the historical origins of Indigenous disadvantage. This in turn compels citizens to rethink their civic and political responsibilities” (177). Further, she insists, “official apologies constitute a partial truth telling that must be followed by concrete action” (178). For me, the transformative potential that we have to harness lies in education and the opportunities for positive action and change that we as teachers can present to our students. We have a duty not only to memorialize and witness the suffering of millions, but to actively engage with, through, and alongside Indigenous people. This is where education, activating and calling on many ways of being, perceiving, and knowing, can begin to take those latent good intentions and mobilize them into actions. For us as future

teachers, the first step to education through multiple ways of knowing is of course educating ourselves, and this is one of the reasons I've found this Indigenous Education course to be so valuable.

In this passage, Maia grapples with the relationships among remembrance, action, knowledge, intention, and education. Reflecting again on her own journey and responsibilities as a member of a B.Ed. program, she turns to the importance of building her own knowledge so that she can move beyond words and intentions into meaningful actions.

Examining her own learning on the difficult history of the Indian Residential Schools system in our Indigenous Education course, Maia brings her reflections further into relation with the learning she has been doing in her TAB placement:

The learning experiences that we have engaged in throughout the semester are not unlike the learning experiences I have had here in Germany. Though less vivid than experiencing first-hand a tour, museum, or memorial, the process of learning about Indigenous peoples in Canada is still one in which, I admit, I sometimes feel resistant to engage. Like learning about the Holocaust, it is a topic that I know is crucially important but often emotionally devastating. Passages about the legacy of abuse in residential schools, like this one from Anishinaabe scholar Renee Linklater, have provided a shocking and horrifying new perspective on this history: "Trauma is also intergenerational and multigenerational—it is the cumulative, emotional and psychological wounding over time that is transmitted from one generation to the next" (23). I had no idea of the extent to which Indigenous communities are still suffering from colonial atrocities. As legal scholar Rupert Ross articulates, residential schooling has imposed burdens that continue to impact Indigenous people across generations: he writes that "while residential schools taught children to be ashamed of themselves, their families, and everything they knew, children growing up in today's violent families are likely to be internalizing exactly the same depressed view of themselves" (154). This legacy is one that Indigenous students may be facing daily in their own lives. This sombre realization is what makes me glad, as a future teacher, that I have forced myself to engage in the difficult learning experiences that I have had throughout the past

ten weeks. I feel like this has been an eye-opening experience in terms of both Canadian and German history, and one that has served to whet my appetite for further study, discussion, and reflection. I know that every moment of discomfort, confusion, guilt, and sorrow has been accompanied by a corresponding glimmer of enlightenment and the desire to effect change. While this course would have been equally valuable had I taken it in a face-to-face seminar format, I gained an invaluable perspective by taking it from the vantage point of Germany, framed by the pervasive culture of remembrance.

As her instructor in an online iteration of the Indigenous Education course, I (Aubrey) was reassured to see the degree to which Maia's learning during our short time together was so significant for her. Carrying my own fears that the online course might not allow for the personal, relational, and collective experience that the on-campus students share, I was impressed by the connectivity and depth of Maia's dialogic exploration of Canadian and German history and memory. Acknowledging and working through her own "resistance," Maia turns again to what she has learned from Germany about "remembrance" in order to motivate her responsibilities as a teacher and to motivate her ongoing learning. To consider these learning experiences further, we turn to the work of other thinkers on remembrance and memorialization.

Active remembrance works to counter forgetting: critical historical consciousness employed in the work of positive social change helps to counteract the ideological damages resulting from a lack of knowledge, or from a lack of engagement with knowledge. As an example of this point, we turn to Keavy Martin, an allied settler scholar of Inuit literatures, who makes an important point about amnesia and reconciliation discourse in Canada. Martin has argued that the concept of reconciliation can invoke a form of amnesia, namely when it entails "a fixation upon *resolution* that is not only premature but problematic in its correlation with *forgetting*" (49).⁹ "The danger," she contends, "is that the discourse of reconciliation—though rhetorically persuasive—can at times be less about the well-being of Aboriginal peoples and communities than about freeing non-Native Canadians from the guilt and continued responsibility of knowing their history" (49). Any supposed resolution that relies on amnesia—a lack of history or of critical engagement with history—will fail to materialize the peace it claims to seek, particularly when the underlying ideological issues of those histories (such as racism and colonialism) continue to impact the present. Remembrance pushes people to engage in the complicated, critical work of building better futures while learning from difficult histories.

Resisting the emotional difficulty can amount to resistance to positive social change.

This kind of critical push motivates Maia as an educator. Having brought her TAB and Indigenous Education experiences into dialogue, she begins to think about how she might further enact her learning in her teaching. Having just had her own significant experiences at Dachau, she also thinks about possible ways of engaging her future students with memorial sites and practices:

This cross-cultural learning experience has enlivened and enriched the content, narrative, and gravity of the subject matter of our Indigenous Education course in a way that I feel very grateful for. Even the opportunity to work through my ideas and experiences in this reflective piece has revealed to me the potential for growth in this very difficult type of learning, and I know that I will one day work to deliver this same type of experience to my students. For example, one outcome of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is “[a] commemorative marker to survivors of residential schools [...] coming to more than 100 communities across Canada” (CBC News). Though admittedly a seemingly small memorial gesture, the very existence of such markers will serve as an invaluable tool for potential place-based teaching, and a step on the path to healing what Justice Murray Sinclair, head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has called “Canada’s Holocaust” (CBC News). I believe a first-hand experience—like potentially visiting a residential school memorial site—to be invaluable in changing perspectives, in adjusting the inherent lenses through which we each view life, culture, value, and privilege. Even the smallest adjustment to these deeply rooted, often-subconscious lenses can open up what feels like an alternate dimension of perception.

Recognizing that non-Indigenous people hold “deeply rooted, often-subconscious” views and values, Maia places significance on the kinds of “first-hand experience” that have “enlivened and enriched” her own learning journey, shifting her own prior understandings and opening up “an alternate dimension of perception.” Having seen her own “potential for growth” during her time in our course and in TAB, she considers how she might bring her future students to encounter memorial sites and markers in order to learn about the Indian Residential Schools system. We consider, again, our responsibilities as educators in bringing our students to encounter difficult

knowledge: the learning is necessary, but also emotionally difficult, and requires a great deal of care, reflexivity, knowledge, and critical thought. Notably, additional layers of responsibility exist when working with Indigenous students or other students with histories of violence and oppression, such that learning experiences are not (re)traumatizing.¹⁰ Reflecting back on her learning journey and forward to her work as a teacher, Maia sees how engagement with remembrance is “invaluable” in shifting people’s understandings.

Working through a respectful understanding of two difficult histories brought into relation and dialogue, we also see how this reflexive work brings the past into relation with the future. For us as educators, our hopes for the future are focused particularly on our students. As Maia reflects in her closing words:

I look forward with trepidation and determination to a continued commitment to taking those difficult steps, of putting words into actions whenever possible, and to delivering an educational experience to my students about, for, and with Indigenous peoples in Canada that will (I hope!) be one small gain for the healing of our collective nation.

In the case of this one educator, intercultural experiences reveal the importance of theories and practices of remembrance when it comes to grappling with difficult histories in educational contexts. TAB has, here, opened up possibilities for remembrance across borders.

Conclusion: Transdisciplinary Spaces of Memory in Indigenous and German Studies

In the years since Maia originally wrote her reflective paper, a number of changes have taken place across educational and institutional contexts. In our province of Alberta, mandates are rolling out that require all K–12 educators to address First Nations, Métis, and Inuit content in their teaching. New curricula are being developed that (hopefully) make space for meaningful engagement with Indigenous people and perspectives. In postsecondary settings, Indigenization work proliferates, influencing elements ranging from policy to protocol to pedagogy. The shifts in formal education contexts parallel the shifts taking place across Canadian society as the work of the TRC continues to be taken up in public dialogue and as the recommendations of the TRC begin to be enacted in diverse settings. We are optimistic about these shifts. We believe that there is a real potential for Canadians to make change for the better as they acknowledge unsettling truths and do the work that meaningful reconciliation requires. Part of this

work involves acknowledging difficult pasts and then stepping up to do the hard work of dismantling the ongoing effects of those histories. Stepping up in this way makes it possible for Indigenous and settler peoples to walk alongside, to build better relationships for more hopeful shared futures.

In this article, we have pointed to a possible site for dialogue and reciprocal learning: the transdisciplinary space of Indigenous studies and German studies. We have also brought considerations from education research into this intersection. The teaching and learning experiences that were so striking and so transformative for Maia as a student, that were so inspiring for her future teaching practice, were a fortuitous surprise offered by her placement in Germany through the TAB program. Through our writing here, we intend to bring her experience forward for reflection and examination as a transdisciplinary and significant opportunity for discussion, learning, and transformation. Guided by the principle of ethical relationality, we offer these considerations as a possible inspiration for future scholarship and practice. For Maia, this experience has been personally transformative and professionally inspiring. Informed by this experience with difficult histories and with remembrance, Maia will continue to strive in her teaching practice to engage students with significant truths even when that learning is difficult. For us both, this work is done in the spirit of building a better future for our students and for the generations to follow. As co-authors here, we recognize that there is a great deal of work remaining to do—at this transdisciplinary site of possibility and beyond—through enacting remembrance in defiance of dehumanizing erasures.

Notes

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- ¹ We agree that it is important to acknowledge positionality and to speak from our particular locations and experiences. For more perspectives from Indigenous researchers on acknowledging positionality or speaking through personal voice and experience, and on how positionality connects to relationality, see, for instance, Absolon, Graveline, Kovach, or Wilson.
 - ³ Within and beyond German Studies, extensive scholarship exists on the topic of memory cultures. See, for instance, A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* and “Transformations”; J. Assmann and Czaplicka; Carrier; Erll; Huyssen; Nora; and Tamm.
 - ⁴ For a more detailed consideration of citizens as learners in relation to history, or learning and Indigenous Studies, see Aubrey Jean Hanson’s article on the role of learning in reconciliation. That text examines, for instance, how reading in Indigenous literatures can “contribute to shifts in understanding” that push for meaningful responses to colonialism in Canada (80).
 - ⁵ For more on the notion of relationality, see Absolon; Donald, “From” and “Indigenous Métissage”; Graveline; and Wilson.

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- ⁶ See, for instance, Simon’s “The Touch of the Past” and “Museums, Civic Life, and the Educative Force of Remembrance.”
- ⁷ For more on the complexities of Holocaust education, see, for a starting place, Gray; Morris; Samuels; Short and Reed; and Stevick and Michaels.
- ⁸ For more on the Indian Residential Schools system and the accompanying pedagogical complexities, see, for instance, Battiste; Loyie; Milloy; and Woolford. See also TRC, *Final Report*.
- ⁹ Martin is careful to separate this problematic understanding of reconciliation (as focused on forgetting the past) from the community-valued work of the TRC. For instance, she argues that the stories shared by Survivors within that process work to counter forgetting. See her full article for the nuances.
- ¹⁰ We acknowledge the potential for engagement with memorial sites or practices to be particularly difficult for some students, for instance in that Survivors may be triggered by visiting Indian Residential School sites. For deeper consideration of this issue and potential ways forward, we refer readers to Cooper-Bolam; Dupuis and Ferguson; and Taylor, to begin with. We also recommend the thoughtful piece “For this Land” by Kanien’kehá:ka artists and scholars Jackson 2bears and Janet Rogers, in which they describe facing the “profound sadness” and “traumatic memories” of the Mohawk Institute or “Mush Hole” residential school building that so many of their relatives had attended (29). In this piece, they describe creating an “immersive” site-specific performance-installation that responded to the former residential school site, a process that was “transformative” (29) and also offers potential inspiration for Indigenous learners and artists grappling with the difficult vestiges of residential school sites. See also Cooper-Bolam or Hanson and Daniels for discussions of former residential school sites in the present day.

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