

Keith F. Taylor (Dalhousie University)

Editor-in-Chief

On September 19, 2007, the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement* (IRSSA) came into effect. It arose from a lengthy process involving class action lawsuits in several jurisdictions across Canada. The IRSSA was signed by the National Consortium (formed from twenty law firms representing former residential school students), several Canadian church entities, and the Government of Canada. The provincial and territorial courts approved the IRSSA, which was, at that time, the largest out of court settlement in Canadian history. See [1] for a detailed account of the background and consequences to date of the IRSSA.

In addition to providing a process of financial compensation to individuals who had attended residential schools, the IRSSA laid out a number of other actions intended to redress damages to the Indigenous nations of Canada resulting from the residential schools program. One significant action was the establishment of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) with a budget of \$60 million. After five years of information gathering and consultations, the TRC submitted its final reports in 2015; they can be found at the website for the *National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation* [2]. Among these reports is the critical *Calls to Action*. The Calls to Action is a list of 94 specific “calls”. Number 7 on the list is:

We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

It is clear that there are many aspects to these “educational and employment gaps” and improvements in multiple areas (for example, per student funding in K-12 education) that don’t directly involve mathematics are needed. However, it is also clear, to us at least, that mathematics education levels are a significant component in education levels and closing any overall gap will require meaningful improvement in mathematics education in many ways. Although call number 7 is directed at the federal government, the intellectual resources necessary to respond to the call are mostly in the Canadian mathematics and mathematics education communities, as represented by the CMS/SMC, CAIMS/SCMAI [3], and CMESG/GCEDM [4]. There are important ways in which our community is responding. For example, special sessions at CMS meetings with a theme related to Indigenous education attract speakers presenting a variety of initiatives aimed at enhancing mathematics interest and learning in various regions of the country, as well as enthusiastic and engaged attendees.

The *CMS Reconciliation in Mathematics Committee* was established to ensure such communication and sharing of ideas remains effective and to generate national scale initiatives for improving the opportunities for Indigenous students and scholars to access the power of mathematics. Some examples of how opportunities might be improved are: Developing systematic support for preparation, and in-service training, of elementary school teachers in their command of mathematics; especially for those planning to teach in First Nations schools; building pedagogy, based in appropriate Indigenous cultural examples, that develops mathematical thinking; enhancing the widespread availability of enrichment opportunities – every school should have a math circles program; and building a network of Indigenous Mathematics Knowledge Keepers, be they ecologists, land surveyors, engineers, or doctors, to serve as role models for living a life enhanced by mathematical tools. This was just a sampling of ideas. Moving forward with any of these is challenging.

A core principle of reconciliation is summed up in the phrase “nothing about us without us”. This means building trusting relationships and responding to the guidance provided by the leadership of Indigenous communities. One challenge is that there are more than 50 First Nations in Canada spread over 650+ communities as well as significant off-reserve populations. There are many different “Indigenous cultures” and languages. That being said, the Canadian mathematics community, broadly defined, should strive to have a relationship with every community as well as the national Indigenous leadership. Building relationships requires money. We must develop partnerships with corporations that have natural interests in northern Canada where the communities are particularly expensive to visit. We must build trust with the federal government – the target of Call 7 – to obtain funding on the scale necessary for sustained activities.

Returning to building trust with Indigenous communities, the Reconciliation in Mathematics Committee could arrange for an activity, coordinated with Elders from the Nation on whose traditional lands a summer or winter meeting is held, that will raise awareness within the mathematics community of the meaning of reconciliation or, more generally, the impact of colonization on the First Nations. A Blanket Exercise [5], if available, at an annual general meeting would also be helpful.

Finally, on the scale of each of us, if you are doing something, or thinking of doing something, that might be related to the mandate of the Reconciliation in Mathematics Committee, let them know so your good ideas can spread.

[1] https://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/IAP_Final_Report_English.pdf

[2] <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>

[3] <https://caims.ca/>

[4] <https://www.cmesg.org/>

[5] <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/>