

# *Sins of the Father: Exploring Shame as an Ethical Pedagogy to Advance British Columbia's K–12 Settler Students Towards Reconciliation*

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*This paper reflects my journey, as a racialized settler and K–12 practitioner in British Columbia, Canada, towards developing a pedagogical understanding of how to transform the experience of inherited colonial shame among settler children in my classroom. Canada has a shameful history of colonialism, the progressive revelations of which provoke an iterative cycle of shame among many of the children in our schools. This cycle prevents these children from emerging as responsible agents of reconciliation. I examine the hidden pedagogical potential of shame to function as an ethical catalyst for reconciliatory change. I posit that Aristotle's conception of shame (aidos), when paired with Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, can provide the means to energize my pedagogical efforts to address the shame of settler students and enable them to pursue respectful mutual relationships with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. By fusing the philosophical horizons of Aristotelian shame with Freire's critical pedagogy, I argue that the future for settler children need not appear as a fait accompli, in which the "sins of father" will be visited upon the children of another generation.*

## **Introduction**

Many children of European ancestry, or "settler children," in British Columbia's public schools feel shame when they reflect on the roles their forebears have played in the subjugation of Indigenous Peoples, who have suffered assimilation, racism, and paternalism, resulting in intergenerational trauma, communal tragedy, and ongoing injustice. As a K–12 educator, I have found that the histories of Indigenous–settler interactions often raise difficulties for my settler students, and myself. Through no fault of their own, they experience the settler shame bequeathed to them by their forebears. Shame is frequently regarded as "a private, self-conscious experience in which individuals feel that a weakness or vulnerability has been exposed not only to others, but also themselves, leaving them feeling deficient and humiliated" (Leitch, 1999, p. 1). As a practitioner, I worry about the impact of this inherited shame upon my settler students, who often make up the majority in my classroom, and wonder if there is a pedagogy that can assist practitioners in responding to it. I look to answer this question by employing Aristotle's understanding of how shame uniquely operates in children and pairing that philosophy with the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire to arrive at a new, actionable pedagogy that can advance reconciliation.

Before proceeding, I would like to situate myself. I am a male, South Asian K–12 practitioner, currently working in both elementary and secondary settings. I reside on the traditional lands of the Semiahmoo Indigenous Peoples in Surrey, British Columbia. I am a first-generation Canadian who does not have ancestors who originally colonized the lands of Indigenous Peoples; nonetheless, I do reside on unceded Indigenous lands. Therefore, I must acknowledge that I participate in and benefit from the legacies of colonization.

The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has laid bare the roles played by the residential school system and the Indian Act of 1876 in the decimation of Indigenous communities and cultures. The TRC has proven to be a catalyst for advancing Indigenous rights and self-governance in Canada and galvanizing broader societal change with respect to Indigenous–settler relations. The TRC’s 94 Calls to Action have made their way into BC’s educational system, where Indigenous histories, ontologies, and epistemologies are gaining prominence in the new curriculum, which requires “that the voice of Indigenous People be heard in all aspects of the education system; that the presence of Indigenous languages, cultures, and histories be increased in provincial curricula” (BC Ministry of Education, 2022). BC’s new curriculum “builds on what has been learned and extends Indigenous perspectives into the entire learning journey,” which “means that from kindergarten to graduation, students will experience Indigenous perspectives and knowledge as part of what they are learning” (BC Ministry of Education, 2022).

The TRC has taken a prospective approach to healing in general, but here it is healing with respect to settler children that I wish to focus on. For settler students, the first step to reconciliation is to acknowledge the atrocities their forbears have committed against Indigenous Peoples. The second step involves students using their reflections on Indigenous–settler relations as an impetus towards establishing harmonious and equitable relations with Indigenous Peoples. For practitioners, this means having sensitive conversations with settler students about the harms that settlers have inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples. My settler students have (probably) never directly mistreated Indigenous People, but I am aware that shame, for them, is likely to be an inescapable and cyclical adjunct to reconciliation, as the various inequities of historical interactions are progressively revealed. How can healing and reconciliation proceed if settler children are caught up in this iterative loop of shame, and what role can practitioners play in countering this loop?

I explore this topic by using Aristotle’s philosophy of shame and subsequently pairing it with the critical pedagogy of Freire. I connect the ideas of these scholars for four interconnected and overlapping reasons: 1) They have similarities with respect to their prospective orientation, an orientation that I will demonstrate is crucial for allowing shame to be an agent of healing. 2) When sequenced in this order, these ideas provide practitioners with a detailed roadmap for understanding and applying the transformative properties of shame to advance reconciliation. Aristotle provides detailed descriptions of the unique functioning of shame in children and its reintegrative and healing properties, which are effectively animated by Freire’s critical pedagogy. 3) The ideas of these scholars mesh with the intentions of the TRC regarding healing, physical transformation, and the TRC’s prospective outlook, which I regard as key metrics towards assessing the progress settler students need to make towards bringing about reconciliation in a tangible sense. 4) Finally, conjoining the ideas of Aristotle and Freire is a recognition of the living nature of the classroom. Practitioners, by nature, are “doers” and the classroom is where theory transforms into practice. Coupling Aristotelian shame with Freirean liberation, transformation, and praxis help practitioners move shame from being a lifeless source of pedagogy toward becoming a living ethic. These linkages in turn create two more related questions: “What would it mean to conceive of education as a pedagogical site for working through the shame?” (Koelwyn, 2018, p. 276) and “How might beginning a journey of understanding shame through schooling help Canadian society move towards more meaningful reconciliation?” (Koelwyn, 2018, p. 279).

My intent is not to pathologize or appropriate Indigenous trauma (Andreotti et. al., 2019; Kouri, 2020; Rymhs, 2006) or suggest a false equivalency between settler shame and Indigenous trauma, nor is it to offer some form of settler saviourism (Dion, 2009; Maxwell, 2017). Instead, my concern is rooted in care and a commitment towards actionable reconciliation, both of which are professional requirements for K–12 teachers under the *Professional Standards for BC Educators* (BCTF, 2023). Standard 1 states that “educators care for students ... [and] are responsible for the physical and emotional safety of students,” and Standard 9 states that “educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing,” which I feel is what I am intending here.

## Context

The TRC has characterized the historical policies of the Canadian government towards Indigenous Peoples as “cultural genocide” (TRC, 2015a, p. 5). Once vibrant Indigenous communities have suffered generations of deprivation, disenfranchisement, loss of language, and loss of culture (TRC, 2015f). The TRC foresaw three essential outcomes of its inquiries (Snyder, 2010): (1) official statements of fact from Indigenous perspectives, (2) opportunities for residential school survivors to make their voices heard by recording their stories, and (3) healing through reconciliation.

Nagy (2020) has identified a shortcoming of the TRC’s third goal, which relates to its “victim centred approach” (p. 224). The TRC focuses mainly on Indigenous healing and gives little attention to settler healing. However, the enactment of reconciliation will require a broader focus, which must include both Indigenous Peoples and settlers (Koelwyn, 2018). Ultimately, reconciliation is relational, and neither party to reconciliation should fail “to address settler-Canadian responsibility and dismantle settler shame, [which is] a significant barrier to achieving any vision of meaningful reconciliation” (Koelwyn, 2018, p. 277). McCallum (2018) agrees: “Without a grasp of the Canadian settler subject, it will be difficult to understand why settlers would find it difficult to engage in forwarding the rights of Indigenous peoples” (p. 45). Moreover, if the aim is to achieve a sincere reconciliation, then the need to address shame among settler children must be approached with even greater urgency, because second and third generation Canadians have been shown to become progressively less compassionate towards the colonial injustices experienced by Indigenous Peoples (McCallum, 2018, p. 50). As Ahmed (2011, citing Balibar, 2008) argues, “human beings may make their own history, but they do not make it arbitrarily in conditions chosen by themselves, but in conditions that are ‘passed down’ not only in blood or in genes, but through the work of or labor of generations” (p. 154). This transgenerational inheritance of harmful colonial viewpoints provides an ethical and practical urgency for practitioners to break its transmission to the youngest generations of settler students. Furthermore, the TRC has identified that reconciliation enacted without an orientation towards taking action is largely performative,<sup>1</sup> and helping settler students come to terms with their shame may move reconciliation towards an action-based orientation.

For the TRC, reconciliation is about “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this country,” which means that “reconciliation is not about ‘closing a sad chapter of Canada’s past’ but about opening new healing pathways of reconciliation that are forged in truth and justice” (TRC, 2015b, pp. 3, 7), and “for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (TRC, 2015d, p. 3). Prospective healing was so significant for the TRC that a separate report (*Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*) was dedicated to envisioning a new future for relationships between Indigenous Peoples and settlers (TRC, 2015b).

Prospective reconciliation addresses both the present and the future; it seeks to establish new relationships that are built upon sincerity, mutual respect, and co-operative co-existence; and it provides an impetus to move forward in a manner that helps settler children to appreciate the past, without feeling yoked to it. Although the TRC values healing, the tragic history of Indigenous Peoples at the hands of settlers and their governments can create a burden of shame for settler children, which may, in effect, exclude them from the authentic experience of reconciliation. The TRC acknowledges the complexity of this issue with the comment, “getting to the truth was hard, but getting to reconciliation will be harder” (TRC, 2015b, p. 6). In the next section, I will unpack aspects of settler shame and describe its ethical use as a pedagogy for healing.

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<sup>1</sup> The Yellowhead Institute, an Indigenous think tank at Toronto Metropolitan University, declared that as of January 2023, none of the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action were completed and it has subsequently stopped tracking them (de Hoop, 2024).

## Settler Children's Shame

The word “shame” has negative connotations in K–12 schools (Monroe, 2009; McKnight et al., 2018) and, therefore, its manifestation among settler children requires closer examination. For many K–12 educators, shame has no instructional utility; for them, it undermines effective pedagogy and learning. When they think of shame, concepts such as humiliation, embarrassment, dishonour, and indignity come to mind. Therefore, shame is an emotion that should be avoided: deliberately arousing students' shame would violate the spirit of British Columbia Teachers' Federation's *Code of Ethics* (BCTF, 2022) and *Professional Standards for BC Educators* (BCTF, 2023), for shame is believed to have a diminishing effect upon a student's sense of self-worth.

However, there is an important distinction to be made between *shame* and *shaming* (Benade, 2015), and this distinction is critical when proposing the adoption of shame as an ethical agent for reconciliation and healing. Shame, as a noun, is often conceived as a feeling of humiliation that is self-caused and comes from within. Shame represents a form of caring (Probyn, 2005), in which the shamed feels remorse because they care about the feelings of someone whom they hold in high regard, such that they feel shame for harming that relationship. The utility of shame as a *modifier* of behavior can be explored relationally with counsellors or teachers, who can assist people in understanding their shame. Shame of this sort is “done with” the individual (Benade, 2015) or “historical response-ability” (Enns, 2016) and represents a responsible use of shame as a topic for discussion between student and teacher, in order to restore a broken relationship, for instance (Kaufman, 1974). In contrast, *shaming* involves “stigmatic shame,” in which people have shame thrust upon them. Shaming is therefore “*done to*” another person, for the purpose of denigrating and dispiriting the offender (Benade, 2015). I view this as an unethical use of shame as *shaming*. Shame has the potential to be a focus of both caring and collaboration between student and teacher, in which the teacher assists their settler students and themselves to process the moral implications of actions toward Indigenous Peoples, with the aim of altering future behaviours (Kaufman, 1974).

I am acutely aware that the “cultural genocide” of Indigenous Peoples is a challenging topic to address among settler children (Enns, 2016; Koelwyn, 2018; Templeton & Cheruvu, 2020), for whom it can be shame-inducing to contemplate the historical wrongs committed by their settler ancestors in relation to Indigenous Peoples (Kouri, 2020). This sensitive form of information is referred to as “difficult knowledge” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003), a concept meant to signify both “representations of social traumas in curriculum and the individual's encounters with them in pedagogy” (p. 755). “Difficult knowledge” compels people to wrestle with “historical traumas such as genocide, slavery, and forms of social hatred and questions of equity, democracy and human rights” in a manner that “might open teachers and students to their present ethical obligations” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756). However, examining settler violence enacted upon Indigenous Peoples is a topic that many practitioners tend to avoid (Templeton & Cheruvu, 2020). Practitioners tend to invoke an “ideal of innocence” among settler children, in which they avoid discussing uncomfortable topics, particularly those that may implicate their settler students themselves (Templeton & Cheruvu, 2020). Ironically, by maintaining the position of the “innocent child,” practitioners inadvertently continue the legacy of colonization (Templeton & Cheruvu, 2020). Some scholars (Maddison, 2012) have argued that not addressing settler shame may even block reconciliation, thereby creating an even greater necessity for a new pedagogy to address it. However, an awareness of this heritage of shameful relations may lead to deep-seated shame that is difficult for a child to resolve (Zembylas, 2008). Settler shame “may actually prevent settlers from engaging with social injustices,” as “the feeling is so unbearable that it makes us want to disappear” (Koelwyn, 2018, p. 279). As settler children reflect upon the fact that they continue to benefit from the discriminatory structures established by their settler ancestors, it can serve to reinforce their shame (Freire, 1970).

Settler children can feel locked in a perpetual cycle of shame.<sup>2</sup> As a practitioner, I have witnessed this phenomenon firsthand when aspects of “cultural genocide” are discussed in class. During the 10 long months of the school year, during which I work intensively with a specific group of students, my settler students appear to feel shame in relation to colonial history. Although my evidence of settler shame is experiential, there is a body of research that provides evidence for its existence among adults and children alike (Allpress et. al., 2010; Dion, 2007; Kizuk, 2020; Kouri, 2020; Maddison, 2012), which suggests to me that my students may also feel shame authentically, as opposed to me projecting it on them. Students often recoil from reconciliation, as they feel unworthy of the intended healing (Zembylas, 2019). Conversations about Indigenous subjugation are repeatedly evocative of settler shame. For settler students to experience the liberation of conscience that is required for reconciliation as envisioned by the TRC, this recurrent cycle of shame must be interrupted. Otherwise, the shame felt by settler students might congeal, rendering it progressively more difficult to undo (de Costa & Clark, 2011; Zembylas, 2019).

As a practitioner, I wonder whether shame can become an ethically transformative pedagogical agent for healing among settler children, steering them toward reconciliation. Can I help my students (and myself) progress past shame and move toward healing, as desired by the TRC and called for in the *Professional Standards for BC Educators* (BCTF, 2023), as we examine the very shame that, effectively, is *shaming* us? Is the Bible correct in stating that the sins of the father must be borne by the children? Psychologists have claimed that “allowing the experience of guilt can in fact be effective in facilitating positive outcomes in intergroup relations, stimulating efforts towards reparation and repair of the relationship (Maddison, 2012, p. 704), but I want to explore this philosophically. I will look for answers for these questions by employing an Aristotelian conception of shame in children, to which I will turn next.

### **Aristotelian Shame and Children**

Aristotle addresses shame in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Rhetoric*. I will supplement his treatments of shame with interpretations provided by Cua (2003), Fussi (2015), Higgins (2015), Jimenez (2011), and Raymond (2013). I employ Aristotle’s conception of shame over that of others because there are helpful temporal parallels between his ideas on prospective shame and the TRC’s emphasis on healing in the future. Both Aristotle and the TRC stress the need to look forward, meaning that Aristotle’s ideas help provide pedagogical rationale for practitioners on how to accomplish the goals of the latter. Furthermore, Aristotle’s description of how shame operates differently for children than adults and how it can be used as a stepping stone to develop the moral self is useful pragmatic information for practitioners. There is similarity between Aristotle’s conception of shame and the TRC’s goals of healing, and perhaps reconciliation resides in using shame as a pedagogical tool to promote healing among settler children. Furthermore, shame might not only initiate settler children’s healing, but also provide the potential medium through which it can be realized.

Aristotle specifies that shame is not a virtue but rather a “proto-virtuous” emotion that can lead someone toward *kalon* (what is noble) (Jimenez, 2011, p. 1). For Jimenez, shame is “the hinge upon which moral upbringing pivots” (2011, p. 6). It follows that shame can play a significant role in moral development. Aristotle provides a useful distinction between how shame manifests for adults and

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<sup>2</sup> Transgenerational shame and its manifestation among children have been well documented in post–Second World War Germany. For example, Schwab (2004) and Rothe (2012) provide evidence of inherited shame felt by German children. I use these examples to verify the existence of transgenerational shame as a concept and extend it to settler students, as has been done by scholars such as Maddison (2012).

children. By feeling shame, children demonstrate awareness of their actions, since the experience of shame suggests “an avowal of responsibility of a personal character fault” (Cua, 2003, p. 153). The humiliation that arrives with shame confirms the ignoble act and demonstrates a dawning awareness of virtues, vices, and the differences between them. The young person learns to behave virtuously, because to do otherwise would be shameful (Aristotle, 2002, 1116a30).

Feelings of shame “arise in large part from perception of what is publicly due to or from oneself at a given time” (Kennedy, 1991, as cited in Cua, 2003, p. 152). Aristotle views shame as pseudo-courage, “because it comes ... in order to escape reproach” (2002, 1116a29), whereas courage proper compels a person to perform moral acts without such motivation (Jimenez, 2011). Pseudo-courageous people, like children, lack the knowledge and experience through which to cultivate excellence and respond consistently with virtuous actions. For Aristotle, morality is learned through the *experience* of practising virtuous actions, and children have not yet practised enough: “A young person is not an experienced one; for it is quantity of time that provides experience” (2002, 1143a15). Shame is, therefore, “a praiseworthy possession in young people, who do not yet have virtue” (Jimenez, 2011, p. 102), because shame motivates the kind of practice by which children can acquire moral dispositions. Aristotle asserts that “we think that young people should have a sense of shame because they live by emotion and get so many things wrong but are held back by a sense of shame” (2002, 1125b20).

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle focuses on virtues and refers to shame as *aidos*, whereas in *Rhetoric* he refers to shame as *aischune*. Although there is some overlap between *aidos* and *aischune* (Jimenez, 2011), the distinction between the two terms is important in demonstrating that the emotion of shame works differently and more effectively for children than adults. This distinction demonstrates the pedagogical usefulness of Aristotle’s ideas for practitioners. *Aidos* is the form of shame applicable to children, given that they have not fully developed their acquaintance with the virtues and are prone to frequent errors (Fussi, 2015; Higgins 2015). Shame is “praiseworthy only when it is present in those who are in the process of formation; however, when we find it in mature individuals, we should suspect that something has gone wrong in their moral development” (Jimenez, 2011, p. 148). Therefore, when a child experiences shame, it suggests a moral readiness to become virtuous.

*Aidos* is animated by forces of motivation<sup>3</sup> and inhibition, which are realized through the prospective view of this form of shame, in which there is “pain at imagining evils that damage one’s reputation” (Fussi, 2015, p. 115). *Aidos* is a form of “anticipatory shame” (Cua, 2003, p. 183), wherein people are motivated to refrain from immoral acts because they can anticipate the accompanying shame; they are, therefore, able to control their behaviour and demonstrate their progression towards virtue. *Aidos* also functions as an *inhibitor*, preventing people from performing future unvirtuous acts (Jimenez, 2011). Inhibition is critical to a virtuous psyche because it governs a virtuous person’s desire to perform noble acts and avoid shameful consequences (Taylor, 2006, cited in Raymond, 2013); shame, therefore, becomes a social regulator (Maibom, 2010). *Aidos* can imbue children with the necessary foresight to anticipate the consequences of negative behaviours, and for this reason Aristotle views *aidos* as a positive and proactive form of shame, which can encourage moral virtues in children. For me, the prospective temporality of *aidos* is important, as it resonates with the TRC’s prospective outlook on healing.

*Aischune*, in contrast, refers to the harm that may come from the shame that arises from past events. With *aischune*, people feel shame not because they sincerely feel bad, but because their badness has been observed, and they fear the resulting punishment. *Aischune* assumes a retrospective outlook. It is animated by the fear of consequences, as opposed to the fear of disrepute that accompanies *aidos*. *Aischune* is a form of reactive shame that suggests little or no foresight on the part of people, who are, therefore, unable to show that they are progressing toward the established virtues required to be noble.

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<sup>3</sup> The study done Allpress et al. (2010) demonstrates that shame can function as a motivator among settlers and move them towards reconciliation. Allpress et al. (2010) also provide references to other studies that corroborate their findings.

Moreover, *aischune* resembles the kind of shame that I earlier described as “shaming,” which we commonly witness in schools. In the K–12 classroom, shame often manifests both negatively and retrospectively. Furthermore, *aidos* is often mistaken for *aischune*. Conflation of the two forms of shame will nullify the developmental potential of *aidos*, rendering its use unethical and pedagogically unsound. Many practitioners are unable to consider the transformative applications of shame (*aidos*) because they mistake it for its negative cousin, *aischune*. In English, both terms are designated by the word “shame,” and literal-minded practitioners are unable to reap the pedagogical benefits of *aidos*, because they are unable to avoid conflating the two Aristotelian concepts.

Because it is prospective, *aidos* is the more likely of the two types of shame to have a developmentally transformative effect on children. *Aidos* appears as proactive, while *aischune* appears as reactive. *Aidos* is a form of shame that motivates people towards what is noble while simultaneously inhibiting them from shameful actions, and it is, therefore, more appropriate for the development of virtues in children (Higgins, 2015).

Finally, it is important to summarize the process by which the various aspects of *aidos* work together. For Aristotle, *aidos* is a desirable form of shame that can stimulate the development of virtues in childhood. “People with shame perform virtuous actions because of the honor those actions bring” (Jimenez, 2011, p. 101), but also to avoid “a kind of fear of disrepute” (Aristotle, 2002, 1128b13). Therefore, the *aidos* type of shame can work simultaneously as both a motivator and an inhibitor. It motivates children to strive for what is noble, and it inhibits them from indulging in future shameful actions. *Aidos* is praiseworthy, especially in children, because it seeks what is noble and shuns what is shameful. By repeatedly performing noble acts, children become habituated to what is noble, and they will thus become virtuous adults. The relevant function of *aidos* is to “shape the tastes of children through pleasure and distress so that they are attracted to the right kind of objects and activities” (Jimenez, 2011, p. 108). By progressing towards what is noble, people can transform their consciousness. However, *aidos* is unable to energize itself beyond being a static philosophy and requires a catalyst to do so, which can be found in Freire’s critical pedagogy, to which I turn next.

### **Blending Aristotle’s Shame and Freire’s Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom**

As we attempt to apply this process of *aidos* to the moral development of settler children, two interwoven themes emerge. I believe the intersections of these themes can help to achieve the TRC goals of reconciliation as well as uncover an ethical pedagogy that may help settler children and practitioners to heal and liberate themselves from the damaging cycles of inherited shame. With respect to the first of these themes, *aidos*, as enacted through reintegrative shame, can function to orient settler students and practitioners toward practising the virtues that lead to understanding, social justice, and compassion towards Indigenous Peoples. For settler children, the motivation to pursue a new relational prospect of social justice, rooted in genuine positive regard towards Indigenous Peoples, can be found in their willingness to work through their shame toward the development of a new consciousness that moves them beyond passive empathy to an active engagement with issues of social justice. In this relational sense, shame is “not an ethics predicated upon some sort of obligation towards the Other, but rather an event terminology in which the capacity of *seeing* can arise with the experience of shame as the point of departure for a new kind of ethical relation with others and the world” (Zembylas, 2019, p. 313). Or, as Webb (2015) has it, “more than any other affect, shame mediates the boundary between self and other” (p. 3). The process of coming to terms with inherited shame can be a key motivator for settler students to pursue authentic healing and genuine reconciliation. As an inhibitor, *aidos*, functioning through reintegrative shame, can discourage settler students from tolerating the repellent residues of historical colonization. The combination of motivation and inhibition associated with *aidos* will foster humility and compassion among settler children, both of which are necessary to move young people beyond hollow

words and toward the tangible behaviours currently lacking in the reconciliation process, as noted by the TRC.

The second of the intersecting themes relates to the concepts of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (1970), whose critical pedagogy helps augment the pedagogy of shame in several key ways through its concepts of praxis, transformation, and mutual healing. Critical pedagogy breathes life into the theoretical ideas of Aristotelian shame and brings about reconciliation through its conception of praxis. Many critics (Todd, 2000; Tarc, 2011; de Hoop, 2024) have pointed out the hollow nature of reconciliation. They have argued that reconciliation is ineffective because it is a false performativity that produces no tangible change. Material/demonstrable change is the key metric by which to measure the success of reconciliation. To what degree have the physical lives of Indigenous Peoples been improved, and to what extent has the settler mindset been transformed? And for practitioners, without Freire's contributions, the pedagogy of shame will also remain a static and immobilized performativity. As teachers, we are in the business of *doing*, and we do that well with most topics *except* reconciliation. The sensitive and troubling nature of reconciliation induces a willful blindness of sorts, so that we do not have to confront and be morally responsive to a truth beyond our ineffectual thoughts. Our actions do not extend beyond hollow intellectualization, when tangible action is what is really demanded. Freire's critical pedagogy helps to animate and extend the static ideas of Aristotle and reintegrative shame in a manner that respects the social justice ethos of reconciliation and the pragmatism of the classroom in which teachers are professionally obligated to reify reconciliation. Freire's critical pedagogy helps to energize Aristotelian and reintegrative shame, thereby helping practitioners to promote the healing described by the TRC and required by governing bodies, such as is expressed by the BC Teachers' Federation's *Professional Standards for BC Educators* (BCTF, 2023). Focussing exclusively on just the philosophy of shame would render reconciliation incomplete and impotent.

Freire's conception of transformation, when applied to a pedagogy of shame, can "play a constructive role in sensitizing us towards physical actions that can transform what brought shame upon us in the first place or caused harm to others" (Zembylas, 2019, p. 308). In so doing, it can transform the consciousness of settler children. Dussel (2013) contends that "Freire's position is radically different" from that of other psychologist educators, who "all aim to augment, correct, or unblock intellectual performance, either theoretical or moral." He continues: "When he realized that education is not possible without the self-education of the learner in the *process of his or her own liberation*, he changed his pedagogy" (p. 311, emphasis in original).

Freire focused on the relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed,<sup>4</sup> something that the TRC has also attempted to do. Freire's work mirrors the understanding of the TRC, that power lies at the core of reconciliation. It acknowledges that for reconciliation to be impactful, there needs to be a more equitable distribution of power, and that cannot be accomplished with just reconciliatory thoughts. He believed that for genuine reconciliation to occur, both the oppressor and the oppressed need to direct the human values of love, respect, and equality toward the other (Freire, 1970). Freire developed a unique perspective on the relations between oppressor and oppressed: he realized that both the oppressor and the oppressed need to heal simultaneously; he labelled this "the oppressor–oppressed contradiction" (Freire, 1970, p. 56). In other words, he was one of the first to isolate what Koelwyn (2018) and Nagy (2020) have identified as the problem with the TRC's "victim-centred" approach (Nagy, 2020, p. 223). For relationships to improve, both settlers and Indigenous Peoples must seek healing and liberation, and for this reason, liberation "ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes the pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation" (Freire, 1970, p. 54).

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<sup>4</sup> I understand that Freire uses the concepts of oppressor/oppressed in a Marxist sense, but these terms are fundamentally about power differentials, and I have extended them to Indigenous–settler relations, as have other scholars such as Indigenous scholars Susan Dion (2009) and Shannon Leddy (2008), demonstrating its fitness for this topic.



Just as Indigenous Peoples need to be freed from the subjugation of the settlers, settlers themselves need to be freed from their colonial consciousness, which reinforces their attachment to colonial practices. Furthermore, for transformation to occur among settlers, they need to “trust in the [oppressed] people” (Freire, 1970, p. 61) and thus become capable of their own liberation. Transformation of consciousness among settlers is a “profound rebirth,” in which “those who undergo it must take on a new existence; they can no longer remain as they were” (Freire, 1970, p. 61).

This kind of transformation requires that settler children suspend their inherited and/or interpellated colonial attitudes and adopt new precepts rooted in social justice. Settler children need to experience their co-humanity with Indigenous Peoples or risk remaining “uncompleted being[s] conscious of their incompleteness” (Freire, 1970, p. 43). For settler children, “liberation is thus a childbirth and a painful one,” after which they *re*-enter the world as new beings: “no longer oppressor nor oppressed, but [human] in the process of achieving freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 49). Viewed in this way, transformation will “reframe” the identities of settler children in the eyes of Indigenous Peoples and, as importantly, in their own eyes (Webb, 2015, p. 12). However, as Freire suggests, perhaps this will only become possible if “the oppressed” take the lead: “It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors” (Freire, 1970) p. 56).

Here I must insert a point of caution that relates to the sincerity of settlers and their ability to transform. Coulthard (2007), in his discussion of Frantz Fanon’s (2005) seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, contends that the politics of settler’s “recognition” of Indigenous Peoples serves ironically to reinforce colonialism, since “the indigenous society will tend to see the forms of structurally limited and constrained recognition conferred to them by their colonial ‘masters’ as their own” (p. 450). Building on Coulthard’s (2007) position, Kizuk (2020) contests the motivational value of settler shame and suggests that the ability of shame to transform settler consciousness is limited.<sup>5</sup> For Kizuk (2020), the effects of settler shame have more to do with a self-referential desire for absolution than with any genuine urge toward transformation. For Kizuk (2020), instead of meaningful reconciliation, the more likely effect of settler shame is a self-satisfied attitude of moral restoration: “Rather than operating as an affective transformative experience, settler shame leads to a collapse back into a remaking of the settler identity” (Kizuk, 2020, p. 6).

Implementing a pedagogy of shame also poses other challenges that relate to and extend Coulthard (2007) and Kizuk’s (2020) criticisms. By exploring *aidos* among settler students, practitioners run the risk of having those students fall into a “crisis of knowledge and being” (Tarc, 2011), in which their guilt may become even more entrenched. Moving the impacts of colonization away from the faceless and generic entity of the Canadian government, where they are indirect and general, and linking them directly to the ancestors of settler students may produce even deeper guilt. When settler students realize that practitioners have been using that generic term to shield them from the wrongs that have been committed directly by their ancestors, they may find it difficult to reconcile. Conversely, discussing the topic of settler shame may also have the unintended effect of having settler students take up a defensive posture and further internalize the commonly held national narrative of Canada being a just country, which has crystallized over generations (Tarc, 2011).

Furthermore, students may also have their own pedagogical reservations about this new pedagogy. For example, “it is common for students to proclaim their innocence and anger at “being made to feel guilty” by the very pedagogy that is supposed to make them feel “more enlightened” and “feel better about themselves,” and they may attempt to “negate the overwhelming effects of guilt by proclaiming that they cannot be held responsible for actions they themselves have not committed” (Todd, 2000, p. 357). Finally, practitioners who explore this topic may risk falling prey to “liberal guilt,” which is performative and “where all action becomes gesture” (Todd, 2000, p. 359). Liberal guilt functions as a

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<sup>5</sup> Coulthard (2007) and Kizuk (2020) focus on settler adults, but my focus is on children, who, Aristotle argues, are different from adults in their ability to use shame to transform themselves. Given that there appears to be more research conducted on settler adults than on settler children, I have chosen to include those caveats out of caution.

“sentry barring us from probing too deeply into the significance within progressive education” (Todd, 2000, p. 359) and it prevents us from engaging with *aidos* on a level that would initiate moral responsibility and moral action.

However, despite these caveats, shame has a significant utility in inciting moral action. As a practitioner who has witnessed settler shame among my own students, I feel that Coulthard (2007) and Kizuk (2020) focus on the adult population and skirt over the kinds of sincerity that I observe among my settler students. Indeed, I am familiar with a range of adult viewpoints on reconciliation, both in the hothouse of public education and in the political arena of general opinion. I have noted several attitudes that show that settler shame has failed to exert a transformative effect on numbers of adults in these environments. These attitudes include a static self-satisfaction that comes with acknowledging settler shame; a recurring, cyclothymic loop of shame; an ambiguous attitude of avoidance; a cynical attitude of outright denial; and a constant attitude of hostility that borders on white supremacy.

However, in my experience, many settler children are sincere in their desire to understand and address the sources of the shame that they admit they feel. I feel that these students genuinely hope to achieve healing and reconciliation, because they sense that the effects of colonization are morally wrong. This genuine “hope” suggests that they will be able to approach transformation from a visceral motivation of *love* (Freire, 1970, p. 89), rather than from a self-referential stance that pays superficial attention to social justice. It is a familiar truism that our children represent our hope for the future. In my view, however, the very hopelessness of Coulthard’s (2005) and Kizuk’s (2020) position on settler transformation retards the spirit of Freire’s pedagogy.

In contrast, Freire’s depiction of transformation is quintessentially hopeful. He projects the ultimate success of transformation by focussing on praxis, which the TRC and the Aristotelian understanding of shame also emphasize: if reconciliation is to be meaningful, it must be both theoretically sound and actionable. When the oppressors seek to liberate their consciousness, their work must emerge as praxis (Freire, 1970, p. 87). Therefore, as K–12 practitioners work pedagogically toward the transformation of consciousness among settler children, their approach “cannot be purely intellectual but must also involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis” (Freire, 1970, p. 65). To this end, shame “does more than sensitizing us, because it has the potential to develop ethical and political action toward transformation” (Zembylas, 2019, p. 309). Accordingly, I propose that my settler students will demonstrate their ability to bring about reconciliation not only by *thinking* reconciliation, but also by embracing and enacting reconciliation. Their praxis will provide the true measure of their determination to work with and through their shame.

The role of the practitioner in this transformation among settler children is critical, and Freire provides some useful strategies in this regard. A key initiative would be to create the space and conditions necessary for the responsible exploration of settler students’ shame: as such, the classroom becomes a “space of solidarity” between the settler students and the practitioner (Zembylas, 2019, p. 309), much like the Indigenous “communitarianism” or healing circle, as described by Braithwaite (1989). For the practitioner, a responsible exploration of shame means working with settler children, in partnership, to recognize historic wrongs, process the resulting shame, and understand that the future does not need to replicate the past. The practitioner needs to partner with students as they work through their shame and envision a future in which settler–Indigenous relationships are grounded in respect, equality, sincerity, and mutuality. This safe “space of solidarity” is created by applying Freire’s “problem-posing education,” in which “people develop the power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1970, p. 83, emphasis in original). Moreover, this space may also provide an opportunity and venue for practitioners to come to terms with their own shame and model the process of working through shame with their students. Given the complexity of this issue, it would be pedagogically useful for practitioners to demonstrate how someone can progress towards reconciliation so that students can witness firsthand the aspects of reconciliation that involve action.

In a related (but slightly different) vein, Aristotelian shame (Jimenez, 2011) requires an audience or community to be energized, turning this into a reintegrative or reparative process (Tarc, 2011). Regarding the “pain” that results from shame, Aristotle has this to say: “The conditions under which we feel pain are these: first having people related to us [who are] like those before whom we said we feel pain” (1984, 1384b28). The appropriate audience may be expected, therefore, to confirm the students’ feelings of shame; in addition, I believe another, more positive outcome can occur. The inclusion of an audience or community, far from merely intensifying individual feelings of shame, can effectively provide communicative actions that will help to redress settler children’s pain. Aristotle’s statement concerning “pain” implies that our “pain of shame” is attendant upon our ability to empathize with “those before whom we said we feel pain” because we feel connected with others who are like them. In the case of children, I believe the pain of their shame is more likely to arise more directly from a sympathetic resonance or identification with the victims of oppression, particularly when the victims are children. The effective communicative actions – or perhaps they are dramaturgical actions (Habermas, 1984, p. 91) – required in this instance would need to include “others like” the Indigenous victims of colonial oppression, or their close proxies. For this reason, the practitioner might carefully assemble “an audience” in the form of “a council” or “sharing circle” (Kovach, 2009, p. 124), to which people from diverse backgrounds are strategically invited. People from First Nations and other Indigenous backgrounds would need to figure prominently among the invitees.

The community works with the person who is feeling shame because they want to reintegrate that person back into the community, which makes *aidos* operate from a place of “paying forward” as opposed to “paying back” (Webb, 2015, p. 33). The communal aspect of *aidos* creates a safe space in which shame can be safely explored and reconciled, turning the process into a form of “reparative learning” (Tarc, 2011, p. 356). This sense of safety is established by detaching the person who is feeling shame from the act that is causing shame. In other words, the shame “is directed at the evil of the act” rather than the person (Hay, 2001, p. 134). This distinction is important because it allows settler students to maintain their dignity, which is essential for healing. It is within the safety of the community that settler students can safely understand that their shame need not be ascribed or be a *fait accompli*. By detaching settler students from harmful historical settler mindsets, reintegrative shame offers them hope and the ability to envision new relationships built on equity. Hence the communal process becomes one of re-emergence for settler students through a process that can “build consciences” (Tomaszewski, 1997, p. 112) in a manner that recognizes their inherent goodness. “Feeling responsible is not the same as being responsible,” and the communal process of shame “moves feeling to thinking which can move one to a changed relation to the self and others” (Tarc, 2011, p. 366).

In addition to creating a safe space of community, Freire emphasizes the need for leaders (or practitioners) to convene and facilitate an ongoing dialogue. It is in dialogue among settler children that practitioners (and the strategically invited members of the audience) will help the children reframe their personal and communal “pain of shame” and envision the gestures of reconciliation that will re-situate settler shame. In these ways, dialogue can render shame relational in “an act of creation,” which can assist settler children in “naming the world, which is an act of ... recreation” (Freire, 1970, p. 89). Dialogue involves critical thinking, which according to Freire projects “an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits no dichotomy between them” (Freire, 1970, p. 92). Through dialogue, practitioners and their allies can participate with settler students in discovering that they are inextricably interwoven with Indigenous Peoples into the fabric of the world. This, of course, is easily said, but for many adults, for whom the word “idealism” is a pejorative term, it is an utterly utopian vision. However, to this frequently voiced opinion Freire has responded:

That which is *utopian* for me is not that which is unrealizable and is not equivalent to something which is idealist in character. Utopia is the dialectical expression that unfolds in the acts of *denouncing* and *announcing*. This is the act of *denouncing* the dehumanizing structure and the act of *announcing* the humanizing structure. (Freire, 1970, as cited in Dussel, 2013, p. 319, emphasis in original).

Immersed together in the communicative and dramaturgical actions of dialogical sharing, participants will become familiar with Indigenous modes of inquiry, “bound in ceremony, spirit, land, place, nature, relationships, language, dreams, humour, purpose, and stories in an inexplicable, holistic, non-fragmented way” (Kovach, 2009, p. 140). Though “stories” appear last in this list of Indigenous modes of inquiry (each of which is also a way of knowing), for Kovach, sharing is “an open-ended method that invites story” (2009, p. 124). Sharing their stories, including their stories of shame, with others like themselves and “others like” the victims whose pain they identify with, settler students will discover that they are, in fact, inextricably interwoven with Indigenous Peoples into the fabric of the world. In dialogue, the students will become “comfortable with the fluidity of story,” and they will develop as “able listeners” (Kovach, 2009, p. 125). “Mutual listening,” says Dussel (2019, p. 166), “sending and receiving, is the *conditio sine qua non* of pedagogical love as extreme gratitude.” The “rapprochement” explored through dialogue is seen as the grand avenue to reconciliation.

## Conclusion

Must the sins of the father be borne by the children? Having examined this problem via the philosophies of Aristotelian shame and the Freirian philosophy of critical pedagogy, I can now provide some clarity in the context of settler children in Canada. It need not be accepted as a *fait accompli* that settler children will feel perpetually fettered to inherited shame. Shame, as opposed to shaming, can afford significant philosophical, pedagogical, and dialogical opportunities for practitioners who work with settler children. A prospective approach to shame can involve students in working through their settler shame and liberating themselves to achieve, through praxis (Freire, 1970), a new state of consciousness. Settler children can thus envision a future in which the re-situation of settler shame is accomplished together with Indigenous Peoples. I am reminded again that the TRC has stressed that “together, Canadians must do more than just *talk* about reconciliation; we must learn how to *practise* reconciliation in our everyday lives – within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces” (TRC, 2015b, p. 21). I believe that working dialogically with shame (*aidos*) can lead settler students and classroom practitioners to discover, together with diverse others, exactly how they might practice a new pedagogy of reconciliation.

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