
David Joanasié

Perspective on Reconciliation from an Inuk Youth

I feel I am more fortunate than others who are not as connected with their Aboriginal culture. I speak, read, and write fluently in Inuktitut and have learned and experienced Inuit culture enough to be able to practise a lot of the values and customs associated with it.

I see the connection to my (Inuit) culture as the most important aspect that has made me who I am today. In addition to that, I find it truly imperative to continue the advancement and perseverance of my mother tongue among my peers and, more importantly, among future generations.

I find it somewhat difficult to identify the role culture has within the reconciliation process. But to put it into context, and assuming that both Aboriginal (Inuit) and non-Aboriginal (*Qallunaat* or non-Inuit) cultures are included in the reconciliation process, I would say that Inuit culture is naturally susceptible to the larger Canadian culture due to its low number

of carriers—by carriers I mean that there are approximately forty-five thousand Inuit in Canada within a population of over thirty-two million. This means that Inuit are a minority within a minority. *Qallunaat* culture, on the other hand, is much more assertive and plentiful when comparing it with Aboriginal cultures. It is part of the mainstream society. Also, Inuit historically are a shy people and, hence, they may be more vulnerable to large, dominant cultures.

I could see how some of these traits from either culture might hamper a sound reconciliation process. At the same time, I feel that both cultures are becoming increasingly aware of one another and are recognizing ways to work together for better understanding. The relationship between the two cultures needs to be further identified to get past historical experiences and on to a justified reconciliation process.

The role of culture within the reconciliation process, I think, is that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures alike must respect one another in light of their historical experiences—they have to *see eye to eye* on healing, so to speak. By this, I mean that there needs to be maximized understanding and trust built between the cultures involved. It is somewhat difficult to pinpoint how this could or would be done, but it might possibly involve a whole different governing system altogether or a humungous shift in attitudes.

In reality, one of the biggest reconciliation processes that has been undertaken to date is the residential school Survivor

payouts. However, money cannot buy back the experiences and fix or heal the people who have endured residential schools, including addressing intergenerational impacts and the effects on their peers, family, and community. Money is a dominant cultural concept that Inuit and other Aboriginal people have bought into and have come to value so much that it has replaced the true meaning of healing and reconciliation. What might be an option to look at further is to take a percentage of the payout to the Survivors and put it into a trust that would benefit future family, community, and nation members through the creation of materials, resources, wellness centres, counselling services, and a range of projects and services to promote, revive, and preserve language and culture. This fund could also sponsor local healing programs and invest in educational scholarships for upcoming youth and future youth in their advancement toward a better life.

These are just some of my thoughts, and I do hope they have served useful in gaining a better understanding of things and a broader perspective on reconciliation.

Biography

David Joanasis responded to our invitation to youth to write a short statement on the issue of reconciliation. David's father is Inuk and his mother is non-Inuk. David wrote:

The reason I identify myself as being of Inuit descent is that although I am mixed blood, my entire childhood was spent

growing up in Kinngait (Cape Dorset), which is an Inuit community and, therefore, I learned to speak and live like Inuit from my community. I was born in Iqaluit, Nunavut (then Frobisher Bay, NWT) in 1983, and I currently reside in Ottawa and work for Canada's national Inuit organization, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK).

David moved to the south to attend the Nunavut Sivuniksavut Training Program. Nunavut Sivuniksavut (NS) is a unique eight-month college program based in Ottawa. It is for Inuit youth from Nunavut who want to prepare for the educational, training, and career opportunities that are being created by the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) and the new Government of Nunavut. After completing NS, he accepted a job as ITK's Youth Intervenor.

David's contribution addresses the importance of cultural connections and proposes practical measures to promote healing and reconciliation in rising generations.

“Thou Shalt Not Tell Lies.” Cree students attending the Anglican-run Lac la Ronge Mission School, La Ronge, Saskatchewan, 1949
Photographer: Bud Glunz, National Film Board of Canada
Library and Archives Canada, PA-134110
(This photo can also be found, along with many other resources, at www.wherearethekids.ca)

