Gaming for Truth and Reconciliation: A Player's Perspective

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by Ann Velez, the Teaching & Learning Centre

On March 25, 2025, as part of the Curriculum Integration Spotlight Series, which is open to all staff and faculty, I played The Truth in Truth and Reconciliation Educational Board Game in person with four other Seneca colleagues from different departments.

None of us expected this session to be lighthearted, and just in case anyone had such a notion, the trigger warning on the box reminded us otherwise:

> "Subject matter includes abuse, violence, assault, suicide, death, abduction, racism, sexism, classism, and cultural genocide. The contents of this activity are based on real events in Canadian history that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with."

Played on a board depicting Turtle Island (an Indigenous name for North America), the game's simple object is to survive assimilation by not losing all of one's Value cards (Land, Identity, Culture, Language) and collect four Eagle Feather cards, which symbolize survival and resilience. While travelling around the board, players draw information cards that describe interactions of colonizers in Canada and the Indigenous peoples since first contact. Each information card is meticulously researched, footnoted, and referenced in the game's Guide Book, which also gives facilitation support, additional background information, and reflection questions.

The real object and value of the activity, of course, is for players to learn how colonization impacted, and continues to impact, Indigenous peoples in Canada. This is done by reflecting on the perspectives and actions of colonizers and Indigenous peoples, and then hopefully through engaging in thoughtful and empathetic discussions with each other about these learnings.

In this, the game far exceeded my expectations, and I had a positive experience learning both with and from my colleagues. I learned facts I didn't know before and had the chance to ask questions and share thoughts and feelings about them freely. The physical interactivity of the game and the visual imagery in the board and cards further reinforced the learnings. And even though the subject matter of the game was difficult, learning how historic injustices are starting to be addressed in recent times gave hope for reconciliation and healing.

I believe certain factors were key to the success of our session:

- We played the game in a purely educational setting at the Teaching & Learning Centre, located at Newnham Campus.
- All players maintained a respectful and inclusive learning atmosphere and observed Seneca's Principles of Indigenous Curriculum Engagement (SPICE).
- A member of the Teaching & Learning Centre, who already had experience with the game, facilitated our session by setting up, summarizing the rules, guiding play, and referring us to the Guide Book for robust and well-researched content that answered questions about Indigenous history and culture as they came up.

These factors contributed to an environment that welcomed players' thoughts and feelings, allowing for respectful sharing and perspective taking. It was also implicitly understood that there would be learning, and we were not playing the game as a means to have fun and socialize.

Though the logistics of gameplay, along with the seriousness of its content, could be overwhelming without support from First Peoples@Seneca or the Teaching & Learning Centre, anyone interested in the game can watch videos on Medicine Wheel Publishing's website where the game's creator, James Darin Corbiere, guides players through set up, unboxing, and play. He also explains the creation of the game's Guide Book and associated graphic novel, Tales of the Firekeeper.

Want to learn more about The Truth in Truth and Reconciliation Educational Board Game? The Teaching & Learning Centre has two sets available for faculty to review and use for teaching purposes. Contact teaching@senecapolytechnic.ca with your questions.

Medicine Wheel Publishing. (2023). *The Truth in Truth and Reconciliation Educational Board Game.* [Photograph]. https://shop.medicinewheelpublishing.com/products/the-truth-in-truth-and-reconciliation-tool-kit

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