



# ILLUMINATING BEGINNING TEACHERS' WAYS OF BEING AND THINKING TO CREATE DECOLONIZING AND INDIGENIZING LEARNING SPACES

JODY DLOUHY-NELSON, PHD, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA OKANAGAN, 2023

## POSITIONALITY

I am a White settler-educator-researcher with Czech-Hungarian, English-Scottish-German roots who grew up on the land of the nêhiyawak, Anihšīnāpāk, Dakota, Lakota, Nakoda, Métis, in Treaty 4 lands with a presence in Treaty 6. I have been given the privilege of learning with a Syilx Scholar, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers over a five year period, and I have a responsibility to share my understandings from the Syilx Okanagan Homeland where I have lived half my life. It is a responsibility directly linked to children and adolescents' futures, land and language revitalization, truth, unlearning, and Indigenous pedagogy in an awareness of colonial destruction and violence.

## RESEARCH QUESTION, Understandings, Kin-thinkers

How do beginning teachers—when in a program that fosters educator self identity; and when exposed to local Knowledge through contact with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Storytellers—Syilx in this local context—articulate their unlearning to illuminate how change in their thinking and practice (praxis) occurs?

Cohen's Syilx conceptualizations of the Monsters of Colonization (2010; 2023) prompt using imagination and mind-power that are useful to transforming these Monsters in order to leave our local Places better for the Peoples-to-be in the homelands of the Syilx People. Hare (2021) points to "the transformative powers embodied by Trickster Coyote where imagination, disruption and renewal are possible in Indigenous Teacher Education [and] Teacher Education must become a place of renewal where Indigenous Knowledges, worldviews and histories become part of teaching and learning for all preservice teachers." (p 46).

Kin-thinking may be found in the curriculum theorists' voices I include in my work, including Bill Pinar, Ted Aoki, William Doll, Maxine Greene, and Margaret Macintyre Latta, who are identified as reconceptualists, and who are largely Anglo-Eurocentric, yet have sought to shift curriculum through articulating the personal subjectivity of learning, the social and experiential nature of learning, and the educator's calling to see inside the thinking to create opportunity for meaning making.

The opportunity thinking in this study is found in pedagogy/praxis as decolonial Indigenization (Gaudry and Lorenz, 2018) where awareness and decisions lead to transformative action through commitment to inner change in educators/education.

## MY WAY FORWARD: METHOD

A WAY TO PROCEED: THE GENERATIVE POWER OF DIALOGUE AS AN ACT OF CREATION



Centering local Knowledge is vital in order to decolonize/unlearn (Armstrong, 2009; Thiong'O, 1993).

- From Syilx Knowledge: in an *enowkinwixw* circle—a dialogical process of the Syilx Okanagan People on whose lands I did this study—the rubbing together of flint to light fire causes friction, sparks, and warmth toward collective wisdom (Armstrong, 2009; Cohen, 2010)
- In Freire's (1970/2017) pedagogy of the oppressed, individuals coming together in dialogue create generative ideas, and that is how change-making, collaborative journeys happen. In my dialogues with teacher interns, I explored how they "name" their new world, position themselves, and become "literate" in settler-colonizer transformation.
- Out of the transcripts emerged what I call "dialogical moments" that capture the complexities of the pre-service teachers' thinking processes, transformative language, and described actions to decolonize or unlearn while learning the Truth about what we also call Canada, and to Indigenize or make space for local Knowledge.

## THE COMPLEX PROCESS/VALUES JOURNEY OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TO UNLEARN/DECOLONIZE, MAKE SPACE FOR INDIGENEITY

This study identifies markers of the unlearning journey of pre-service teachers. The journey involves:

- experiencing the truth of Canadian history through seeking and confronting their positionality.
- grappling with their position as future educators.
- becoming more knowledge system/epistemically oriented (Kerr & Andreotti, 2020).
- reflecting, dialoguing and beginning to want to name their world.
- seeking groundedness in educator praxis.
- recognizing openings and invitations to take action to create an environment that enables life-force expression, and connection to the land.
- developing an awareness of decolonial pedagogy and the consequences of ignoring decolonizing praxis (Macintyre Latta, 2023).
- embracing a primary principle of action: understanding IK (Indigenous Knowledge) as holism, as integral, Local systems.
- undergoing an inner unsettling process (Regan, 2010), dependent upon the practices of positionality and land acknowledgement, reflexivity, and relationality.
- identifying their will to grasp the expanse of their Teacher Agency (Ferreira da Silva, 2022).
- finding the connection between their teacher agency and becoming confident disrupters, deconstructers, decolonizers, and Indigenizers.
- articulating the lived-curriculum vs curriculum-as-plan (Aoki, 2004), amidst reacting to the fall-out of colonialism in schools.
- becoming more aware of the Western "canon" present in curriculum, and using their agency to discern in educational choices.
- grappling with the epistemic orientation of two-eyed seeing (Bartlett, Marshall and Marshall, 2012), and seeking to grasp the complexities of respecting Indigenous Knowledge while holding firm to a positivistic version of Western Science.
- being more people-oriented than document-oriented in seeking connection and ethical consultation with local Indigenous Peoples.
- identifying their lived values and recognizing when a situation does not sit right with their inner self.
- overcoming fear tokenism through clarity of one's values, purpose.
- embracing/respecting local protocols.
- doing a mental dance between content-as-indigenizing and process-as-Indigenizing.

## MOTIVATION FOR MY STUDY

- I live, study, and work in a place rich with biodiversity, an intricately interwoven ecosystem unthreatened until the arrival of European Settlers about 150 years ago, thanks to 10,000 years of caretaking by the Syilx Okanagan Peoples. Syilx Scholar Dr. Bill Cohen's teachings of the necessary delicate, dynamic tensions of the web that forms this ecosystem, and that resonate between creativity and survival are intrinsic to my meaning-making.
- Upholding the value of the life conditions needed for regeneration of Earth's ecosystem/s is a role that humans must play. This role belongs to those who are attuned to all life in the greater web—humans who not only think, but act in creative and transformative ways that support biodiversity. From my White Settler perspective, I understand that one's worldview can either support or interrupt the interconnectedness which is vital to sustainability on this planet. The Syilx worldview is one in which interconnectedness is completely interwoven. Syilx Knowledge forms an environmental ethic, or eco-pedagogy (Armstrong, 2009).
- Language is needed to describe how preservice teachers learn to create learning environments that are uncolonized and that make way for Local Indigeneity in order to advance this work in Teacher Education.
- These notions move me to explore new educators' expressions of their efforts with children and adolescents in Syilx Territory.

## FOR FUTURE STUDY

This image of a preservice teacher is formed differently for every individual. However, in a collective, in a dialogic space with transforming potential where learning has occurred through direct contact with Syilx Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Scholars—where the thinking among individuals is articulated, absorbed, interpreted, questioned and re-formed by all—there is ready shaping of, and movement in the thinking (Macintyre Latta, 2013, p. 47), as transformation occurs. A question for future study is "how does this image of the complex teacher intern (as shown by the markers of the complex process and values journey they undertake, in green section above) in a localized Syilx and Settler context translate into longer term practice?" This study is an invitation to see the depth of thinking and the capacity of current day pre-service teachers to become very effective at what Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) term decolonial Indigenization in curricular and pedagogical praxis.

The values-that-trouble are inherently present as power in the processes to unlearn -Dlouhy-Nelson, 2023

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