

Gathering Together: How Educators Are Working Towards Decolonizing and Indigenizing Their
Teaching Practice Within a Colonial System

by

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BA, University of Victoria, 2005

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

It is the professional responsibility of educators in British Columbia to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice. Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated that when educators decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practices it benefits Indigenous students, non-Indigenous students, society, the planet, and educators themselves. However, despite the fact that many current teacher education programs include instruction of Indigenous pedagogy, many educators still do not know how to decolonize or Indigenize their teaching practice. Additionally, working within a colonial system creates many challenges and obstacles for educators working to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice. Using the Transformative Inquiry methodology this inquiry identifies how educators are working to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practices within a colonial system. I met with nine educators from the Greater Victoria School District four times over a four-month period and used Chrona's (2022) book *Wayi Wah!* to guide our discussions on how we were working towards decolonizing and Indigenizing our teaching practice. I also recorded observations from my teaching experiences and my participation in a 10-course program with the Indigenous Education Department at the University of Victoria called Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives, and engaged in the practice of reflexivity throughout the inquiry by keeping a digital journal in which I documented my thoughts and interpretations to check my own biases and assumptions. Through this inquiry I have discovered that there are no clear and simple instructions to decolonize and Indigenize one's teaching practice, however our group did determine some strategies that educators can use to work towards decolonizing and Indigenizing their teaching practices which are described in detail in Chapter 4. We also discovered what prevents some educators from doing this work: fear, anxiety and discomfort, "educator overwhelm"¹ and working against the dominant ideology. While working within a colonial system may create significant obstacles, I believe that if we, as educators, work towards decolonizing and Indigenizing our teaching practice we can dismantle the colonialist ideologies that dominate our society, which can in turn help to dismantle the colonialist structures such as our education system.

¹ I use the term "educator overwhelm" to describe the overwhelming feeling that many educators experience as they try to meet the unrealistic demands of teaching in the current context.

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Figure 1: Overview of organizing concepts for study findings in relation to educators decolonizing and Indigenizing their teaching practices (page 44)

Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement

My name is Chelsea Adeline Mason, and I was born and raised and continue to live on the territories of the W̱SÁNEĆ people and the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations. I recognize that these lands are part of the Douglas Treaties and that there is much controversy over the legitimacy of these treaties. As a settler on these lands I am accountable for learning and understanding how I take up space on these lands. I have learned that separating Indigenous peoples² from their lands, impacts not just their ability to hunt, fish and gather medicines, but it impacts their way of being. Their relationship to the land extends far beyond what Western ideologies are capable of understanding. I also recognize that even though these lands were taken, the W̱SÁNEĆ people and the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations have ongoing relationships with these lands. I will continue to support Indigenous peoples and communities in their efforts of decolonization.

My relationship to these lands has not always been evident to me, and yet these lands have raised me. As a child I spent lots of time outdoors camping, swimming in lakes, rivers and the ocean, playing at parks, walking our family dogs, and playing sports. I have had the privilege of being able to travel to other places in the world and I have always enjoyed these trips. I also spent nine years living on Treaty 7 territory. However, the lands of the W̱SÁNEĆ people and the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations will always be my home. Yet, it is not lost on me that the only reason I am able to call these lands my home is because the W̱SÁNEĆ people and the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations were dispossessed of their homelands. I will spend the rest of my life acknowledging this and learning how to live on these lands in a way that honours and respects the W̱SÁNEĆ people and the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations. My relationship and

² Throughout this thesis I refer to both Indigenous people and Indigenous peoples. My intention is to use the singular form *people* when I am referring to Indigenous individuals and the plural form *peoples* when I am referring to more than one Indigenous community to acknowledge that the term Indigenous includes diverse groups of people.

my dependence on these lands have become clearer to me in recent years. I am learning how these lands are tied to my identity and what it means to have a reciprocal relationship with the land. I am thankful to these lands for all that they have taught me and all that they provide me, such as fresh air, clean water, food, shelter, as well as a place to go to find peace and comfort. Through the endeavors of capitalism, I have witnessed our society's destruction of the land to make a profit. I am committed to doing what I can to protect the land and help prevent further damage by actively reclaiming space for native plants, being accountable for and making positive changes to the daily impact that I have on the land, and being an activist for land protection.

Situating Myself

Self-situating is a common practice among many Indigenous groups and many Indigenous scholars (Kovach, 2000), and it will help the reader to know where I come from, how I am connected to this land and the peoples, and the lens through which I have engaged in this work. Based on the teachings I have received from my Indigenous colleagues from the Greater Victoria School District's (GVSD) Indigenous Education Department, John Harris, Dave Davidson, and Kolette Cristante, through participating in circles, I situate myself by identifying my ancestors. Although I can trace some of my ancestry quite far back through an online source, the story of how my ancestors came to live on these lands is mostly unknown, and unfortunately, I have not had elders in my family for many years, so it is difficult to obtain this information. My mom, Pamella Mason, and my dad, Gary Mason, were both born, raised and continue to live on the territories of the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations and the W̱SÁNEĆ people. On my mother's side of the family, my nana, Jean Harris, was born and raised on the territories of the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations and the W̱SÁNEĆ people. Her mother, Jane Harris (nee Hoffman), was born on Treaty 4 territory and her ancestors were from England and Germany. My nana's father, Frederick Harris, was born in Cornwall, England and moved to Treaty 1 territory in what is now called Canada and joined the army. He then moved to the

territories of the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations and worked at the post office. My peepaw, Henry Porter, was born on the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. His mother, May Margaret Williams was born somewhere in what is now called British Columbia, and his father, Harold Porter, was born in Hartlepool, England. When I search further back my peepaw's ancestors also came from Wales, and the S'Klallam and Snuneymuxw Nations. My great great grandfather was born on Lummi Island and his grandfather was Chief La-Ka-Nim of the S'Klallam Nation who was the youngest son of the House of the Seven Brothers. Chief La-Ka-Nim's mother was Princess T'Sus-Khee-Na-Kheen of Nanaimo who was originally kidnapped and meant to marry Chief Stee-tee-thlum of the S'Klallam Nation, but instead she married his son Chief Stee-tee-thlum the younger and they had eight children.

On my father's side of the family, my grandma, Flora Brooks, was born on Treaty 1 territory close to the Long Plain First Nations. My grandma lived in many places including the territories of the Anishinaabe Algonquin, the Secwepemc Nation, and the Syilx and Okanagan people. To escape an abusive relationship and live closer to her sister she moved to the territories of the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations and the W̱SÁNEĆ people. Her father, William James Brook, was born on Treaty 1 territory close to the Long Plain First Nations. Searching further back, many of his ancestors were also born in what is now called Canada, but there is also English, Irish, American, and German ancestry. My grandma's mother, Louise Gunn, was born in Steeple Bumpstead, England. My grandfather, Clifford Mason, was born on the traditional territory of the Siksikaitisitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy), Tsuut'ina, Stoney Nakoda, Cree, Saulteaux and Métis people which is covered by Treaty 6. His father, Charles Henry Mason, came from Oklahoma, USA, and he has a long history of ancestors who came from the United States, but before that his ancestors came from Wales, England, and Jersey. My grandfather's mother, Mabel Jane Mannix, came from Treaty 7 territory, but tracing her ancestry back shows ancestors from England, Ireland, and Wales.

I am a middle class, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, educated, employed, home-owning, soon to be mother. Although I have Indigenous ancestry from the Snuneymuxw and S'Klallam Nations, I present and was raised as a white woman. As some of my friends and colleagues have expressed, being of both Indigenous and settler ancestry can be challenging to navigate. Learning about my Indigenous ancestry has been exciting part of this journey³, however, it is a privilege I was denied up until recently as my ancestors did not discuss their Indigenous ancestry, likely due to the stigma and potential harm that may have been caused by acknowledging their Indigenous ancestry. So, I too, am struggling to know how to situate myself. I did not grow up in my First Nations community, yet I do not want to deny this ancestry that is part of my identity. However, because of how I look and how I have been raised, I sometimes feel like an impostor when I say that I have Indigenous ancestry. I have been very fortunate to have been supported by Indigenous Elders, colleagues and friends who have helped me to be more confident in acknowledging my Indigenous ancestry. I am still in the process of learning about my ancestry and would like to learn more about my Snuneymuxw ancestry and visit Port Townsend to learn more about my S'Klallam ancestry.

I understand that because of who I am and how I look that I have received many unearned privileges. Some of these privileges include being able to attend post-secondary school, including completing a Masters of Arts program, and being employed. I completed my Bachelors of Arts in 2005 and the Post Degree Professional Program in Education in 2008. I have been teaching ever since. I taught for 9 years in the Calgary Board of Education and have been teaching in the GVSD for 6 years. I have taught Dance, English, French, Social Studies, Physical Education, Yoga, Leadership, Career Life Education, and I currently teach a grade 7

³ My mom has always known that we had Coast Salish ancestry, but she had no idea which specific nation we were from. Last summer, thanks to the help of Elder Sulsa'meethl (Deb George), I was able to track down online records for my great grandmother and trace our ancestry back to the S'Klallam and Snuneymuxw Nations.

and 8 Eco Ed⁴ exploratory⁵ class. I am passionate about education and Indigenous rights, and I do believe that as Justice Murray Sinclair said, “education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of this mess” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2015). I do not pretend to have all the answers or to know more than anyone else. In terms of decolonizing my teaching practice, I feel that I am still very much in the beginning stages.

Gratitude

Although what follows are my interpretations based on who I am and the experiences I have had, it is also really important for me to acknowledge that even though self-reflection is a significant part of the journey to decolonize oneself, I did not do this work on my own. This is the result of the time and efforts of many individuals, and my gratitude for these individuals extends beyond what I can express in the words that follow, but I will try. Chrona (2022) explained that “we owe our lives and our current knowledge to our ancestors, and learning should respect what has been learned and passed from those ancestors to succeeding generations” (p. 124). Thus, I would like to start by acknowledging and thanking my ancestors. They are the reason I am here today, and I have learned so much from the knowledge that they have passed onto me. I also feel that it is essential to acknowledge and thank the Indigenous peoples across the world, past and present, who have fought and resisted colonization. It is because of these peoples that Indigenous languages, knowledges, teachings, traditions, and cultures continue to exist and thrive in some parts of the world. I also want to recognize and thank the Indigenous scholars and researchers who have paved the way for students like me to be able to engage in this work. I can only imagine how challenging it must have been for the pioneers of Indigenous education

⁴ Eco Ed is an exploratory course that a colleague and I developed together. It focuses on Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and creating opportunities for students to connect with the land. A further description of the course is included in the section *Connecting to the Land* in Chapter 4.

⁵ According to Bishop and Harrison (2021) “[e]xploratory courses are an essential feature of a successful middle school” and provide students with the opportunity to “ascertain their special interests and aptitudes, [and] to engage in activities that will broaden their views of the world and of themselves” (p. 29). Some examples of an exploratory course are woodworking, drama, art, and dance.

to make progress in decolonizing and Indigenizing an institution that was and continues to be colonized. I would like to express my gratitude to the local Indigenous Elders Tousilum (Ron George), Salsa'meethl (Deb George), Yux'wey'lupton (Butch Dick), and Mary Anne Thomas, who have taken the time to share their stories and teachings with me. I'm extremely grateful to my Indigenous instructors from the University of Victoria (UVic) Chaa'winisaks, Dr. Carmen Roderiguez de France, Robbie Louis, Dr. Shauneen Pete, and Dr. Lauren Jerke, and my Indigenous colleagues from the GVSD John Harris, Dave Davidson, Kolette Cristante, and Frank Conibear who have allowed me to walk alongside them and have been patient with me as I learn what it means to be a settler on these lands and be Indigenous, and how I can work towards decolonizing my thoughts, my words and my actions. Their guidance has been fundamental in my learning journey. Special thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Kathy Sanford, for her patience, guidance and encouragement throughout this journey. I am also grateful for my committee member, Dr. Lyndze Harvey, for her feedback and suggestion to adopt Transformative Inquiry as my methodology. I also want to thank my classmates from the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives Program at UVic. These individuals created a community and a space where I could feel comfortable being vulnerable, and I have learned so much from each of their unique perspectives. As well, I am thankful to the colleagues who stepped forward to be my partners in this inquiry. I have so much respect and admiration for these individuals, and I appreciate their willingness to be vulnerable with me and engage in this challenging work. I would be remiss in not mentioning the friends and family who have encouraged me with their kind words of support. Lastly, I would not be here, nor would I have been able to complete this thesis if not for the support of my mom. Throughout this entire process she has taken care of me and made it possible for me to dedicate the time and energy necessary to complete this thesis.

Dedication

To all the children past, present and future. To the survivors of the residential school system and the ones who never made it home. To Indigenous students who are currently navigating their way through the education system. And to my unborn child, may you grow up in an education system that is inclusive, equitable and just.

To Tousilum (Ron George), thank you for sharing your warmth and knowledge with me. Your love for the cedar trees has inspired many and you will not be forgotten.

Chapter 1: Introduction

As an educator, it is my responsibility and my intention to ensure that *all* my students feel that they belong and feel safe in our classroom community, and can be successful. In the 2020/2021 school year 7.3% of students in the GVSD self-identified as Indigenous (British Columbia Ministry of Education; 2021b). For the Indigenous students in my class to feel that they belong, are safe, and can succeed, they need to be able to see themselves in the curriculum and learn in a way that reflects their Indigenous ways of learning and being. Therefore, to support my Indigenous students and encourage their success, I need to decolonize and Indigenize my teaching practice.

Beyond my professional responsibilities and aspirations, the work of decolonizing my teaching practice is deeply meaningful to me. There are many aspects in my life that have led me to this inquiry. As mentioned previously, on my mother's side of the family I have Coast Salish ancestry, which I do not know a lot about. For this reason, I am personally and passionately invested in learning more about Indigenous knowledge and culture, and in taking action to support the rights of my Indigenous ancestors and relatives. Furthermore, as someone who loves spending time outdoors and considering the climate disaster⁶ we are currently facing, I admire and respect the relationship that Indigenous peoples have with the land, and I believe there is a lot that they could teach others about sustainable practices that will help to save our planet, and I would like to share these sustainable practices with my students. On a more tragic note, I was shocked and appalled when I first heard about Canada's residential school system. Admittedly, it took me a while to respond to this information, but the more I learned, the more I felt that I needed to do something as a teacher, as a settler, as a caring individual, and as

⁶ Researchers Gram-Hanssen et al. (2021) explained that "a growing number of scholars argue that climate change can be seen as a form and product of colonialism...This is especially so due to the strong link between colonialism and capitalism, with colonialism paving the way for capitalism to emerge through the exploitation of natural resources and cheap or forced labor" (p. 673).

person of Indigenous ancestry. Thus, I have made a personal commitment to do my part in the process of reconciliation by learning more about the true history of Canada, and working towards not only decolonizing my teaching practice, but also the way I live my life. I am dedicated and committed to this goal, which is why I have chosen to research how educators are working towards decolonizing their teaching practice. However, as I will explain later, there are many obstacles and challenges that educators must overcome. The GVSD is starting to provide more professional development opportunities to help teachers engage in this work. However, I have found that most of these professional development opportunities explain *why* educators need to work towards decolonization, but very few describe *how* educators can decolonize their teaching practice. I have spoken to a number of colleagues who also want to work towards decolonizing their teaching practices and are frustrated with the lack of guidance from the district and the government of British Columbia (BC). So, as a social and collaborative person who likes to problem solve, it made sense to conduct this inquiry in a way that would include and benefit my colleagues. In completing my research inquiry my hope is to not only work to decolonize my own teaching practice, but to help my colleagues decolonize their teaching practice and to contribute in some way to the decolonization of our current education system.

As part of my journey to decolonize my teaching practice, I also enrolled in a 10-course program with the Indigenous Education Department at UVic called Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives. So, some of what is included in this work is influenced by what I have learned from this program, my instructors, and my classmates.

Defining What it Means to Decolonize and Indigenize the Education System

To discuss and understand how educators are decolonizing their teaching practice, it is important for me to first define what I mean when I use the terms *decolonize* or *decolonization*. Additionally, the terms *Indigenize* and *Indigenization* are often used in affiliation with decolonize and decolonization, and sometimes used interchangeably, so it is necessary to understand how

they are different and how they are connected. However, understanding what is meant by decolonization and Indigenization is a difficult task. Attas (n.d.) from Queen's University explained that "[t]here is no clear definition of decolonization or Indigenization; all definitions are complex, multi-faceted, and contested...[and]...decolonization is a journey that takes a lifetime" (see first footnote). That being said, many scholars agree that decolonization involves examining and dismantling colonialist structures and ideologies and restoring power and control to Indigenous peoples (Antoine et al., 2018; Attas, n.d.; Belfi & Sandiford, 2021; Mambrol, 2017; Racette & Sammel, 2020, SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement, 2016). Furthermore, researchers Tuck and Yang (2012) warn against the term decolonization being used as a metaphor for "other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools" and argue that the term decolonization should only be used when referring to the "repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (p. 1). Whereas, it is unlikely that what educators are able to accomplish in schools will restore power, control and land to Indigenous peoples, I believe it will help to examine and dismantle the colonialist structures and ideologies built into our education system, which can in turn effect changes in the rest of our society and hopefully lead to the "repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). When discussing the term decolonization, one of my Indigenous instructors, L. Jerke (personal communication, March 30, 2023), from UVic defined decolonization as an unlearning of colonial values. In terms of discussing the changes that educators are trying to achieve in schools, I think it is more in line with the definition from my instructor, L. Jerke, and the concept of dismantling colonialist structures and ideologies. So, although using the term decolonize in this way may be contrary to the argument made by Tuck and Yang (2016), at this time I believe it is the best term to use to describe the changes that educators are working to implement in their classrooms and schools.

Although closely connected and essentially part of the work of decolonization, Indigenization refers to including Indigenous history, knowledge, and perspectives in the Western education system in a way that is presented as equal to Western history, knowledge

and perspectives (Antoine et al., 2018; Attas, n.d.; Racette & Sammel, 2020; University of Saskatchewan, n.d.). Any educator wanting to decolonize their practice will also need to look at how they can Indigenize the curriculum that they teach. However, I found through my courses at UVic and in the discussions that I have had with colleagues that when referring to the idea of making these changes in our teaching practice or in our schools, the term people often use is decolonize. Additionally, I think that in most cases decolonization must take place before Indigenization can occur. Educators need to unlearn colonial values (L. Jerke, personal communication, March 30, 2023) before they can begin to Indigenize their practice. Thus, I tend to use the terms decolonize and decolonization more frequently than Indigenize and Indigenization. However, the work of decolonizing and Indigenizing can sometimes occur simultaneously, so at times when I use the terms decolonize and decolonization, I am including the concept of Indigenize and Indigenization.

Inquiry Problem

There is nothing simple or straightforward about the work of decolonizing and Indigenizing our education system, and it seems that identifying one problem only leads to another problem. A significant problem in the current Canadian education system is its inability to support the success of Indigenous students due to the lack of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the current curriculum. While the most recent BC curriculum does include Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, the problem remains that most non-Indigenous teachers do not know how to teach Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. Furthermore, because of the residential school system and the Canadian government's attempt at Indigenous cultural genocide, there are many Indigenous educators who have grown up not learning their cultural traditions and teachings, thus they too struggle to know how to decolonize their teaching practice. Most educators in BC above a certain age received little to no education about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, so how can they teach it? While there are several valuable resources that can be found through a quick google search, as I will discuss later in the

literature review, for educators the act of decolonizing our teaching practice is not only about including Indigenous content in our teaching, but it also involves changing the ways that we teach. And this introduces a whole new set of complications.

First, who is going to teach educators how to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice? Having been raised in a Western society, most educators have little to no understanding of Indigenous epistemologies or pedagogies, thus it seems that they would have to rely on Indigenous people who have been raised in their communities to learn about Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. However, statistically considering the Canadian population, there are far fewer Indigenous people to teach than there are settlers who need to learn. Furthermore, as previously stated, a direct result of the assimilation practices of residential schools is that many Indigenous people grew up not learning about their own cultures or languages. Thus, the current focus for many Indigenous communities is to pass their teachings onto their younger generations, which limits the time that they have to teach non-Indigenous educators. Additionally, if Indigenous students are unable to find success within our current education system, their chances of going to post-secondary institutions are unlikely, and to be able to teach educators, post-secondary qualifications are almost always a requirement in our colonial system. Moreover, as Lees (2016) has outlined, many Indigenous community members do not trust the education system and are not yet ready to work with non-Indigenous educators. In the GVSD, we are very fortunate to have an Indigenous Education Department with a staff of approximately 12 educators and counselors who work with all of the schools to support the Indigenous students in our district, as well as, consult with teachers who are wanting to bring Indigenous education into their teaching practice, and teach students and educators about different aspects of Indigenous education such as drumming and land-based learning. However, they too are overburdened by the demands that have been put on them to support the district. Finally, another argument that I hear frequently from Indigenous people is that it should not be their responsibility to teach non-Indigenous people.

Another significant dilemma for educators is knowing which Indigenous teachings are appropriate to share with students. Many Indigenous cultures believe that knowledge is sacred and cannot be shared with everyone. Therefore, many non-Indigenous educators experience a justifiable anxiety of engaging in cultural appropriation when teaching Indigenous culture and knowledge. Likewise, some Indigenous people equally experience anxiety in thinking that their sacred knowledge might be misused and mis-shared. Based on the Canadian government's attempt to eradicate Indigenous knowledge and culture, it is more than understandable that many Indigenous people would be protective of their cultural teachings. Miigam'agan from *The Gatherings: Reimagining Indigenous-Settler Relations* (Hager & Mawopiyane, 2021) explained this strongly felt tension for Indigenous people:

If there had been a sense of balance and wellness in our relationships from the very beginning of our history together, then maybe the idea of sharing our culture wouldn't have been such an issue, but that balance wasn't there...You can feel that there's a last little spark of something sacred that we have, and if we share that, it could be trampled on and not regarded - not regarded in the same way as we do. (p. 136)

However, not all Indigenous people share the same opinion when it comes to sharing their knowledge, which can lead to greater confusion and apprehension for non-Indigenous educators. In my personal experiences, I have met Indigenous people who have encouraged me to ask questions, yet I have met others who have made it clear that I should be careful not to ask too many questions. Fortunately, there are Indigenous people who are excited and willing to share their cultural teachings (Lees, 2016; Hager & Mawopiyane, 2021). Miigam'agan (Hager & Mawopiyane, 2021) spoke of her own change of heart:

As Indigenous people, we've experienced rejection and isolation, and we've learned those things well. So, we became rejecting of others, even though in our prayers and when we speak in our language, we're supposed to be inclusive. So, I say now that it's

necessary to share because that's how we will all continue. Like any other relationship it's about boundaries. (p. 139)

Nonetheless, not all Indigenous people will share these sentiments and it may take a long time before Indigenous people feel that they can trust non-Indigenous educators and the education system enough to share their knowledge.

Likewise, an additional problem that educators face is that the work of decolonizing their teaching practice is going to require a considerable amount of time. Time for Indigenous people to feel ready to share and time for us as learners to learn. Many current teacher preparation programs include some coursework on Indigenous pedagogy, but as my recent student teacher explained to me, her course was only 3 weeks long and although it was one of the courses that she found most valuable, it was not enough to help her really understand Indigenous epistemologies and feel confident teaching Indigenous pedagogy. And what about educators who have been teaching for many years? When I completed my teacher education program 15 years ago, I received no instruction in Indigenous pedagogy. I will not deny that progress is being made at the post-secondary level in terms of working to decolonize teaching practices and our education system. The University of British Columbia is currently offering a Masters of Education program in Indigenous Education and as previously mentioned UVic is offering a 13-month program for educators called Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives. However, these options are not viable for all educators. So how do we better prepare K-12 in-service educators who have been teaching for many years? When I first began my Master of Arts program, I was inspired by the Yukon Education orientation for new teachers which is led by Elders of the First Nations groups in the Yukon and includes an introduction to First Nations culture. I thought this may be the solution to the problems addressed above, and although there were a few reasons that made me think this type of program might not be effective in the GVSD, one of the main reasons was because the program was only 3 days long. Although, I think this is a great place to start and the learning would be meaningful, I feel that to decolonize our

education system, it is going to require a greater time commitment from educators. One of the Indigenous community members in Lees' (2016) study confirmed these thoughts when describing their experience in working with educators,

I think the time needs to be spread out. It's too much for them...We expect them to take everything they think and know about Indians⁷, change that in three hours (after an initial) presentation, then meet us, then talk about having our interview questions...it's almost a disservice to the (candidates)...It's like Indian 101 in 2 days. (pp. 371–372)

I recognize that considering the climate crisis, there is a sense of urgency to decolonize and Indigenize the education system. However, as Elder Tousilum (Ron George) taught me “it takes the time it takes” (personal, communication, July 14, 2022). Rushing through the process of decolonizing our education system would go against Indigenous teachings and further perpetuate the ideals of colonialism. The work of decolonizing our teaching practice is going to take time and unfortunately most educators already feel overburdened with the demands of the job and have very little free time.

Finally, one of the most significant problems when it comes to working towards decolonizing our teaching practice is that we must do this work within a system that is itself a colonial structure. The education system was designed to reflect the values of colonialism. The school calendar is organized according to Christian holidays. The daily schedule is based on Eurocentric concepts of time. In BC, the curriculum prioritizes Western knowledge and has only begun to include some aspects of Indigenous knowledges. Subjects such as Mathematics and Language Arts, are seen as separate from other subjects, especially at the high school level, which contradicts the holistic learning practices that are common to Indigenous ways of

⁷ Younging (2018) explains that most Indigenous people prefer the term Indigenous and this is most likely out of recognition for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. So, I have chosen to use the word Indigenous, however, the terms “Indian”, “Aboriginal”, and “Native” have been used in this document when I am directly quoting an author.

learning. Classrooms are organized according to a hierarchy where teachers are seen as the authoritative figure. Assessment practices focus primarily on students' intellectual abilities and disregard the emotional, social, physical and spiritual growth of students. These colonial structures limit how much teachers can decolonize their practice. Teachers cannot change the calendar/timetable, they cannot control how their classes are organized, or how they officially report student progress. Kanu (2005) addressed this issue in her study and identified,

three incompatibilities between school structures and Aboriginal culture...: (a) incompatibility between schools' rigid approach to dealing with time and Aboriginal people's more flexible view of time; (b) incompatibility between schools' large classes and Aboriginal teaching methods such as the talking circle; and (c) incompatibility between the regimentation of the classroom experience and Aboriginal people's cultural value of noninterference in childrearing practices in some Aboriginal communities (noninterference means refraining from directly criticizing an individual or attempting to control the behavior of others by direct intervention). (p. 62)

There are only so many changes that educators can make within the current system. Hopefully systemic changes will be made, but that is going to take a long time. So, what can educators do in the meantime?

The problem is complex and there were many factors to be considered in designing this research inquiry, but the primary question that guides this inquiry is: How are educators working to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice within a colonial system?

Context of the Inquiry

I mentioned before that I wanted this inquiry to not only have an impact on my own teaching practice, but also for my colleagues and the system in which I work, which is the GVSD. Thus, I decided to focus this inquiry on K-12 educators within the GVSD who are working/wanting to work towards decolonizing their teaching practice. The GVSD is located on the territories of the lək'wəŋən people, specifically the Xwsepsum and Songhees Nations.

However, the majority of K-12 educators in our district are non-Indigenous. The district has Local Education Agreements (LEA) with the Xwsepsum and Songhees Nations, the Metis, and the Urban People's House. As previously stated, the district has an Indigenous Education Department (IED) with a small, but growing staff. John Harris, one of the IED staff members, is the Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Facilitator. Any educators in the district who are wanting to connect with Elders and/or members of the Songhees and Xwsepsum Nations must coordinate this through John. However, there are a total of 45 schools in our district and John is the only Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Facilitator, thus it can be quite challenging for educators in the district to connect with Xwsepsum and Songhees community members and Elders.

As previously stated, 7.3% of students in the GVSD self-identified as Indigenous in the 2020/2021 school year (British Columbia Ministry of Education; 2021b). Data from the same year showed that the graduation rate for Indigenous students in the GVSD was 36% lower than that of their non-Indigenous counterparts, whereas the provincial graduation rates of Indigenous students were 26% lower than non-Indigenous students (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021a; British Columbia Ministry of Education; 2021b)⁸. Clearly, our district needs to work on how we can better support our Indigenous students. Additionally, there have been allegations of systemic racism in our district. In 2021, Hayalthkin'geme (Carey Newman) a Kakwākā'wakw artist who, in collaboration with students, created a totem pole at Oaklands Elementary School and had a longstanding relationship with the GVSD, resigned from his position on the School District 61 (SD61) Indigenous Ad Hoc Committee and cited systemic racism as the reason for

⁸ While graduation rates may not be the only way to determine a student's success and may even be seen as a colonized way to assess a student's ability to learn, this information is still valuable. Chrona (2022) warns, "[t]here is a danger in not paying close attention to the system's quantitative data, such as graduation rates or achievement on standardized assessments. Yes, they tell only part of the story and do not reflect all there is to know about a learner. But if we do not look at parity or disparity in all data sets, we lose the opportunity to learn about, and systemically address, gaps in how well we respond (or do not respond) to groups of learners" (pp. 97–98).

his resignation (Grossman, 2021). He wrote a letter that was posted on social media and passed around to educators, parents and citizens of Victoria, BC asking for signatures to show support of his message. In the letter Newman outlined the examples of overt racism that had led to his resignation:

In 2017, [the GVSD] hired a non-Indigenous person as District Principal of Indigenous Education...On March 1, [2021] during a district education policy and directions meeting...board trustee Ryan Painter noted there were too many Songhees and Esquimalt Nations members present, according to board bylaw...In early May [2021], the district released a budget survey where one question asked participants to rank the importance of Indigenous students' success against that of non-Indigenous ones...On May 10[, 2021] during a board meeting...[i]nvesting in Indigenous education ha[d] been listed as a reason the district [was] making cuts to programs like music. (Skrypnek, 2021)

This is the context within which educators in the GVSD are working. Evidently, there is much need for the decolonization and Indigenization of our district.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Communities of Practice

Being that the objective of this inquiry was to bring together a community of educators who are working towards the same goal, I applied the conceptual framework of communities of practice from Wenger (2011). Wenger (2011) defined communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”, and he explained that “the concept has turned out to be a useful perspective on knowing and learning” (p. 1). Furthermore, he explained that there are three characteristics that are imperative to a community of practice:

1. **The domain**:...[The community of practice] has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people...
2. **The community**: In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information...
3. **The practice**:...Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems... (2011, p. 1-2)

These characteristics align with the characteristics of the participants, the methods, and the goals of this inquiry. I also believe that the concept of communities of practice lends itself well to the work of decolonizing education. Although it is not identified as an Indigenous practice, Wenger did explain that “[c]ommunities of practice have been around for as long as human beings have learned together...[and] are everywhere” (2011, p. 3). Additionally, the First Peoples Principles of Learning recorded by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) (n.d.) described learning as being relational. Furthermore, in both my formal research and informal conversations around the work of decolonizing education, I have learned that this work must be done in connection to and in collaboration with others.

The Imperfect Accomplice

As I will share later, because the majority of participants are non-Indigenous, I chose to adopt Carroll’s (2019) concept of the “imperfect accomplice” as a framework for this inquiry. Referencing both Dion’s theory of the “perfect stranger” and an article from Indigenous Action Media called *Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex an Indigenous Perspective*, Carroll (2019) described an imperfect accomplice as someone who does not simply offer support, but “fight[s] with those who are marginalized and become[s] complicit together” (p. 201). What I appreciate about Carroll’s theory of an imperfect accomplice is that it goes beyond allyship, as an accomplice is someone who is “complicit...in actions against

structural oppression” (Carroll et al., 2020, p. 11). When I first began thinking about the focus of this inquiry, I met with an Indigenous counselor from our Indigenous Education Department and she said, “nothing about us without us” (J. Mitchell, personal communication, February 16, 2022), and in the same conversation she told me she would love to see non-Indigenous educators working to disrupt the system. It seems to be a very fine line that non-Indigenous educators must walk to do the work of decolonizing their teaching practice, but I think this concept of being an imperfect accomplice lends itself well to this work. Through the guidance of resources from Indigenous educators and scholars, and potentially with support from educators in our Indigenous Education Department, non-Indigenous educators, including the participants in this inquiry, can do the work of decolonizing their teaching practice and becoming imperfect accomplices.

This work of becoming an imperfect accomplice tends to create fear and anxiety among educators, and this is evident in the numerous conversations that I have had with many of my colleagues (I will discuss this further in Chapters 2 and 4). Thus, I utilized the framework proposed by Carroll et al. (2020) as a way of helping myself and my colleagues work through the anxiety and “[move] [f]orward to [b]ecoming [i]mperfect [a]ccomplices” (p. 14). Carroll et al. (2020) referenced a non-academic theory from Ascencio and ChE and a theory of embodied learning from Ng to create a framework for how educators can work through this anxiety: 1) mindfulness, 2) acknowledging your privilege, and 3) overcoming the “fear” and creating change (Carroll et al., 2020). In terms of promoting some type of mindfulness or embodied learning practice for educators that are doing this work, they explained that “[w]hen teachers are able to reflect on their knowledge, behaviours, or habits in a more objective way or unattached (less ego-full way), change is possible (Ng, 2011)” (Carroll et al., 2020, p. 15). Ng (2018) further explained “that integrating body, mind, and spirit not only is disruptive to established educational conventions in North America but is a method of decolonizing—undoing—ways in which we have come to be in the world” (p. 45). The work of decolonizing our teaching practice will not

only create some discomfort for participants through examining our own biases and discussing challenging topics such as racism but will also require us to unlearn much of what we have learned in the colonized system in which we were educated. In relation to the second step in the framework from Carroll et al., as non-Indigenous educators, most of the participants, have certain privileges, and access to power and tools that will not only support us in working through our anxiety, but can also be used to support Indigenous peoples. As we decolonize our teaching practice, it will be important for us to not only acknowledge and be aware of our privilege, but also use that privilege to effect change. Finally, step three in this framework is an essential step in this work. Carroll et al. (2020) acknowledged that being mindful and acknowledging one's privilege both take time, but they argued that "action is the ultimate goal...[and] [t]o overcome the 'fear', teachers feel they have, they should focus on what they can do in their classrooms" (p. 17). The goal of this inquiry was to not only provide educators with a safe space to examine their privilege and discuss ways to decolonize their teaching practice, but to also provide them with strategies to do this work in their classrooms. Therefore, I think this framework proved to be valuable to this inquiry.

Liberatory Consciousness

In line with the concept of the imperfect accomplice, and the framework proposed by Carroll et al. (2020), the theory of liberatory consciousness developed by feminist activist Love (2000) also aligns with the objectives of this inquiry. Love acknowledged that it is our socialization that has taught us to accept our "roles" of dominant or subordinated⁹ within oppressive systems. As such, her theory of "liberatory consciousness enables humans to live 'outside' the patterns of thought and behavior learned through the socialization process that helps to perpetuate oppressive systems" (Love, 2000, p. 471). The theory is built on the

⁹ Love (2000) chooses to use the noun subordinated over the adjective subordinate as she argues that using the adjective further objectifies and reduces groups of people (p. 474).

following four components: 1) awareness, 2) analysis, 3) action, and 4) accountability/ally-ship (Love, 2000). Love argued that these components of liberatory consciousness can be practiced by “every human” and should be practiced in any situation in which “oppression or internalized oppression is evident” (p. 471). Working through each of these four components is an ideal way to decolonize one’s teaching practice and was an effective framework to guide this inquiry. As suggested by Carroll et al., (2020), the best place for an individual to start the process of decolonizing their teaching practice is by becoming more *aware* of their positionality and privilege and how these aspects impact their thoughts and behaviours. From there, individuals can move towards *analysis* by examining these thoughts and behaviours, where they come from, and what changes need to be made, which naturally leads to *action*. Love explained that “liberatory consciousness requires each human to take some action in every situation when the opportunity to transform society and move toward a more just world presents itself” (p. 472). Finally, the last step, *accountability*, focuses on the importance of members from both the dominant and subordinant role groups sharing their perspectives within and across role groups to support one another’s progress towards liberation or, in the case of this inquiry, decolonization (Love, 2000). Furthermore, applying these components in a cyclical process is an effective strategy in working towards decolonizing one’s teaching practice, and as such I believe this was an effective theoretical framework for my inquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Canadian provincial, territorial and federal governments have been called to, and have committed to decolonizing and Indigenizing the Canadian education system. Furthermore, the act of decolonizing and Indigenizing the current Western education system has many benefits for not only Indigenous students, but also non-Indigenous students, teachers and the world. However, as Battiste (2013) so wisely said, “[i]deas do not exist without people to implement them” (p. 68). If any progress is to be made in decolonizing and Indigenizing the Western education system it will require the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, including “school administrators, the government, educational researchers, teacher educators, teachers, and the Aboriginal community” (Kanu, 2005, p. 66). Yet, despite governments updating curriculum and school districts signing agreements with Indigenous communities, as White et al. (2012) explained, “[t]eachers have a large role to play in the project of decolonization” (p. 54). Fortunately, some Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators are willing and ready to implement these changes (Carroll et al., 2020; Kanu, 2005; Lamb & Godlewska, 2021; Racette & Sammel, 2020). Nonetheless, despite efforts at the post-secondary level to better prepare teacher-candidates, the problem remains that many K-12 in-service educators do not know *how* to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice (Bissell & Korteweg 2016; Lees, 2016; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). Furthermore, as a non-Indigenous teacher, it is difficult to know how to engage in this work in a way that is respectful, authentic, and meaningful. Thus, many researchers and educators are calling for more professional development to help K-12 in-service educators to know how to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice (Claypool & Preston, 2011; Kanu, 2005; Lees, 2016; White et al., 2012). Claypool and Preston (2011) found that the school division that their study focused on had “success with implementing professional development through the philosophy of Dr. Brokenleg’s, Circle of Courage™ (Brendto & Brokenleg, 2001)” (p. 89), however educators expressed a need for professional development

that would help them to assess students more holistically. Kanu (2005) made a recommendation for professional development that teaches educators how to use Indigenous education resources appropriately. Both Kanu (2005) and Lees (2016) expressed a need for professional development led by Indigenous community members. Although few studies have been conducted on *how* educators are working to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice, there are many studies that focus on decolonizing and Indigenizing the Western education system, and these studies provide much insight into factors that must be considered when thinking about how teachers can engage in this work.

Why Decolonize and Indigenize the Western Education System?

Researchers argue that there is a need to decolonize and Indigenize the Western education system (Arenas et al., 2009; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). Ragoonaden and Mueller (2017) described how “traditional, Eurocentric, and normative approaches” to education negatively impact students from “non-mainstream cultural backgrounds”, and in order for these students to have “positive educational outcomes” they need to be taught in ways that are more inclusive and congruent with their own culture (p. 25). In addition, Arenas et al. (2009) asserted that there needs to be a “counteracting force” to prevent further destruction of minority cultures and languages. Not only is there a need to decolonize and Indigenize the Western education system, but Lamb and Godlewska (2021) explained that Indigenous educators and scholars from across Canada have been calling for the decolonization of the education system for a long time.

Benefits for Indigenous Students

Many studies have shown that Indigenous students have lower achievement rates and higher dropout rates in comparison to their non-Indigenous peers (Battiste, 2013; Cahill & Collard, 2003; Lamb & Godlewska, 2021; Masta, 2018; Racette & Sammel, 2020). Researchers offer several reasons for this discrepancy; one key reason is that Indigenous students are unable to see themselves in Western education systems (Cahill & Collard, 2003; Calderon et

al., 2021; Masta, 2018; Moll et al., 1992; Racette & Sammel, 2020). In her study on the experiences of Indigenous students in “mainstream” schools, Masta (2018) explained that student engagement in school happens when student identities in and outside of school intersect. However, this creates a tension for Indigenous students who cannot identify with the environment of “mainstream” schools and, “[t]his tension affects Native American students’ social, emotional, and intellectual engagement with school” (Masta, 2018, p. 21). Not only does this impact Indigenous students’ engagement in school, but it is also exhausting for Indigenous students to switch back and forth between these two worlds (Cahill & Collard, 2003). In her discussion on the first bilingual school on Mi’kmaw territory, Battiste (2013) explained that,

[t]he students’ experiences in the public school had been damaging to their identities, self-concept, and self-esteem. So re-establishing the foundations of Mi’kmaw language, knowledge, and trust in what education could do was important and was reflected in the philosophy of the school...This philosophy supported the awareness and appreciation of one’s self in the context of one’s culture and capacities. (p. 88)

Furthermore, Arenas et al. (2009) explained that it is essential for educators to Indigenize their teaching practice because the migration of Indigenous groups to urban areas means that children will not have the same access to their ancestral knowledge. By learning about and practicing their cultural traditions it creates a sense of pride in students (Arenas et al., 2009). Through teaching Indigenous pedagogy, not only do the students see themselves in what is being taught, but it also helps teachers to see their Indigenous students (Calderon et al., 2021). The struggle for Indigenous students to find success in the Western education system has persisted for too long so the system needs to change.

Benefits for Non-Indigenous Students

Many researchers have made mention of how learning Indigenous knowledges benefits all students, not just Indigenous students (Arenas et al., 2009; Battiste, 2013; Cahill & Collard, 2003; Lamb & Godlewska, 2021; Pack, 2019; Racette & Sammel, 2020). All students suffer

from a partial or biased education, and non-Indigenous students miss out on opportunities to learn about Indigenous knowledge systems that have been neglected in Western education (Arenas et al. 2009). Additionally, Pack (2019) argued that introducing students to a completely different metaphysics helps students to develop critical thinking skills. Similarly, Metis Elder Calvin Racette (2020) explained that “[w]hen students understand that there are multiple perspectives, they often start to think differently and begin to ask different questions” (p. 97). When students develop the ability to think differently it can impact our society in positive ways.

Benefits for Society

When non-Indigenous children are exposed to the history and culture of Indigenous peoples it can lead to a more just and equitable society (Arenas et al., 2009; Cole and O’Riley, 2010; Pack, 2019; Racette & Sammel, 2020). Arenas et al., (2009) argued that if non-Indigenous children only see themselves represented in the curriculum, they see themselves as superior; however, intercultural education ensures that children learn from each other’s communities and have respect for one another. Teaching Indigenous pedagogy also exposes non-Indigenous children to the facts instead of stereotypes, which can encourage them to defend other cultures in adulthood. More specifically, in terms of Canada’s journey of reconciliation, Lamb and Godlewska (2021) asserted that, “[e]ducating all students not only about Indigenous content, but also from Indigenous perspectives and with Indigenous ways of knowing, is a key part of transforming Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations” (p. 120). The relational aspect of Indigenous knowledges has much to offer the Western society.

Benefits for the Planet

Indigenous education has positive implications for not only those who inhabit our planet, but for the planet itself (Battiste, 2013; Cole & O’Riley, 2010; Pack, 2019; Racette & Sammel, 2020). A significant aspect of Indigenous knowledge is the belief that all living and nonliving things are connected, and human beings can learn a lot from plants and animals. Battiste (2013) explained that “Indigenous scholars and advocates have stimulated an interest in the

contribution of Indigenous knowledge to a better understanding of sustainable development” (p. 84). She further clarified that, “[k]nowledge of the environment is being lost in communities around the world, and there is an urgent need to conserve this knowledge to help develop mechanisms to protect the earth’s biological diversity, among other benefits” (p. 84). In his article “Indigenizing Education and the Phenomenology of Place”, Pack (2019) described how teaching his students about the power of place in Indigenous philosophies was enough to disrupt their thinking and change the way they viewed their relationship with the land and “nonhuman persons”. Considering the current climate crisis, the planet needs students to start thinking differently about the land and “nonhuman persons”, and there is a lot to be learned from Indigenous knowledge systems.

Benefits for Teachers

The benefits to *all* students, the society and the planet are clear, but what makes the concept of teaching Indigenous pedagogy even more meaningful is the benefits it holds for teachers. Engaging in the process of learning about Indigenous knowledge systems provides teachers with an opportunity to learn something new and model what it means to be a lifelong learner (Cahill & Collard, 2003; Racette & Sammel, 2020). In fact, Pack (2019) explained how his newfound understanding of place had positive outcomes for both him and his students. Similarly, Cahill (2003) described how participating in the *User Friendly* project furthered her understanding of the culture and worldview of the Australian Aboriginal community that she had been living in close proximity to for many years. Furthermore, while Arenas et al. (2009) explained that Western education systems “limit the emotional and intellectual development of teachers” (p. 71) and create distant relationships between teachers and students, Moll et al. (1992) revealed that through their research, which involved going into student’s homes and connecting with their families, it allowed teachers to overcome their biases and develop more positive relationships with their students. Finally, Racette (2020) concluded his article with some inspiring words for educators in terms of the benefits of decolonizing and Indigenizing their

practice:

The rewards are not hard to come by if you work at it. You get rewards when you see Indigenous and non-Indigenous children very engaged in the content and interested in what you are teaching...Indigenizing education is an education that highlights the beliefs and perspectives of some of the oldest cultures in the world and gives you a wonderful opportunity to be the best teacher you can be—one that acknowledges you as a caring human being. (pp. 118–119)

Decolonizing and Indigenizing our teaching practice not only benefits students, society, and the planet, but it can help make us better educators.

An Educator's Responsibility

Many scholars believe that it is an educator's *responsibility* to decolonize and Indigenize their practice (Battiste, 2013; Lamb & Godlewska, 2021; Racette & Sammel, 2020; Tailby et al., 2020). Racette (2020) went so far as to say,

I firmly believe that most teachers are like doctors. They take a Hippocratic Oath to perform their jobs to the best of their ability to every student that walks through their door. In order to meet the diversity of cultures and to address the gaps that exist, they need all types of teaching resources: resources that allow students to see themselves in what they are learning. (p. 118)

The only way that Indigenous students will see themselves in what they are learning is if educators teach with an Indigenous pedagogy. Additionally, to decolonize the Western Education system and work towards reconciliation, teachers have a responsibility to teach students about Canada's colonial past and present and how this has impacted and continues to impact Indigenous peoples (Lamb & Godlewska, 2021; Racette & Sammel, 2020). Furthermore, the Professional Standards for BC Educators (2019) also reflect that an educator "foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and cultures of First Nations,

Inuit and Metis” (p. 5). This is a significant responsibility; however, it is not the exclusive responsibility of educators.

The Government’s Responsibility

Working towards decolonizing and Indigenizing our education system is something that the Canadian provincial, territorial, and federal governments are required to do. Battiste (2013) explained that,

[t]he concept of education as either an Aboriginal right or a treaty right established in Canada the right for Aboriginal people to decolonize the existing education system...In Canadian law, Indigenous knowledge is constitutionally protected as Aboriginal and treaty rights under Section 35(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. (p. 70)

She also indicated that,

[t]he Supreme Court of Canada in its attempt to merge Aboriginal and treaty rights with the rest of the constitutional powers has told Canada, the provinces, and the territories that constitutional reconciliation with the holders of these constitutional rights is a critical educational requirement in patriated Canada. (p. 77)

Furthermore, both calls to action #62 and #63 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015) called on the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to create a K-12 curriculum to teach students about the history of Indigenous peoples, and to ensure appropriate training for educators to teach Indigenous pedagogy. Moreover, in their research, Lamb and Godlewska (2021) highlighted British Columbia’s Bill 41 as the government’s commitment to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In line with these commitments, the BC Ministry of Education has updated both the Professional Standards for BC Educators (BC Teachers’ Council, 2019) and the BC curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.) to reflect that educators are expected to integrate Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in all areas of the curriculum. Furthermore, the GVSD has signed a Local Education Agreement with the Songhees Nation of the ləkʷəŋən

Peoples committing to “make systemic shifts to support successful educational outcomes of all First Nation Students, through the provision of relevant and quality, educational programs and services” (Local Education Agreement, 2020, p. 4). Thus, not only is there a clear need to decolonize and Indigenize our teaching practice to better support our students, but it is also our professional responsibility as educators.

Understanding Indigenous Epistemologies

In order to decolonize their teaching practice, in-service teachers must, first and foremost, have an understanding of Indigenous epistemologies. However, as previously mentioned, it is safe to assume that most, if not all, K-12 in-service teachers in Canada have been educated in a Western education system and know very little about Indigenous epistemologies. While it is important to remember that Indigenous knowledge systems are as diverse as the various Indigenous groups themselves, for the purpose of this literature review the concept of Indigenous knowledge will be discussed in generalized terms. Although not a comprehensive definition, researchers define Indigenous epistemology as holistic, relational, reciprocal, experiential, cyclical, adaptable, interconnected, non-commodified, rooted in local language and deeply connected to place (Arenas et al., 2009; Battiste, 2013; Cahill & Collard, 2003; Calderon et al., 2021; Claypool & Preston, 2011; Masta, 2018; Pack, 2019; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017; Tailby et al., 2020). It is important to note that Indigenous knowledges and cultures are not fixed to historical times, they are constantly evolving (Arenas et al., 2009; Cahill & Collard, 2003; Masta, 2018). Although some may view Indigenous and Western knowledge as being oppositional, in referencing scholar McCarty, Arenas et al. (2009) reported that the blending of Indigenous and Western culture has led to “[n]ew hybrid cultural forms” (p. 77). If Indigenous knowledges and cultures are adaptable and dynamic, it would make sense that aspects of Indigenous knowledge systems would start to blend with and inform Western knowledge systems. Arenas et al. (2009) referred to this phenomenon as “syncretism”. This concept of syncretism was evident in the studies conducted by Bissell and Korteweg (2016) and

Tailby et al. (2020), in which they relied heavily on the use of modern technology as a way to Indigenize the learning tasks performed by the participants. Consequently, in order for in-service teachers to be better prepared in teaching Indigenous pedagogy, it will be important for them to understand that Indigenous knowledge is complex, multi-layered and dynamic.

Changing the Way Educators Teach, Not Just Adding Content

Some scholars argue that one of the key challenges of decolonizing and Indigenizing the Western education system is that Indigenous education and Western education have contrasting and conflicting values, goals and practices (Arenas et al., 2009; Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Cahill & Collard, 2003; Cole & O'Riley, 2010; Lamb & Godlewska, 2021; Masta, 2018; Pack, 2019; Racette & Sammel, 2020). Therefore, change and integration is not as simple as merely infusing Indigenous knowledge systems into the current Western education system (Battiste, 2013). Unfortunately, this is the approach that many schools and educators have taken (Kanu, 2005). They attempt to teach Indigenous pedagogy through isolated cultural projects that they are able to fit into the structure of the current Western education system (Kanu, 2005). As researchers Tailby et al. (2020) explained, "quite often when these projects are...run for Aboriginal kids, schools perceive them as being an isolated project... 'there you go, there's your little bit of culture' and then that's it, it's finished" (p. 83). Treating Indigenous knowledge as a box that can be checked off is an example of tokenism and does nothing to achieve the goals of decolonization and Indigenization. As previously stated, decolonization is defined by unlearning colonial values and dismantling colonialist structures and ideologies. And because the Western education system is a colonial structure founded on colonial values, teachers need to examine their understanding of knowledge and education. In their study Calderon et al. (2021) explained how they wanted "teachers to engage in serious epistemological questions and move them away from desires to have Western linear models that track PD experiences into lesson plans" (p. 359). And their study proved to be very successful as one of the participants revealed, "[w]e just felt we have a whole new way of

thinking about the content rather than an add-on to the content” (p. 356). Instead of looking for resources or new ideas that educators can include in their current teaching practice, they need to examine what it means to *know* something and understand that there are multiple ways of knowing, teaching and learning beyond what has been taught in the Western education system. Similarly, researchers Carroll et al. (2020) referred to the work of Mignolo to suggest that to work towards decolonization educators must participate in an “epistemic disobedience” (p.10). In order to honour and encourage other ways of *knowing*, the manner in which educators teach and assess students’ needs to be more in line with the holistic practices of Indigenous epistemologies outlined in the last section (Claypool & Preston, 2011; White et al., 2012). In fact, Claypool and Preston (2011) argued that educators need to focus less on the cognitive competency of their students and move towards a “*zone of trustful intuition...which targets student development of emotional and spiritual domains*” (p. 92). Through the work of Ng, Carroll et al. (2020) recommended one way of doing this is by “[b]ringing mindfulness or embodied, self-reflective practices into the classroom (Ng, 2011)” (p. 15). To authentically decolonize and Indigenize the Western education system, teachers must stop focusing on *content* and instead focus on *how* and *why* they are teaching students and *how* students are learning.

Educators’ Discomfort and Anxiety

Unfortunately, a very common factor that prevents many educators from working towards decolonizing their teaching practice is the feeling of discomfort and anxiety that they may experience when engaging in this work (Carroll et al., 2020; Kanu, 2005). In fact, many teachers who have not received adequate training feel uncomfortable or even fearful of teaching Indigenous knowledge systems (Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Calderon et al., 2021; Kanu, 2005; Lamb & Godlewska, 2021; Racette & Sammel, 2020). Furthermore, Lamb and Godlewska (2021) acknowledged that “even new teachers recently graduated from education programmes, supposed to be better equipped for integrating Indigenous content, fear failure and express

discomfort with the subject matter, guilt, and anxiety over not being Indigenous” (p. 113). Consequently, the anxiety that educators experience was the focus of a study conducted by Carroll et al. (2020), and they found that “the educators’ anxieties stop their learning outside of settler colonial epistemology because of structures that impose fear to go outside of this epistemology” (p. 9). Some of the worries that prevented educators from teaching Indigenous epistemologies included: offending both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, being reprimanded for teaching outside of the dominant epistemology, being “called out”, committing cultural appropriation, and reproducing stereotypes (Carroll et al, 2020). While it is important not to deny educator’s feelings, the journey to decolonize and Indigenize the Western education system is going to create a lot of discomfort for non-Indigenous teachers. Racette (2020) explained, “[i]t requires work and you will make many mistakes along the way. But you can’t worry about making mistakes because they are an important part of the learning process” (p. 119). Moreover, Tuck and Yang (2012) clarified, and Carroll et al. (2020) agreed, that these evasions or “settler moves to innocence”, are problematic because they “attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (p. 1), which will only serve to reverse the work of decolonization. Thus, educators must accept that decolonizing their practice will create feelings of discomfort and anxiety, and they must find strategies, such as those outlined by Carroll et al. (2020), to work through it and become “imperfect accomplices”.

Partnering With Indigenous Communities

If non-Indigenous teachers are to become better prepared to decolonize their teaching practice it seems imperative that this work would be done in partnership with Indigenous communities (Lees, 2016). As Battiste (2013) explained, although it is significant that many non-Indigenous people are wanting to take up the work of decolonizing and Indigenizing the education system, “the acknowledgement for Indigenous knowledge must begin with Indigenous people themselves” (p. 73). Similarly, Lamb and Godlewska (2021) argued that any attempt to integrate Indigenous knowledge that is made “without meaningful consultation with local

Indigenous educators and community members...runs the risk of creating universalizing, stereotyping, and objectifying representations” (p. 108). Indigenous peoples need to have a voice and the ability to control how they and their knowledge systems are represented in the education system (Arenas et al., 2009; Lees, 2016; Racette & Sammel, 2020; Tailby et al., 2020). Moreover, Carroll et al. (2020) explained that partnering with “traditional knowledge holders is important in becoming an imperfect accomplice” (p. 17).

However, despite the necessity and benefits of working with Indigenous leaders, Elders and communities, this may be one of the most challenging aspects of working towards decolonization, and there are many factors that require thoughtful consideration. The first and possibly greatest challenge is that it is not always possible to “access” Indigenous community members and Elders due to a lack of funding to compensate guest speakers or simply because many non-Indigenous teachers have no connection to Indigenous community members (Kanu, 2005; Racette & Sammel, 2020). Additionally, Lees (2016) conducted a study on the perspectives of Indigenous community members and their roles as co-educators in a field-based teacher graduate program, and although the participants in the study were eager and felt a sense of responsibility in supporting educator’s professional development in Indigenous education, they explained that many community members chose not to participate due to a “lack of trust and previous negative experiences with non-Indigenous peoples” (p. 372). Furthermore, in order for educators to truly benefit from a partnership with Indigenous community members, non-Indigenous educators will need to be open to confronting their own prejudices and biases that would prevent them from developing authentic relationships with Indigenous people (Calderon et al., 2021). Cahill and Collard (2003) further explained that relationships between white settlers and Indigenous people are challenging “because the sort of stuff that we’re dealing with goes to the core of who you are and the assumptions that you’ve grown up with” (p. 218). Not to mention that authentic relationships take time and effort to develop, and within the constraints of the Western education system this is not always possible (Calderon et al., 2021).

That being said, Calderon et al. (2021) found that the white educators who participated in the land education teacher professional development (LETPD) workshop, which was led by Indigenous community members, were able to overcome some of their initial apprehension and were more committed to working with the local Indigenous tribe. Finally, it is important to note that the work of training non-Indigenous teachers must not become a burden on Indigenous educators and knowledge holders, and that these individuals must be fairly compensated (Carroll et al., 2020; Lamb & Godlewska, 2021).

The Need for Structural and Systemic Change

Many scholars agree that to decolonize and Indigenize the Western education system it requires both structural and systemic change (Arenas et al., 2009; Calderon et al., 2021; Claypool & Preston, 2011; Kanu, 2005; Lees, 2016; Masta, 2018; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017, SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement, 2016). In terms of decolonization there are many factors that are beyond the control of educators, such as the organization of time in terms of scheduling and timetabling, class sizes, assessment and reporting policies, and allocating budgets to hire more Indigenous educators and liaisons (Claypool & Preston, 2011; Kanu, 2005; White et al. 2012).

Realistically a lot of the work that is currently being done to decolonize and Indigenize the Western education system would not have begun had governments not taken certain steps¹⁰, such as updating curriculum in BC (Lamb & Godlewska, 2021), the *Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey* Agreement in Nova Scotia (Battiste, 2013), the creation of mandatory Treaty Outcomes in Saskatchewan (Racette & Sammel, 2020), the legislation that requires school districts to work with local Indigenous tribes to create curriculum content in Washington State (Calderon et al., 2021), the creation of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements

¹⁰ None of the research that I have seen specifically explains what led governments to take these initial steps, however, based on what I have learned I would assume that it was because of Indigenous communities and organizations fighting for their rights that governments decided to take these steps.

(AEEAs)/Local Education Agreements (LEAs) in BC (White et al., 2012) and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems in policy and national curriculum texts in Australia (Tailby et al., 2020). Evidently, these kinds of structural and systemic changes are fundamental in promoting decolonization and Indigenization in the Western education system.

However, some studies have shown that when governments that are still driven by their colonial belief systems become involved, they undermine the work, and any progress becomes negatively impacted by their colonial views. For example, despite the BC Ministry of Education's commitment to ensure that the UNDRIP was implemented by updating the curriculum and ensuring that all students learned about Indigenous history and culture, the curriculum was still created by a colonial system, and as Lamb and Godlewska (2021) clarified:

In BC, individuals with political power produce curriculum: government officials choose curriculum revision committees, provide them with principles to follow and control the timing and completion of the revision process. Curriculum writing and revision that starts with the best intentions can be subject to time and budgetary constraints and reactionary resistance, so that the resulting official documents are as much a product of expedience and compromise as any coherent or cohesive design. (pp. 106–107)

So, it is no wonder that the BC curriculum, despite attempting to include aspects of Indigenous pedagogy, continued to marginalize Indigenous history and knowledge for years. And even after many revisions, the current BC curriculum is still severely lacking when it comes to Indigenous perspectives (Lamb & Godlewska, 2021). Not to mention that despite the BC government creating the AEEAs, White et al. (2012) found that most educators in the Burnaby school district were unaware of the AEEA. So, while governments may be able to create programs and policies to encourage the decolonization and Indigenization of the education system, they struggle to implement them, which is likely due to the lack of authentic training provided to K-12 in-service educators and teacher education programs not creating spaces for this learning.

There is no doubt that government support can be very beneficial, especially in terms of creating policy and providing financial support; however, the government is a colonial system and cannot be relied on to create effective Indigenous education professional programs as their very belief system contradicts this work. Therefore, it may be best for the creation of these aforementioned programs to be developed by Indigenous communities and teachers themselves. In example, although the LETPD program was made possible by the Washington state legislation, the program itself was not developed by the government, but rather a group of Indigenous researchers, educators, and community members (Calderon et al., 2021). Yet, the researchers were clear that they too faced limitations in large part because the program was tied to an institutional grant. Trying to support educators in their efforts to decolonize their teaching practice within a colonial system is just as challenging as trying to teach Indigenous epistemology within the Western education system. Consequently, at this moment in time, before more significant structural changes are made, there may be no way of avoiding the influence of the colonial systems present in the current education system. However, there must be a way to work within these colonial systems to offer some kind of support that will help teachers to decolonize their teaching practices.

Conclusion

It is clear that the process of decolonizing and Indigenizing the current Western education system is going to be a long and complex process. In fact, many of the researchers stressed how challenging this work will be (Arenas et al., 2009; Cahill & Collard, 2003; Kanu, 2005; Lamb & Godlewska, 2021; Racette & Sammel, 2020). However, it is important to remember not to rush the process; this work will take time and patience (Carroll et al, 2020; Lees, 2016). As Carroll et al. (2020) explained, “[t]his self-reflection is a life-long process that will continue to change as we change through history and contexts...it is important to reflect on the ways one can use one’s privilege and position as an educator to work with/for Indigenous peoples in their communities” (p. 16). Furthermore, these reflective conversations should be

supported by and include Indigenous voices. As discussed earlier, not only does it take a long time to develop authentic relationships with Indigenous communities, but it will also take a long time to retrain teachers who were educated in a Western education system. Changing the way educators think will not be a quick or easy process, there is much to be learned and unlearned.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Why Transformative Inquiry?

Based on the purpose, objectives, and participants of this inquiry, as well as my epistemology and ontology, I chose Transformative Inquiry (TI) as the most suitable methodology. Although I considered employing an Indigenous methodology, after reading Kovach's *Indigenous Methodologies* (2021), it was clear to me that Indigenous methodologies are meant to be used in research studies that are working with Indigenous communities. Considering that the majority of the partners in this inquiry are non-Indigenous, using an Indigenous methodology did not make sense. While Indigenous methodologies may not have been an option for me, I wanted to find a methodology that in its own way promoted the decolonization of research practices and honoured Indigenous epistemologies. Tanaka (2015a) explains that "[a]t its heart, the [TI] approach seeks to support preservice teachers in their personal journeys towards decolonizing and [I]ndigenizing" (p. 65). Although TI was originally designed to support preservice teachers, I believe that this process of inquiry is valuable to all teachers and educational researchers, especially those who are working to decolonize their teaching practice. Furthermore, TI is considered what Shawn Wilson (2007) and Marie Battiste (2013) described as an "Indigenist" research paradigm. Battiste explained that,

...while Indigenist research does not require that one be Indigenous, it does require one to support and articulate ones' ontology and one's philosophy and research in relation to context-based knowledge. In other words, the context is not derived from theory from academics but from peoples and collectives and related to place. (p. 74)

Accordingly, TI is a methodology that values the knowledge of the participants. Tanaka (2015a) clarified that in the TI process, "[a]ll participants are recognized as knowledge holders and everyone is expected to seek conversations about the topics we care about beyond the notion of academic expertise" (p. 77). Additionally, one of the goals of decolonization and Indigenization in education is to recognize that there are different knowledge systems and that

they are equally as valuable as the dominant Western knowledge system. This can be challenging when Western knowledge is all that most educators have ever known, however, “TI works at developing new patterns of doing, being, and knowing at deep dispositional levels; its purpose is to change our entrenched beliefs, values and attitudes” (Tanaka, 2015a, p.75). Moreover, “[t]he TI approach resonates with an [I]ndigenous worldview in many ways and provides a way for [one] to move into deeper connectivity with Earth, community, and [one’s] own inner direction as a learner” (Tanaka et al., 2012, p. 68). Thus, a TI approach not only aligns with Indigenous worldviews, but it also promotes a decolonized approach to research.

As mentioned previously, my hope was to create a community of educators who were wanting to collaborate in the process of decolonizing their teaching practice. So, another reason that I chose TI as a methodology is because of its collaborative and community focused nature. Tanaka (2015a) encourages researchers “[t]o actively evoke relationally accountable communities where each person has support to know themselves more fully, and to witness the layers of patterned ways of being, doing, and knowing” (p. 82). It has already been discussed how challenging the work of decolonizing our teaching practice can be, thus I believe that supporting one another and holding each other accountable is essential in this work. One way that we can support one another is through a concept of TI called “generous listening” (Tanaka et al., 2012, Tanaka, 2015a, Tanaka, 2015b). Tanaka (2015a) explains that “[a]s we learn, teach, and research, we practice sharing stories with honesty” and “[i]n TI we practice how to listen beyond what it is we think we know about another person, beyond what it is we want to say when they are done talking” (p. 77). Tanaka (2015a) clarifies that generous listening is not common in Eurocentric education and educational research. Yet, we can learn so much from listening to the perspectives of others, so the practice of generous listening was something I aspired to cultivate for myself through this inquiry. Although I have done a considerable amount of research on how to decolonize my teaching practice, I know that I do not have all the answers and I have much to learn from listening to my colleagues. Looking back at my journal entries, it

was clear that generous listening was a struggle for me, however, I did notice some improvement by our final session.

Furthermore, although there is great value in research that contributes to the current state of knowledge, it was my goal for this research to effect change for the participants and, hopefully, the education system in general. In referring to the TI element of reflexivity, Tanaka (2015a) asserts:

I have noticed how careful inner work is essential to creating personal change and that personal change affects other people and, thus, the institutions we create...As we attend to who we are, we are transformed and our actions are altered as well. (p. 84)

Through the TI process, Tanaka (2015a) encourages educators to “[j]oin and initiate efforts to disrupt with intention, academic norms” (p. 85), which echoes what the Indigenous Education counselor told me when I was designing this inquiry. Thus, the TI process provides us with the possibility to create change in ourselves, and consequently, in the education system.

Inquiry Partners

In the TI methodology knowledge is drawn from “four spheres of influence: inquiry partners, learning environment observations, self-study, and academic literature” (Tanaka et al., 2012, p. 4). I have addressed the sphere of academic literature in my literature review, and for the purposes of this inquiry I chose to mainly focus on inquiry partners. Lemon (2022) described inquiry partners as:

[P]eers with whom the inquirer explores their inquiry questions...They may pose questions, offer generous listening (Tanaka, et al., 2014), suggest alternative fields that might support the research, and reflect our own growth back to us when inquirers need support. They play a crucial role in grounding us and the research in relationships. Inquiry partners may be friends, peers, colleagues, family members, or fellow academics” (p. 34).

Alternative to a focus group in which I would gather a group of participants to ask them questions related to my research topic, working with inquiry partners offers a much more relational and collaborative approach. Tanaka et al. (2012) explained that the relationships with inquiry partners “can act as a catalyst for progressing into deeper relationality and connectivity as learners collectively move beyond the perils of a purely objective way of knowing” (p.72). As a way of selecting inquiry partners for this research, I used purposeful homogenous sampling (Mertler, 2022). Mertler (2022) explained that through homogenous sampling “individuals are selected because they possess a *similar* trait or characteristic” (p. 192). The main characteristic that I was looking for in inquiry partners is their intention to and/or their current experience of working towards decolonizing their teaching practice. In order to maintain some intimacy among the group and provide an environment where inquiry partners could feel comfortable being vulnerable, I wanted to limit the number of inquiry partners to 10. At first, I sent an email to the staff at my school describing my research and inviting anyone interested to join me. I had six educators commit to be inquiry partners. Astra¹¹ is a white settler who currently teaches grade 7 and 8 English track¹² and she has been teaching for 10 years. Jordana is a white settler who currently teaches grade 7 and 8 English track and she has been teaching for 15 years. Fern is a white settler who currently teaches grade 7 and 8 English track, and she has been teaching for 10 years and was an educational assistant for 5 years before that. Christine is a white settler who currently teaches a grade 7 and 8 French immersion class, and she has been a teacher in the public system for 15 years but has been teaching in other contexts for more than 10 years before that. Paula was born in Brazil, but moved to what is now known as Canada when she was a baby and has been a settler on these lands for almost 29 years. She currently teaches a grade 6 Improvisation exploratory class and has been teaching for 1 year. Kate is a white

¹¹ To ensure the confidentiality of the inquiry partners pseudonyms have been used in place of their real names.

¹² Our school is a dual track school meaning that students have the option of being taught their core subjects in either English or through French Immersion.

settler, and she is currently the grade 6 teacher librarian, and she also teaches a grade 6 Eco Ed exploratory class, and she has been teaching for 17 years. In talking about this inquiry with colleagues that I had previously worked with, I had two more educators express an interest in participating. Cassandra is a white settler who teaches high school English, Math and Science and has recently begun teaching the new graduation requirement First Peoples English¹³ and she has been teaching for 28 years. Jane is a white settler who teaches grade 6, 7 and 8 Art exploratory and is a part time teacher teaching-on-call and she has been teaching for 7 years. Finally, when I shared my plans with an educator from the district's Indigenous Education Department, she also asked to be an inquiry partner. Coco is Cree, Metis, Ojibwe and English and she has been teaching for 30 years and before working for the Indigenous Education Department she taught high school and kindergarten and was an Indigenous counselor. As mentioned in the literature review, partnering with Indigenous individuals and communities is essential in the work of decolonization. So, we were very fortunate to be able to work with an Indigenous educator from the Indigenous Education Department. There were a total of nine inquiry partners, all of which identified as female. However, again I wanted to ensure that inquiry partners would feel comfortable sharing their experiences, and in order for me to know how committed the inquiry partners are to decolonizing their practice it required some familiarity. I am also mindful of the exclusivity of this process, yet I am unaware of another way of selecting inquiry partners that would have had the same results, and I am hopeful that this group will act as a model to inspire other educators to create similar collaborative groups. Clearly anonymity was not an option for inquiry partners as I was a fellow inquiry partner in the research study, however, confidentiality was achieved by using pseudonyms when writing the final research report (Mertler, 2022). Before inquiry partners agreed to be part of the research, I provided them

¹³ In 2022, the BC Ministry of Education announced that beginning in the 2023/2024 school year all students will be required to take an Indigenous Education course in order to graduate.

with a letter of consent to engage in the research which outlined what they could expect from this inquiry and included a request for permission to audio and video record the sessions.

After receiving approval to conduct this research from the GVSD, our group met once a month from December 2022 to March 2023 for 1.5 to 2 hours to discuss how each of us is working towards decolonizing our teaching practice. Besides myself, the only other inquiry partner that was present at all four sessions was Jordana; the rest of the inquiry members all attended at least two of the four sessions. Inquiry partners were absent for various reasons including illness, appointments, coaching commitments, child care responsibilities, and other obligations. At our initial gathering my plan was to discuss the inquiry, answer any questions, decide when we would like to meet and how we wanted to conduct the meetings. Before our first gathering, the book *Wayi Wah!* by Jo Chrona (2022) had been recommended to me, and in a conversation about my upcoming research study, Kate, who had also recently heard about the book, and I discussed how it might be an effective guide for our group discussions based on the description of what the book was about:

How can Indigenous knowledge systems inform our teaching practices and enhance education? How do we create an education system that embodies an anti-racist approach and equity for all learners?

This powerful and engaging resource is for non-Indigenous educators who want to learn more, are new to these conversations, or want to deepen their learning. (Back cover)

Kate and I thought it would be a valuable resource for our group because of Chrona's experiences in the BC education system. Thus, at our first session I suggested the book to the group, and everyone agreed that they would like to read it to help guide our discussions. The group was eager to get started and discussion of the topic began without any prompting from me. At our second session we discussed Chapters 1 and 2, and at the third session we discussed Chapters 3 and 4. For our fourth session, we discussed a list of questions that I had created that were related to my research question (see Appendix A). During each gathering,

inquiry partners shared their stories and experiences, discussed strategies to decolonize our teaching practice, shared resources, posed questions to the group, asked for feedback and collaborated with one another. At the time of writing this, the group continues to meet, but none of the information from those sessions will be used in this inquiry. At each gathering I provided inquiry partners with snacks and drinks as a small way of honouring their time and efforts, and as a way of creating community. Furthermore, as researchers Carroll et al. (2020) explained, one of the greatest obstacles that teachers face when attempting to decolonize their practice is a feeling of anxiety, and their framework for working through this anxiety recommends that teachers participate in some type of embodied learning practice such as mindfulness. This type of practice involves sitting in a comfortable position for a set period of time and focusing on one thing, such as breathing, in order to “ground...[one]self in the moment, which is the process of allowing the feelings to arise and breathing into the feelings to bring [one]self into the present, as opposed to thinking about future anxieties” (Carroll et al, 2020, p. 14). I am a certified facilitator of mindfulness and with the permission of the group, we began almost all of our gatherings with a brief mindfulness practice. Due to my excitement or nervousness, I forgot to offer a mindfulness practice at our first session, however, I led the group through a mindfulness practice in the following three sessions. I invited the inquiry partners to find a comfortable seated position and close their eyes. I then provided instructions to them to help them first notice their breathing and then focus on their breathing, as well as noticing how they were feeling and how their body was feeling. These mindfulness practices lasted for approximately 2 to 3 minutes. Practicing mindfulness provided our group with at least two benefits. First, it allowed each of us to be able to approach this challenging work from a calm and thoughtful perspective. Second, as Ng (2018) argued, mindfulness is a form of decolonizing pedagogy and as such we were able to start most of our gatherings with a practice that promotes decolonization. We also conducted each of our gatherings in a traditional Coast Salish talking circle format. After finishing the mindfulness practice, I started with a land acknowledgement

and then we used a feather to pass around the circle as a signifier for whose turn it was to share. Each time was different, but we always shared how we were feeling that day using a rating scale of 1 (*terrible*) to 10 (*amazing*). At the first session we introduced ourselves including our position within the GVSD and we talked about why we had joined the group. At the second session we talked about our ancestry as a way of situating ourselves which was recommended by Chrona (2022) in Chapter 1 and is a teaching that I have received from some of my Indigenous colleagues. During our third session we talked about how our week had been and for our fourth session we talked about our plans for spring break. By conducting our gatherings in this format, it not only provided educators with a practice that they can use in their classrooms to help decolonize their teaching, but it promoted connectedness among group members and removed any hierarchical relationships. Besides the fourth session, once we had completed the mindfulness practice and the initial talking circle, I opened it up to discussion by asking if anyone had questions for the group, if there was something that they wanted to discuss from the chapters in *Wayi Wah!* (Chrona, 2022), or if they had an experience in attempting to decolonize their teaching practice that they wanted to share. The only difference in the fourth session was that we discussed the list of questions (see Appendix A) that I had created instead of talking about the chapters from *Wayi Wah!*. Each time the group needed very little prompting from me, and the discussion flowed naturally. There were never any arguments and as far as I could tell there was no tension between any of the group members. There were a couple of times that an inquiry partner became emotional and cried because of what they were talking about, and the group members were always very supportive and encouraging. Each session came to an organic ending, and we closed with a sharing circle in which we talked about something that we were grateful for, which is another teaching that I have been taught by my Indigenous colleagues.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect data for this inquiry, the gatherings were audio recorded and then transcribed using a program called Echo 360. I also took field notes based on my observations after each session. Additionally, in line with the other two spheres of influence in the TI process: “learning environment observations” and “self-study”, I recorded observations from the Eco Ed classes I taught and referred to the notes that I created from the courses I participated in as part of the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives program at UVic (learning environment observations). I also engaged in the practice of reflexivity (self-study) throughout the inquiry by keeping a digital journal in which I documented my thoughts and interpretations to check my own biases and assumptions, and to create greater trustworthiness in my research (Kovach, 2021, p.33, Tanaka et al., 2012, p. 4). Excerpts from my observations and journal have been included in Chapters 4 and 5. I also emailed the inquiry partners between our third and fourth sessions to ask them for some feedback on their experience. I asked the following questions: Do you feel like this group has supported you in working towards decolonizing your teaching practice? If so, what did you find beneficial? If not, why do you think that was? Three of the nine inquiry partners responded, and I have included excerpts from their email responses in Chapters 4 and 5. Coco also was not able to attend our fourth session and instead sent me an email with her responses to the list of questions that we discussed. I have also included excerpts from her email in Chapters 4 and 5. Furthermore, member checking was completed during the draft stage of the final research report to ensure the accuracy of the information that was shared by the participants throughout the inquiry. Finally, due to the nature of the inquiry, reciprocity was a constant and consistent practice among group members. By using a variety of instruments, methods, and sources to collect data it provided a deeper understanding of the research problem and, I hope, demonstrates respect and responsibility towards the inquiry partners.

Lemon (2022) described the TI process as *recursive* which “means that the process unfolds repeatedly such that previous lessons learned shape new experiences in an ongoing cycle” (p. 25). Accordingly, my process of data analysis was recursive. Following each gathering I listened to the recording and took notes to document the key topics discussed, my observations of what educators were doing to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice, and any questions that emerged. To organize my data I used “[t]he method...called process coding, which uses gerunds (“-ing” words) exclusively to capture action in the data (Charmaz, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008)” (Saldana, 2011, p. 96). After the final gathering, I created a list of the 10 behaviours that I observed educators participating in order to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice and those became my initial codes. I then used the software program NVivo to organize the data according to these 10 codes, however, during this process I found other codes emerged and by the end I had a total of 39 codes. As I went back through the codes I began to classify the codes into categories (Saldana, 2011) based on the primary research question: How are educators working to decolonize their teaching practice within a colonial system? In the end, I decided upon five categories and nine sub-categories based on which categories appeared more frequently in the data and what was congruent with my literature review and what I had learned from the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives program at UVic.

As previously mentioned, my intention in conducting this inquiry was to not only work to decolonize my own teaching practice, but to support my colleagues in their efforts to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice. As such, I wanted to use what I have learned from this inquiry to create some type of a framework that would be accessible to educators and support them in their own journeys. Thus, what follows in Chapter 4 is a summary of the knowledge that I have acquired from this inquiry written as a framework created for educators who are working to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice in a colonial system. Furthermore, in line with the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, n.d.), I wanted my learning to be

reciprocal. As Tanaka (2015b) explains, “[o]nce you are given a gift, such as the gift of knowledge, it is expected that you will bring it forward in a good way” (p. 144). I would like to bring my gift of knowledge forward by gifting this framework to the GVSD Indigenous Education Department so that they may use it in their work supporting educators in decolonizing and Indigenizing their practice.

I apologize in advance if some of the information seems repetitive, there is a lot of overlap between the categories and sub-categories presented. As researcher Tanaka explains, “[t]he linear structure of written text suggests a step-by-step progression, where in reality all of these elements exist simultaneously” (Tanaka, 2015, p. 136). Like Indigenous ways of knowing and being everything is connected, which makes it very difficult to share this information in a linear format. I also recognize that organizing the data in such a linear way is a colonial concept. So, at first, I thought about how I could use a circle and I created a rough diagram which included the categories represented in a circle to show how they were all connected and how the process of decolonizing one’s teaching practice is recursive. However, I could not figure out a way to share all of the ideas, thoughts, experiences and stories of the inquiry partners in this type of format. Furthermore, because I am only in the beginning stages of decolonizing the way that I think and I have been raised in a Western education system, I am still a linear thinker and I could not think of a better way to clearly express what I had learned.

Chapter 4: How Are Educators Working to Decolonize and Indigenize Their Teaching Practice Within a Colonial System?

As a means to decolonize my own learning and the way in which I documented what I have learned from this inquiry, I have written the next two chapters in a less traditional, less Eurocentric format. My findings and my analysis of this inquiry are interconnected, so instead of compartmentalizing them into two separate sections, I have blended the two to express what I have learned in a more holistic manner and to honour Indigenous ways of knowing.

For this chapter, I have organized what our group discussed in our sessions in response to my inquiry question that I referred to in the introduction: How are educators working to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice within a colonial system? There are five categories that seemed most prevalent in our group's discussions: Looking for Resources, Asking Questions, Holistic Teaching and Learning, Valuing Other Forms and Sources of Knowledge, and Letting Go of Control. Most of these categories also have sub-categories (see figure 1 below).

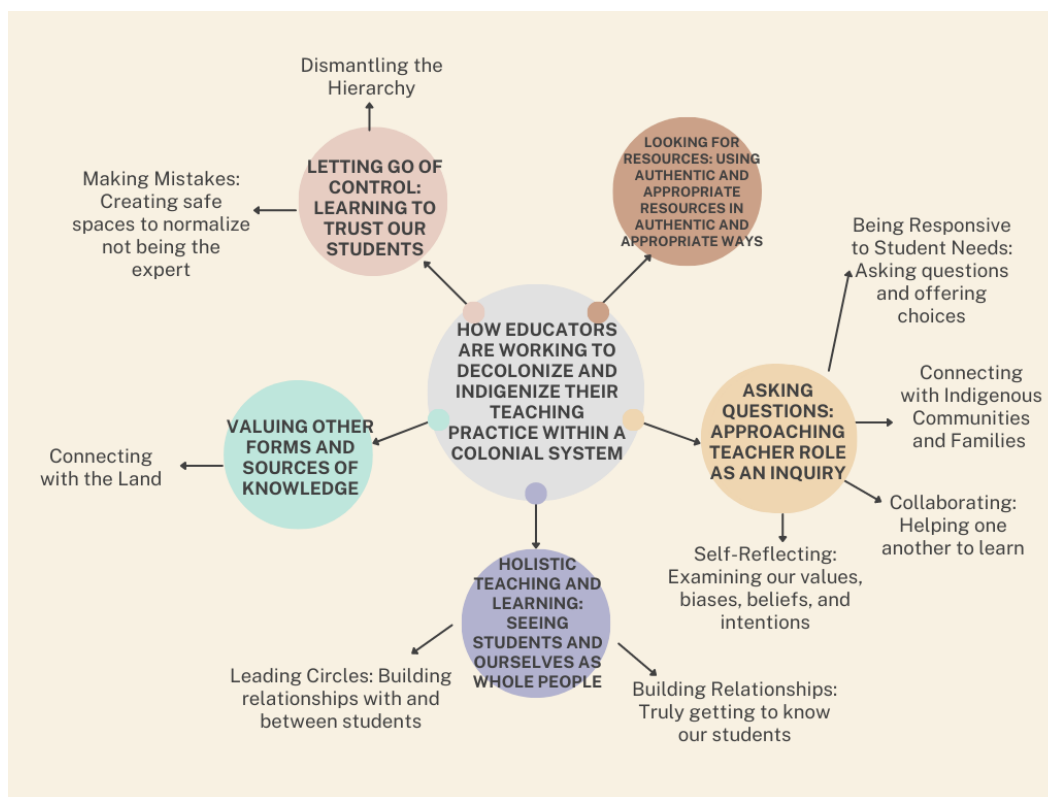


Figure 1. Overview of organizing concepts for study findings in relation to educators decolonizing and Indigenizing their teaching practices

This chapter is long because I have intentionally used a lot of direct quotes from my inquiry partners for many reasons. I wanted to truly honour their voices, stories and experiences as both Battiste (2013) and Tanaka (2015a) emphasize the value of the knowledge of the participants. Additionally, I wanted the readers to feel as though they were part of the conversations in hopes that it would encourage them to have their own conversations. I also wanted to make it clear that I was not operating in a vacuum and my learning was influenced by many others, especially my inquiry partners. As well, I believe that by demonstrating that these are the experiences, feelings and thoughts of more than one person, it may help others to feel less alone in this work. I have used the terms “we” and “us” extensively both because I

participated in the inquiry and because I wanted to be clear that I do not see myself as being separate when I speak about the work that we, as educators, need to do.

Looking for Resources: Using authentic and appropriate resources in authentic and appropriate ways

Before discussing resources, it is important to note that the process of decolonizing one's teaching practice has to be about more than simply teaching Indigenous content. As Coco said, "[i]t's really a mind shift and a heart shift." Jordana also talked about having this realization a few years ago, she said, "this is bigger than just bringing in some Indigenous content, [it's]...questioning your own approach or how you go about doing things." Jane also shared a similar sentiment; "circling that back to Indigeneity, it's like this isn't a unit. This isn't a one-off presentation. This isn't one day where we do a drum circle. This is supposed to be woven through everything." However, as Kate and Coco agreed, and as I discussed in my literature review, most educators are looking for easy to use resources.

Naturally, the first topic our group discussed was resources, and throughout our sessions together group members shared resources that they found to be useful in their classes. For example, Paula shared *Spirit Bear's Guide to Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action* (First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, 2020) because it used student friendly language which made the 94 Calls to Action more accessible for her students. As was evident in our group, sharing reliable and culturally appropriate resources is an important way for educators to support one another in their efforts to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practices. Nonetheless, the majority of our discussions revolved around the complexity of vetting resources. How do we know if a resource is appropriate to use? We discussed resources that educators had been using for years but were now being removed from the shelves because the individuals who created them were not Indigenous or at least not recognized as Indigenous. This is a topic that has been quite popular in the media as well. However, as Kate explained:

It's so much more than who wrote it or who made it. That's the easy part because you look in the back of the book and you read...But then it's not actually. I find sometimes that certain districts don't like using other districts' things and there's lots of complications. I feel that it's complicated to me because I'm an outsider looking in.

Yet, even Coco, the Indigenous inquiry partner, said that it is complicated for her too because it's about so much more than who created the resource. For example, it can be about how the resource is being used. Kate and Coco explained to the group that we were no longer able to use a well-known resource because someone in our district had translated it into French without the permission of the Nation who had created the resource, so the Nation told our district that we were no longer able to use it. This was a surprise to many of us, and at the time of this discussion Coco told us that the resource was still available on our district's Indigenous Education Department's website. So, there were probably educators who were still using the resource unaware that they no longer had the right to use it. Evidently, it also takes time for the information to be shared that a resource is no longer appropriate to use. Christine brought up the concern of resources being pan-Indigenous¹⁴, which is something we discussed a lot in my Indigenous Education courses at UVic. She shared:

I wonder sometimes about things that are going on in the elementary school. I only know that perspective because my kids are in elementary school. They're doing lots of Indigenous based activities, which is so cool, but I also kind of wonder is that related to Indigenous thinking from here? Where has that been taken from? So there's the Seven Teachings and then there's other things and what different animals represent. But I don't actually think it's related to here, and then that's also problematic if it's not acknowledged.

¹⁴ Parsons (2019) references her Indigenous Knowledge instructor Les Jerome from a lecture he gave to explain that pan-Indigenous refers to a "method to strip down vast cultural differences and place all Indigenous people into one generic category".

I have learned from my instructors in the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives program at UVic that there is nothing inherently wrong with using a resource such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings which comes from the Anishinaabe people. However, it is always best to try to use teachings and resources from local nations, and it becomes problematic when we do not acknowledge where the teaching comes from and assume that all Indigenous peoples share the same beliefs and traditions. Consequently, it is important to find out who created the resource and where it comes from, but as Paula explained, another common issue is knowing who to ask:

But when we're trying to find knowledge to share, how do you situate the knowledge when you don't know who to ask...if I don't know where that comes from, who do I ask where it comes from? Is it ok that I'm asking them where it comes from? Is it ok that I'm asking for permission? Or is it bad that I'm asking for permission?

In one of the UVic Indigenous Education courses that I participated in called Exploring Indigenous Literature for the Classroom, our instructor provided us with a guide from the *Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education* (Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic education, 2011) and my classmates and I spent an entire 3-hour class discussing and using the guide to verify whether a resource is appropriate for us to use. The guide had three different checklists and a total of 45 questions to answer before one could decide whether the resource is appropriate to use. The questions in the checklists focus not only on who created the resource and where it comes from, but also on the content of the resource. Unfortunately, when there are multiple steps to take to find reliable resources, it can become a bit of an obstacle for many educators. For example, Paula shared:

It feels like it gets really convoluted, really quickly. So, I think what ends up happening is we find little like, "Oh, I know this is from here. I'm just going to use this and it'll be ok." But then we miss out on maybe the richness of all these other things because I think

that's maybe the most common teacher thing is how do I implement this stuff? I need to do it right and I don't know how to make sure I'm doing it right?

As I discussed in my literature review, finding resources may not be the most important work when it comes to decolonizing our teaching practice, however, it is important to find resources that are reliable and culturally appropriate. So, what do educators do? Well, as Cassandra explained:

I wonder first of all, before we teach something we have to know where it comes from.

That is maybe a first step. And then the second step is before I teach it, is it ok? Is it ok for me to teach it? Is it my right? Do I have permission?

Clearly, there are many questions that educators must ask themselves and others to ensure that they are using authentic and appropriate resources in authentic and appropriate ways.

Asking Questions: Approaching teacher role as an inquiry

As educators, we have been indoctrinated in a system that has led us and others to believe that we have all the answers, or that we at least know more than our students do. However, this simply is not true. Yes, I may know more than my grade 6 students about how to write an academic essay, but there is knowledge that students have gained from their families, communities, and their own experiences that I know nothing about. Decolonizing our teaching practice is going to require us to do a lot of learning and unlearning, and as our group discovered, asking questions is one way that we can do this. As Kate put it so succinctly, “You don’t know what you don’t know.” So, we need to get accustomed to asking questions, and it is apparent from the section on resources that it is necessary for us to ask questions. For example, when talking about resources, I observed that there was some frustration about not being able to use certain resources that we had been using for years. However, instead of getting frustrated, we need to ask questions; as Coco explained, “the way to think about it is, ok, what's changed? Why can't we? And that's the learning.”

This is exactly what our group did: we asked many questions. We asked ourselves questions, we asked each other questions, and we discussed the importance of asking our students questions and asking the Nations, on whose territories we teach, questions. For too long many of us have taught without questioning things that we should have been questioning. So, I believe that asking questions is a significant part of decolonizing our teaching practice, as I said in one of our discussions, “I think it's good that we question it first of all. I think it's always good that we are asking those questions to make sure that what we are doing is a good thing.”

Self-Reflecting: Examining our values, biases, beliefs and intentions

As I have come to learn through my own journey and experiences, and the courses that I have taken through UVic, the work of decolonizing our teaching practice requires critical self-reflection, which includes asking ourselves some really difficult questions. Self-reflection is a common practice among many educators whether or not they are working to decolonize their teaching practice, and this group was no exception. Some of the questions we asked ourselves were: Is what I'm doing ok? Is what I'm planning going to work? Is this an authentic resource? How do I teach that? Did I handle that situation the best I could? What could I have done better? Interestingly, Fern said she asked a lot more of these questions earlier on in her career:

I felt like I was a way better teacher when I was a new teacher because I was struggling with, is this going to work? Is this not going to work? I didn't have the right way yet. I think in many ways it was way better when I was struggling with complexity.

So maybe one approach to decolonizing our teaching practice is starting with a beginner's mindset, and one of the first questions we might ask ourselves is what is preventing me from decolonizing my teaching practice? As Fern said, “Again, to be honest, is it because I'm burnt out or is it because this is challenging or what is it?” For Christine, she questioned how she could stay true to herself and her beliefs while changing the way she approached teaching:

It's interesting for me coming into learning more about Indigenous pedagogy and my own practice, but also too when I think about my own ancestry or my own personal

identity, I'm a Christian for one and also having family that is from Europe or the colonizer, and knowing my own biasing and prejudice, and of course, I'm always reflecting on it, but I am still who I am and I still have my own beliefs, and this idea of how am I true to who I am in my teaching because I have to be me because if I'm not genuinely me, how can I be authentic and passionate and really present for the kids?

As Christine shared, who we are influences the way that we teach, so it is important for us to reflect on our beliefs and values and how we can ensure that we are staying open to and including others' beliefs and values in our teaching. Along with our values and beliefs, it is also important for us to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses. Jordana shared what she found to be personally challenging to her in terms of working to decolonize her teaching practice:

I feel like I can address some of the things that I know, as I'm learning myself as an adult, these are racist issues within the knowledge system that I inherited. I find it easier to address that kind of thing because it comes from a very intellectual place and so I feel like I can do that just because that's my personality and I can address it...but some of the stuff that's more like heart center, that's more coming from a very emotional place from really getting into it with students, that's kind of what I find the most challenging as a teacher right now because like I said, there's so much going on.

As I will discuss later, our group found that holistic teaching is a significant component of decolonizing and Indigenizing our teaching practice. Researchers Claypool and Preston (2011) argued that to create learning environments that support both Indigenous and Western knowledge “educators need to address the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing of their students” (p. 92). So, for Jordana, this reflection helped her to become more aware of areas that she might want to focus on to help decolonize her practice.

Throughout our time together, we witnessed some of our group members have very powerful moments of self-reflection. For example, in one session, Cassandra explained how

great her day had been because she had participated in a drumming circle, and yet, at the following session she shared this with us:

Making sure it's not performative because that's something that I am really struggling with right now around drumming. And I've been drumming whenever it's been offered, so for quite a few years now. And I think it's because I had a conversation with somebody who is Indigenous and who I am very close to and gifted a drum to, and part of the conversation that we had, and I trust her to be really honest with me, is that "Drumming is not something that everybody does. It's something that you get asked to do in some communities. And so, it is kind of weird to see you guys all drumming at the same time, I recognize that we need to", she was saying this to me, "I don't have an answer because I don't want you to not do the drumming."... And so it's made me a little less sure about it.

I also had a significant moment of self-reflection that I did not share with the group, but wrote in my journal, about circles and assessment in my Eco Ed class:

Furthermore, I still feel the pressure to assess students and because this class is mostly based on students' participation, at the beginning of the year I explained to the students that there was an expectation to participate in circle and that their participation would be part of their assessment and I recorded which students did and did not participate in circle. [I did this by keeping a record of the students who shared a response to the question of the day]. Yet, if [I] look at the values and protocols of participating in circle and this is something that I also go over at the beginning of the [term], participants ALWAYS have the right to pass if they don't feel comfortable. So, assessing students on whether or not they participate [according to my limited view of what participation means] is unfair. But then I get this niggling feeling because there are the students who will occasionally pass because they're not having a good day and that seems totally justified, but there are other students who pass every single time, and my assumption is always

that they are being defiant. They don't like the course, or they want to get a reaction from me, so they don't participate, but I need to look at this from a different perspective. Why are they not participating? Are they not comfortable? I know how vulnerable I can feel when I participate in a circle with other adults, so it shouldn't be surprising that the students also feel vulnerable and maybe their vulnerability comes across as defiance. So, how do I support these students in feeling more comfortable in the circle?

This type of questioning or self-reflection is necessary in decolonizing our practice because it forces us to examine our intentions and think about other perspectives. Along the same lines, Paula reflected on how she would be able to tell the difference between being uncomfortable and doing something that she felt was wrong:

Also thinking about the idea of 'performativeness' and discomfort, I think it's also really difficult to identify when I care a lot about this and I'm nervous and there's a lot of growth that's about to happen and the gut feeling of there's something wrong about what I'm doing right now. And I think that's another thing that's challenging with this is when do I understand this to be just my discomfort of where I'm situated as I'm trying to learn in this way and when should I listen to myself that the way that I'm doing this isn't working.

This uncertainty is a feeling that I also have struggled with. Along with a couple of colleagues, including one of the counselors from our Indigenous Education Department, I created a program for our Indigenous students on Fridays. The program is optional, and the students are invited to participate in various activities such as beading, fishing, carving, and making fry bread. The inspiration for this program came from an Indigenous student who expressed a desire to learn more about her culture in school. Yet, for some reason it feels wrong to me because we are separating the Indigenous students from the non-Indigenous students. I asked the group, "is this right that we're doing this?"

The discussion that I think created the greatest cause for self-reflection was our discussion that revolved around Chapter 4 from the book *Wayi Wah!* (Chrona, 2022) that

focused on racism. As was evident from our discussions, I think for many white educators this chapter can cause some discomfort and make educators question a lot of what they say, do, and think. Christine shared, "I'm always thinking, I'm trying to be a good person, right? So it feels like questioning even just who you are." Understanding that, as citizens of Canada, we have been raised in a racist system, and that as a result, we too are racist is a fact that is difficult to accept. Christine effectively described her inner turmoil as she read Chapter 4:

I've grown up in this society, so I, by definition, have to have these underlying biases and prejudice. But that word racist also comes with this connotation of knowing better somehow and still thinking that. So what is the difference then between somebody who is starting to recognize I'm doing these things and when I speak I have to always be thinking. Is that not something different than somebody who's screaming at somebody to get off the road and calling them some horrible name? To me there's got to be something in between that's not that same word.

This chapter also encouraged Jordana to reflect on what she had been taught growing up and how she might address such a challenging topic with her class:

Looking back reflecting on my upbringing and what I experienced going through school, what I saw, what I heard, but also then matching that with of course I want to do more. Well what if I incorporated some of this more into my teaching along with some of these other terms and ideals and how do I do that without it being understood in a very different way?

We cannot decolonize our teaching practice without addressing racism and examining the racist beliefs that have been instilled in us (Chrona, 2022). However, as I noted in my observations, how do we recognize our racist thoughts or actions when we are unaware of them? Christine and Jordana noted that it was both powerful and challenging to read Chapter 4 because it encouraged them to reflect on some of their behaviours that were unintentionally racist. Jordana explained:

Part of it is being in a good enough space yourself that you can have the, I don't know if self-critique is the right way, but question your own methods, and where you're not going down that rabbit hole, like everything I do is horrible.

Self-reflection is challenging work and can evidently create a lot of discomfort, however, as demonstrated by the inquiry partners, it is essential to the work of decolonizing our teaching practice. As Coco explained, "The biggest change really comes when people do work themselves - they do the "heart" work. They do work that impacts their heart, and therefore it impacts their mind, and they feel compelled to make changes."

Collaborating: Helping one another to learn

When I began to design my research inquiry, the aspect of collaboration was really important to me. Despite being enrolled in the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives program at UVic, I knew that there was a lot that I could learn from my colleagues, and I have always found that I learn best when I collaborate with others. Likewise, most, if not all, of the group members expressed at some point how much they appreciated having the opportunity to come together and collaborate with other educators. In one of our closing circles, Kate shared, "I'm grateful for this opportunity and the space to be with you. It feels great to connect and to...be able to talk openly and...learn from each other." In fact, I think for many of the inquiry partners, collaboration was the reason that they joined the group, and one of the ways in which we collaborated was asking questions. We asked each other about specific resources and how we could approach teaching certain topics. We asked questions to help us better understand and to feel more comfortable about a topic we wanted to teach. And we asked questions to learn about what other educators were doing in their classrooms. Jordana shared, "I'm just curious about how other people address anti-racism, especially around Indigenous people and issues, and what they do in their classroom or what they're thinking of doing." Cassandra similarly said:

I really want to hear what other people are doing. I'm always super curious about the ways people are bringing ideas into their classrooms and I just feel like that's a big role of being an educator is actually doing the learning part of it.

Astra was curious about what “it mean[s] for us to decolonize or to work towards decolonizing our teaching practice?” She asked the group, “How do we keep going? And how do we dismantle that system because I think it's really messy and fun, but I also find that there's lots of questions.” As educators we can learn a lot from books such as *Wayi Wah!*, but watching our colleagues who are actually working in the classroom is such an effective way for us to learn. Kate talked about how watching me do sharing circles with my classes encouraged her to try to do the same in her class:

I've been watching Chelsea here in her groups. So I've got my second group starting tomorrow and we're starting in circle and we're going to have a stick and I learned all about what you pass around and how it needs to be connected to everybody...So it's a whole big thing and it took me three months to figure out, but it was a ton of learning.

It is always a bit easier for a teacher to try something new in their class when they know someone else has tried it and it's been effective. As Kate shared, “We just need to talk about it because it gives each other permission to change and shift and try new things and just get out there.”

When educators are struggling with an issue in their classes and they have already done some self-reflection, but cannot find any solutions, collaboration provides them with an opportunity to get feedback from other educators. For example, Cassandra was struggling with some students who were resistant to participating in circle and she asked the group for feedback:

I would say that I have maybe 70% buy in, but I have two or three folks in there who are really resistive and really digging their heels in, and they're not kids who are disruptive...these are ones who know better and are choosing to be really resistive. And

it's interesting because it was initially supposed to be a creative writing class, but we did the shift to make sure that everybody gets the grad requirement. So, I'm not sure whether it's just the structure that they're resisting or if it's because we switched it to English First Peoples. I'm just curious if anybody has any thoughts or suggestions.

Our group had quite the follow-up discussion about all the different reasons that the students might be resistant and what Cassandra could try. And the discussion was not only beneficial for Cassandra, we all gained a better understanding of our students and the various reasons that they might choose not to participate in an activity.

Another way in which collaboration can help us to decolonize our practice is by questioning and discussing some of the more structural aspects of colonialism in our schools. One of the topics that came up for our group was the use of a bell system. Kate described why it was important for us to talk about this:

I found it really interesting that this year, halfway through the year we decided to add bells between every 56 minute block. And I don't care, add them, but the talk around that needs to happen. Because I don't think about it the same now as I did prior to that. So let's try bells or whatever, but the talk around changing the way that we are throughout our day, and using the First People's Principles of Learning...and I think that when something like that comes up on a staff, we need to talk about it. And we need to talk about why we want to shift from that.

Kate makes a very significant point. In order for us, as educators, to make any structural changes in our system and move away from colonialism, we need to ask these questions and we need to have discussions. Why do we need bells? What purpose is this serving? How can we look at this differently?

In terms of collaborating and asking questions, one aspect of which educators need to be aware is to whom they are directing their questions. Christine spoke of an Indigenous educator who had worked at our school previously and how great it was to have him as a

contact person because she could ask him questions. When we were discussing Cassandra's students not wanting to participate in circle, my first instinct was to ask one of the counselors from our Indigenous Education Department. I also noticed, especially in our first session together, that many of our questions were directed towards Coco, the Indigenous educator from our Indigenous Education Department. Granted she was able to offer us insight that nobody else in the group could offer, however, as I have learned from my literature review and my own personal experiences, our Indigenous colleagues are over-burdened with the responsibility of being the contact person for the whole school and that is not right. Fern shared this sentiment when she talked about her reason for joining the group, "I'm here because I think we have an obligation to educate ourselves, as opposed to waiting to be educated by the people [who] are probably sick of educating us. So I want to do some more self-educating." Jane expressed a similar sentiment when talking about the challenges of teaching an Art exploratory class:

Because sometimes those lessons around ownership can be a little bit thorny and tricky to navigate for someone who's not Indigenous, especially if you don't want to constantly be going and asking "Is this ok?" "What should I do?" "How could I do it right?" I think figuring it out is really important for ourselves.

This is not to say that we should leave out our Indigenous colleagues from these conversations, because as I discussed in my literature review, partnering with Indigenous individuals and communities is very important, however we cannot rely solely on Indigenous people to teach us; that is our responsibility.

At the end of our sessions together, I asked the group members for some feedback, specifically questioning whether or not this group had been helpful in their journey of decolonizing their teaching practice. Those who responded to the email expressed that it was beneficial and inspiring to hear about what other educators were doing. Coco shared, "This experience has been great for me because although I am Indigenous and have taught in Indigenous Ed for decades, it is always revealing to sit and listen to others," and that

“collaborating with other like-minded teachers has also been very helpful - such as this group that you are leading Chelsea - it is a wonderful way to open up and share and jump in.” As is evident from the experiences of the members in this group, collaboration among educators is a great strategy in terms of decolonizing our teaching practice, but the one thing that many of the group members expressed was that we need more time to collaborate.

Being Responsive to Student Needs: Asking questions and offering choices

As educators, we spend a lot of time and effort planning and creating lessons that we hope will be engaging for our students. Personally, I am accustomed to my colonial thinking, and I like to follow the plan, so I find it challenging when my plans do not work out. However, if we want to decolonize our teaching practices, we need to be responsive to our students' needs, which means that sometimes we need to forget about our plans. Paula described similar struggles and what she learned from reading *Wayi Wah!*:

We're like, well this is my plan, and I'll just stick to my plan, and if my plan doesn't happen then how am I going to feel like I accomplished what I was supposed to do as a teacher today, and coming back into the moment and being there with our students and knowing what they need in that moment. And then there's another part where [Jo Chrona] talks about how education needs to be responsive and so we're not there to live the master plan, we're there to be there with them and respond to their needs.

Cassandra talked about what this might look like in a class:

Maybe being responsive...means that I need to sit with this child for a few more minutes while everybody else is doing something a little bit longer than we normally do it. This child needs this, and I can make that decision and it's not going to hurt the other kids to have to free read for an extra 10-15 minutes because I really need to be with this kid right now.

As we discussed different issues or concerns we were having in our classes, we discovered that many of us did not even think to ask our students how they felt or what they needed. For

example, I have always wondered how Indigenous students in my classes feel when we talk about topics such as residential schools or the sixties scoop, but I have never asked them how they feel. Similarly, Fern shared:

I have never asked them that. I've never said, "Hey David, we did a lot of talk about First Nations things this year. Do you feel comfortable telling me how you feel about it?"...Why haven't I asked them that question, it seems so obvious.

However, Cassandra explained that this is common practice for her:

That's something I do. It varies so much from child to child. I've had kids where we talked about if the word Indian is going to come up, for example, in some reading that we're doing and it depends, you have to get to know the kid first. It's building trust first and then just asking them, "How comfortable do you feel with this?" I have one student right now who I don't believe I'm servicing as well as I would like to be, but we're in the middle of conversations about *Indian Horse* and reading *Indian Horse* in the class. I won't say too much about her story because it's not my story, but it is difficult for her to be in the room. And so, I'm really just trying to keep the conversation open. I didn't know that at first for her and I've taught the book many times with other kids who've been ok, and I didn't ask her if she was ok with it before we started, but we got part way in. And so the ongoing conversation has been, "Are you ok today if we read?" and "Ok. Yeah, I'm alright" or "No, I'm just going to go for a walk, but I don't mind if you guys go ahead and read." And I just adjust. And I have found that kids are so willing to say what they are comfortable with and what they're not comfortable with. And it was interesting with the word Indian, when that came up, this was a different girl and she said, "Oh, me and my family we use that word all the time with each other. It's part of the way we talk about each other," and she just lightened it so much in a way, not that I'm going to use the word because that's not, it's contextually not appropriate for me to use the word, but once she sort of said that, it wasn't difficult to have the conversations about what you are

and aren't comfortable with. And I think if you just ask the question individually like, "Hey, do you have a minute?"

As Cassandra shared, if educators want to get honest and meaningful responses from their students (and in particular their Indigenous students), building a positive relationship with the student is key and this is something that we discussed at length in our group, but I will address this further in one of the following sections.

The concern that Cassandra had about students being resistant to participating in circle (refer to section on *Collaborating: Helping Each Other to Learn*) prompted many of us to think about the students' needs. Why was it that they did not want to participate in circle? Is it because they felt vulnerable? What did they need in order to feel more comfortable? I asked the very same questions in my reflexivity journal. Kate shared that she was also having the same challenges in her class, however, she said that it was only her Indigenous students who chose not to participate in circle. This prompted Fern to ask, "What did they say? Why are the Indigenous kids not wanting to do it? Has anybody asked them?" We spent about 25 minutes discussing the various reasons why both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students might choose not to participate in circle. For example, maybe they feel vulnerable. Maybe they feel ashamed that they do not know more about their culture. Maybe they are just being oppositional. Maybe they are trying to look a certain way in front of their classmates. Maybe it is because of their family's influence on them. However, every child is different and until we actually ask them why they do not want to participate in circle, we will not know how to meet their needs. As Fern said, "Everyone's going to have a different story. Every kid is going to have this feeling for a different reason."

Being responsive to students' needs means we, as educators, also need to offer them choices. When the group began a session with a mindfulness activity we saw this as a way to help educators decolonize their teaching practice. However, as Jordana brought up:

There's always that reminder that [mindfulness] does not work for everyone. Because I know especially people who have PTSD it can be very triggering for them closing eyes, even the breathing stuff. And so, I remember asking a counselor who's doing that kind of stuff with me, "Is this ok to bring in the classroom, what do you think about this?" And she was just like, "I would be very careful when you do those types of activities."

I agree with Jordana, and I am fortunate to have done a children's yoga teacher training that was very trauma informed, and so we discussed how when I practice mindfulness with students everything is optional, and students always have the choice to participate. Jordana also talked about the importance of giving students choice in how they want to engage with their culture:

One of my students that I've taught, this is now my second year teaching her, and I've seen her say as personal goals that she wants to be more in touch with her culture. But she gets to decide how to do that, in her own way, and it doesn't have to be through school.

While this student of Jordana's may not want to learn about her culture at school, one of my students specifically requested learning more about her culture at school, and that is what inspired the Friday cultural program with the Indigenous students at our school. Students are all different and they want and need different things, and as I said to the group, "That's why our kids need choice."

Returning to Cassandra's dilemma about the circle, what would happen if teachers gave the students who were resistant to circle a choice to not sit in the circle? Unfortunately, it is a bit complex because circles do not come from Western culture and those of us who are non-Indigenous are just learning about circles, and we do not know all the protocols. So, the group questioned whether giving the students this option would be a good idea, and some of us had received different teachings about circles. Cassandra explained that one of the Indigenous educators from another school had told her that he never lets students withdraw from circle. Yet I explained an instance where I gave a student the choice to not sit in the circle with us:

I have one student that was away for I think the first three weeks, or maybe even four weeks, because his dad passed away. Then he came back, and when he came back, he chose to sit outside of the circle, and I didn't force him to join us in the circle. Every time we went around the circle, I would say, "Do you want to participate?" and he would say "No," but he was coming, and he was sitting, and he was hearing what other kids were saying.

Throughout the 10 weeks of my Eco Ed course, this particular student never joined circle, but maybe he was not ready to participate in circle yet. And I do not think that I need to be the person to decide when he is ready, but maybe I could have asked him why he chose not to participate, and that could have been my first step.

It is important to consider that there may be obstacles when being responsive to students' needs and offering them choice. Something that I have noticed in my classes is that my students are not necessarily accustomed to being given a choice, and they do not know what to do when they do have a choice. I wrote about this in a journal entry:

In the first term, I tried to let the students' interest determine what we would do in the class. I gave them all sticky notes and told them to write down what they would like to do/learn about in the class. All of their responses were either things that were not logistically possible for us to do or things that I had already mentioned we would do.

Evidently, it will take some time for students to get used to making their own decisions.

Another obstacle in responding to students' needs that our group discussed was the issue of time. This was especially challenging for exploratory teachers because they see the students so infrequently and there is no time in between when one block ends and the next block starts. Thus, trying to have a private one-on-one conversation with a student to ask them questions about what they need is really challenging. Christine also explained how, when she did not have to switch her class with other teachers and she had her students for the whole day, she had more flexibility in her schedule to give the students more choice:

The kids also become way more involved in the planning of what goes on even in a day. I would have conversations with the kids in the morning and say, "This is what the weather is supposed to be like today. We've got to get through just math and this other thing, but we can move that to this day. What do you guys want to do? Do you want to do it now?" Then also in terms of buy in, it's like we're all collaborating together.

Asking students about their needs and offering choice requires time and flexibility, but I believe that all of the educators in our group would agree that it is worth it, and it is one way that we, as educators, can work towards decolonizing our teaching practice.

Connecting with Indigenous Communities and Families

As I found in my literature review, through my personal experiences, and through discussions with this group, connecting with the Indigenous community in the local area is extremely important in the work of decolonization. That being said, it is not always easy to connect with the local Indigenous community and many non-Indigenous educators may not know where to start.

Our discussion around connecting with the local Indigenous community began with a story that Fern shared about an Indigenous mother not wanting to send her children to school because she did not trust the education system. I pointed out that, "I think that's also a huge area where our system struggles is our connection to families." And Cassandra made the point, "That goes so generationally deep because our system so intentionally removed children from their parents." Reflecting on the residential school system, it is understandable that Indigenous families would not want to send their children to public schools. So, our group questioned how do we support Indigenous families in feeling more comfortable in a school building? How do we earn their trust back? Fern was reminded of a dinner that our youth and family counselor used to organize with Indigenous students specifically for Indigenous families, and she questioned whether this would still be appropriate. Once again, the solution that we proposed was asking questions, as Cassandra shared:

And that's where we would ask the community: "Are you ready for us to do something like this or not yet?" And then I think probably through the Native Friendship Center as well because you want to be able to reach communities or families that are urban Indigenous. I think it's like asking the students as well. We have to get used to asking families and communities about "What is it that you need, or we have this idea...Do you think this would be something that you would like to participate in?"

Coco also reminded me how important it is to practice reciprocity, "highlighting the importance of reciprocity, especially when it comes to the fact that Indigenous people are always being asked to give and share about themselves and their culture, when often there is nothing given in return." Hopefully, by asking the questions and practicing reciprocity the relationship starts to grow, trust is built, and educators and Indigenous communities can move forward together to decolonize our education system.

Holistic Teaching and Learning: Seeing students and ourselves as whole people

Our Eurocentric education system seems to focus on only one part of our students: their minds. However, as I discovered in my literature review, and in referencing the First Peoples Principles of Learning from FNEESC, Indigenous epistemology believes that "[l]earning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)" (n.d.). Coco shared a similar definition, "Indigenous pedagogy is relationship based, realizing the whole child – heart, body, mind, and spirit, instead of chunking learning into sections, which is what western/Eurocentric education does." Thus, to decolonize their teaching practice educators need to see and treat their students as whole people with hearts, minds, bodies, emotions, and a spirit.

Our group discussed how many educators question how to include the First Peoples Principles of Learning in their teaching, and what many of them do not understand is that it is not only about teaching the students about the principles, but it is also about embodying the principles in our teaching. As Paula expressed, "One thing I love is [the First Peoples Principles

of Learning] are things that you don't just teach, like this is a principle and this is a principle, you bring them into who you are as a person." As a result of being trained/educated in a Eurocentric system, educators tend to teach from a solely intellectual perspective. However, I noticed that when I approached my teaching more holistically and taught with a more heart-centered focus it felt better. I recorded this in my journal:

When teaching my students about how to participate in a sharing circle, I usually follow a resource that I found online. I'll read parts of the resource aloud and then there are certain guidelines that are meant to be followed that I print off and cut out and give to some volunteer students to read aloud to the class. In my mind, this is a very "intellectual" and maybe even colonial way to teach about circles and I'm not sure how effective it has been. So today, I didn't read from the resource but instead I asked the students some questions, and these weren't questions that I thought of beforehand, they just came to me in the moment. I acknowledged that sometimes we can feel uncomfortable or vulnerable in a circle. And then I asked them how we as a group ensure that everyone in the circle feels comfortable enough to share. Each group came up with some thoughtful responses and I allowed myself to be vulnerable and talked about my own insecurities and what would make me feel more comfortable. To me this was teaching from the heart, and we'll see how circle goes, but it felt much more effective and authentic.

Christine talked about the immediate benefits she saw in her students when she approached teaching in a more holistic way, "We're talking about the social emotional piece, and the value of going outside, and connecting with peers and you can literally see a physical lift in students." Our group also discussed how we want our students to leave the K-12 education system being able to do more than just pass a test. Both Fern and Jane explained how there are many students who have done well in high school and then they go to university and struggle because they did not develop important life skills such as problem solving or perseverance. Paula also

talked about the importance of all students developing character in referring to an anecdote from the *Wayi Wah!* book:

That's kind of like that anecdote about the kid taking the same English course three times. Yeah, academically, you could look at that and be like, oh that's not success, but what would you rather your child have? It says somewhere along the way he had internalized the determination and not given up on himself. So, would you rather have a kid that will never give up on themselves or a kid who aces English class right away? It's about what really matters and it's about who they are, which is I guess why it matters who we are with them.

As Paula alluded to, teachers also need to see themselves as whole people. As previously mentioned, we started each of our sessions with a mindfulness practice and a sharing circle because not only is mindfulness a strategy that we can use to decolonize our practice, but it also helps to support us, as educators, in learning to make our own mind, body and spirit connections. I shared with the group how I had learned from an article by Ng (2018) that mindfulness is an act of decolonization because it is a holistic approach that helps us and our students to integrate mind, body, and spirit. As teachers, we have a lot going on in our lives, and this was apparent when we checked in with everyone during our sharing circles. For example, the following statements capture the sense of the group members' demanding lives during our circle check-in:

JORDANA: I'm feeling a little stressed because I sprained my ankle this summer and I've been rehabbing it and rehabbing it. It's really bad and in a moment of stress, you know when you're not paying attention to what's going on, and I went over on it, and I'm just like "Oh god all my work".

FERN: I started the day at a 10, at about 2 o'clock I was at about zero and then coming into the space and because Chelsea and her mom's welcoming food and all of you people and the mindfulness I've elevated myself up to an eight.

KATE: I'm a 10, I got discharged from the cancer clinic this week. So I'm good.

CASSANDRA: I'm feeling about maybe a fiveish today. My son just moved to San Diego and he just told me on Sunday that he was moving. It's only for a couple of months, but I'm still adjusting.

PAULA: I'm probably around a five too. I'm just kind of having some life moments which happen alongside everything else that goes on. So, I'm just trying to kind of figure myself out a little bit.

ASTRA: So, I'm feeling like my body is really nourished. My mind is kind of exhausted, so I'm feeling like a five on the mind scale, but probably a 10 with just everyone's kindness towards me today.

Evidently, teachers have many worries outside of their classrooms such as health, family, relationships, finances etc. Our personal lives and our emotions are going to impact our words, our actions, and the way we teach. Yet so many of us try to compartmentalize our lives, and do not let the students know how our personal lives might be affecting us. Paula talked about this idea as she referred to the book *Wayi Wah!*:

There's this humanity and that involves all of you and it has to, and on page 11, [Chrona] talks about, in order to move forward, you have to understand where we're coming from. Bring in the totality of who we are to every learning opportunity and that we can't compartmentalize who we are, and we have to honor our whole selves. I really like that.

Paula shared her experience of what happens when she is honest with her students and lets them see when she is struggling:

I find with that empathy piece, everyone tries to say, oh you teach empathy by modeling it. It's like how am I supposed to model if I'm dysregulated and I'm up to here and I'm trying to get them to listen to me and I'm trying to get them to respect me...And my number one thing is every time I feel myself here I'm going to acknowledge this to them and I find the moment I say it out loud they all go, "Oh" and then it's human to human

again and then there could be an awkward silence, but I just find more often it kind of levels everything out again.

In sharing how she is feeling with her students, not only does Paula acknowledge to them that she is a human being who experiences challenging emotions, but she also models for them a healthy way that they can communicate how they are feeling.

By teaching from a holistic perspective, it helps educators to decolonize their teaching practice and create better learning experiences for their students. When teachers think about holistic teaching and learning, it is equally important to see themselves as whole people, and let the students see them as whole people too. As Paula said:

I think they forget we're people if you don't do that. They forget that you have stuff going on too. So being there present with them and looking them in the eyes, they're like, "Oh right, it's not just me."

Finally, our group discussed that in order for our students to know us, as Paula suggested, and to create a more holistic experience for them we have to start by focusing on building relationships.

Building Relationships: Truly getting to know our students

As educators, building relationships is key to decolonizing our teaching practice. In fact, as a group we discussed the importance of building relationships several times in each session. Coco said it so beautifully:

Relationship is the big one for me, because in the end, when kids look back on their time with you at school and in their class, they're not going to necessarily remember the academics, they're going to remember how you made them feel, and when you build that relationship, they're going to remember that and it's going to make them enjoy school and enjoy learning because of how you made them feel in their heart.

A number of the group members talked about how establishing relationships with our students is the first thing we should do and how it should come before curriculum. Cassandra explained, "I

put the intent to build a positive and trusting relationship first and the content came in after.” She then described how she does this in her classes:

When I think about decolonizing, for the first few weeks of class I'm not really teaching anything¹⁵. The first day of class I have them all sit, and I tell them to talk to each other because I'm going to be busy talking to you one-on-one and I don't even care what they're doing. I don't notice, it's probably a disaster. But I talk to one or two and I get to know them, and I ask them a whole slew of questions and it goes a long way.

There was of course some concern over the time it can take to have a one-on-one conversation with each student in the class. As I mentioned when describing the research problem, school schedules are coordinated according to a Eurocentric concept of time and the daily schedule is organized into specific blocks of time and educators generally do not have the ability to extend those blocks of time. Once again, this time restriction seemed to have the greatest impact on exploratory teachers. We had four exploratory teachers in our group, and we see our students three times a week for a period of 56 minutes, and less if there is a holiday or a professional development day. Jordana, Jane and I discussed this struggle:

CHELSEA: I think that's the struggle with exploratories too

JANE: Yeah, it's very bite sized for sure.

CHELSEA: And even trying to find time to have those one on one conversations because we have one class leaving and the next class enters in the next 10 seconds. So it's like, “Hey, can you just stay back for 10 seconds so I can have a conversation with you? But we only have 10 seconds.”

¹⁵ When Cassandra talks about not teaching her students anything, I believe she is referring to a Eurocentric notion of teaching and she means that she is not teaching them any content, she is evidently teaching her students relational and communication skills.

JORDANA: Yeah. So I think it takes time, right? And when you only see kids for one term, it's not a lot of time for them to know where is she coming from? What's her game here?

I shared with the group that when I taught in Calgary for 9 years, I remember having really strong relationships with many of my students. I knew about what was going on in their lives outside of school, I developed relationships with their families, their parents would buy me tickets to attend their extracurricular activities or invite me to their house for dinner. So, what was different? I was the dance teacher for grades 5-9, so for the students who signed up to take dance every year, I taught them for 5 years in a row. That is not even possible in our BC middle school model. As with any relationship it takes time because it takes time to build trust.

Cassandra told me in an email about the student who she had been struggling to connect with:

I went and found her on my prep so that we could do some work around identity. She talked and I scribed and together we captured so much of her thinking (about 45 minutes of conversation) that I think she surprised herself...we are a little closer to her trusting me (she was excited to show me pictures and video of her trip to clans territory this summer).

Again, this took time and Cassandra had to use her "preparation" time to do this, which not every teacher would be willing or able to do, so educators must find a way to build relationships in their own way. As we discussed, there are many different ways that educators can connect with their students. It can be as simple as making the effort to learn student names quickly, as Paula explained, "I have a party trick, the first class I ever have them, at the end I go around and say all their names." Referring back to Cassandra's student, Cassandra explained that she had been discussing bull kelp with the class and had asked them to create a doodle of bull kelp and:

[The student] got super excited because she's like, "Oh I actually have a lot of plant knowledge." And then I had brought the book out and then she wanted to see the book

and...that's the biggest connection we've made all year. And it was just over a doodle...But then that was a connector piece rather than something like *Indian Horse*, which has been a connector piece at other times. So, you never know, I guess, where the connector piece is going to be.

It is also important to acknowledge that building relationships comes easier for some than it does for others. Fern pointed this out:

Relationships are not a problem for people in this room, that's what we do...but I wonder about different people needing different kinds of relationships and...how would we mentor or encourage relationship building when everybody has their own ways of developing relationships with people?

I shared with the group, "I think that's one of the pieces I struggle [with] most when I'm teaching is the kids that I can't relate to or can't build those relationships with." Kate reminded us that it is not about how we prefer to build relationships, it is about what the students need. She told us about a program that they had created in grade 6 to help students connect:

One thing we've done at the South¹⁶ campus this year that has been very [effective] for a lot of kids is we have Bagels and Books at 8 a.m. every morning. And it's quiet. There's no talking, it's like lights low, music on. They come and eat, they get a book or some of them do the Rubik's cube or whatever, but that is connection for them, and I was like...this is not a relationship. Then the parents [of one student] came in for an IEP meeting and they're like, "That's the only thing that gets him to school." I'm like, "He never says anything to me." But that's an example of creating opportunities that aren't just that typical relationship piece. Just that space and that time.

Christine and Jordana expanded on this idea:

¹⁶ Due to an increase in enrollment our school has two campuses that are about a 10 minute walk from each other.

CHRISTINE: The safe space in and of itself is what the child needs and what they also remember, it looks different for everybody. Sometimes you think, I don't even remember how often we chatted or connected...but they still are in that space and in that environment.

JORDANA: So, I think that shows too that even those teachers who aren't all 'lovey', they're building their own relationships and their safe space and there are opportunities for students in different ways.

Our students are all unique and different, so our relationships with them will naturally look different as well. Nonetheless, as Coco shared, the time and effort that educators put into building relationships with their students will be worth it and it will be another way that they can work to decolonize their teaching practice. For example, both Fern and Cassandra talked about how beneficial it can be to take the time to build relationships with students through various activities, such as taking students for a walk:

FERN: It's not academically rigorous, but really, it's actually so much, in my opinion, more meaningful and powerful in terms of the relational learning that goes on and the life learning that goes on.

CASSANDRA: You will be more successful with all of the other pieces, and you don't have to be worrying about losing all that time...So, I don't know that overall time is lost because if they trust you, they respect you...then when you want to teach them something, they will want to learn from you.

I also have seen how taking the time to build relationships can be beneficial when trying to engage students. I recorded in my journal:

Although I know how important relationships are, yesterday I experienced something that made me truly realize how important they are. There is an Indigenous student who is now in grade 8 and I was his advisory teacher in grade 6. He is a very quiet student and although I would say that he and I had a positive relationship when he was in grade

6, I would also say that I never got to know him really well and was never really sure how he felt about me. He now participates in our Friday circles and cultural activities, so I have been spending more time with him. Again, he is still very quiet and although I always say hello to him and ask him how he's doing, I get the sense that he's not too interested in engaging with me. But then yesterday, I was outside with one of my Eco Ed classes and he was outside with his advisory class. I noticed that there were some weeds growing in our raised garden beds, so I took a little trowel over and was removing the weeds when he came over to ask me what I was planting. It seems so little, but for him it was really big. I can't really remember a time that he has engaged with me without being prompted. And it just goes to show you that it can take some kids a long time before they feel comfortable with an adult and that we as teachers just need to be persistent in the most gracious way possible.

Leading Circles: Building relationships with and between students

When I first began my master's program and was starting to think about how educators could decolonize their teaching practice, I spoke with one of the counselors from our Indigenous Education Department and he simply said, "Start with circles." There are many different ways and reasons to conduct a circle, and it is true, as Kate said, that circles are not uniquely an Indigenous cultural practice, however, there are many Indigenous communities that practice circles, including the Coast Salish people¹⁷, on whose territory our group was situated. Additionally, circles are an effective way to start building relationships with and between students. Coco spoke so eloquently about the power of circles and how they can help us to build relationships:

Circles can do that. They just open us up. In the Anishinaabe teaching where I come from, the circle levels the playing field, it puts everybody on the same level, the adults

¹⁷ I have since learned that circles were not originally a Coast Salish tradition, but the Coast Salish people have adopted the practice of circles from other Indigenous groups.

and the children, and nobody's better than anyone. And it gives kids a safe space to speak and we don't do that often enough in our schools. We give kids information, read, watch videos...write something down, draw a picture, act it out, make a poem. But we don't really give them the chance just to sit and speak and hear their voice coming from their heart, with no judgment, no assessment, no reporting. So circles are such a valuable tool.

Likewise, Paula talked about how listening to her students' responses in circle helps her better understand her students, "I also find you learn a lot. Sometimes there's a kid that always has an answer and one day they pass. It kind of helps learn a little bit more with what's not said too." Even having the students share their number for the day can tell teachers so much and offer an opportunity for relationship building, but teachers have to make the time for it. I wrote the following in my journal:

It is always my intention to check-in with the students who report being a one or a two out of 10, but if I'm being honest it rarely happens that I check-in with them and I see this as such a missed opportunity to build relationships with those students.

Once again, time can be an obstacle when it comes to organizing a circle in the classroom. Depending on the focus of the circle it could take hours to ensure that every student has a chance to speak. As previously mentioned, as teachers, our day is structured around schedules which we have little control over, but as our group discussed, if we can make the time for circles in our weekly or daily routines, there are so many benefits.

Evidently, circles offer us another way to teach more holistically. As Coco said, "Just sitting in a circle is allowing for that time to interact and reflect." The school day can be busy and hectic, and circles provide a moment to debrief and acknowledge how everyone is feeling, which, as I reflected in my journal and through my observations from my classroom, really helps students and teachers get to know one another. By participating in circles, it teaches students social-emotional and relational skills. They learn how to connect to their emotions and how to

truly listen to one another. Paula commented on how circles have been a really powerful tool at the middle school level in teaching students how to listen to one another:

Another reason why those teachings are so perfect with where we are in middle school is because kids are so in their own thing, and their own head, and their own stuff and they want to talk about themselves and being in that space gives you the opportunity to say, "Oh I know you've already had your turn, but everyone gets a turn, and so everyone listened to you, you have to listen." Now I'm realizing how powerful it is to be in that space and...everyone gets a moment to feel heard.

Circles are also a great way to resolve classroom issues. As Coco shared, "When you do have things like that to talk about, there's the trust already built in where you can say, 'Hey guys, let's sit down and have a talk, we need to figure this out or hash this out.'" Cassandra also suggested a way of using circles to teach empathy and encourage students to work together based on their strengths:

I wonder if even along those lines, maybe you did circle, and your conversation was about how is this particular thing that we're working on going for you? Then some kids will say, "Oh, it's going great." Then reaching a point where there's enough trust, that students could say, "Well, I'm actually really struggling with this piece, and I don't know how to do this." Then being able to take that a step further to say, "Ok, well you heard who's managing ok. You've heard who's struggling. Now it's time to actually get together. If you are not someone who's struggling, step in please and help out those who are." I think something that we could tie into a First Peoples practice, which is the circle, provides the structure for us to find out how we're doing. So then when the kids move out into a work setting, "Hey, I see you're kind of struggling with that. Can I help you with that?" is actually a normal part of the way we interact.

Competition is one of the values of colonialism (Wilson, 2018), thus encouraging students to support one another, instead of constantly being in competition with each other is the work of decolonization.

I start and end the week with a circle in my class. At the beginning of the week my students and I do a check-in circle to see how everyone is doing and I usually ask a question that helps us get to know one another better. At the end of the week, we do a gratitude circle to talk about what we are thankful for. It seems fairly simple, and I would say that the majority of my students participate almost all of the time. However, as I've already mentioned, circles tend to make people feel vulnerable, and not just children, adults too. Kate shared her feelings about participating in circle in our sessions together:

In the beginning when we were meeting, I said to Chelsea, "I don't really like the idea of circle." Circle just made me feel uncomfortable. There were some things that were not sitting right with me. But I got over it.

Again, it takes time to build trust in the circle. Coco talked about how long it can take to build this trust:

It might take months to do, but it's so worth it...It takes work to get the circle there. I know when we start out, we just go around and say our names, that's it. Next day, we add one more thing, we add one more layer because it takes kids a while. Sometimes kids will sit with their hoodies on. They don't want to take part for months. They'll do that until they start to open up, and you can see their bodies actually open up, and their shoulders come back, and their heads come up. They take time to trust you and to trust each other, but it's worth doing. The circle work is really worth it.

As was evident with Cassandra's students, there will always be a few resistant students, but that did not stop Cassandra from leading circles, she chose to persist. As I shared with the group, I believe that the more we continue this work the easier it will be for students to adjust,

and eventually circles and other Indigenous ways of knowing and being will become second nature to our students.

Part of setting up a successful circle is going over the expectations or protocols. Coco talked a bit about this:

The teachings of the circle are so important too, such as the respect that when you come into the circle you hang your crap at the door, you leave all that negativity behind and you come and you remember that you have two ears and one mouth. So, it's so important to listen as much as it is to speak. Our hearts are all facing each other, so we speak from the heart.

However, as we discovered in our group, depending on the geographic location of the circle and who is leading the circle there are different protocols. For example, I was taught by John Harris that on Coast Salish territories you always start the circle to the right because the Coast Salish Nations follow the direction of the moon. On the territories on the east coast, some Nations start to the left because they follow the direction of the sun. Yet, I was also taught by an Indigenous educator in our district that whoever is leading the circle can decide which direction they want to go. Another protocol that our group received different information about was the idea of allowing students/participants to pass if they do not feel comfortable sharing. Christine and I were taught that you should always give students the option to pass, yet Cassandra and Astra had been taught that the expectation is that everyone participates, and you are not allowed to pass. And Astra's experience with not allowing students to pass was quite positive:

I was really surprised because I thought I'd have a few in my class who would be like, "No way!" But it was almost like because I didn't give pass as an option. It was just like, oh, it's the expectation that we're all sharing. So that was really interesting, because every other year that I've done it, I've done a pass, but then I started noticing that half the class wouldn't say anything, so that was interesting too.

However, as I shared previously about the student whose father had passed away, I do believe in certain circumstances that it is really important to give students the opportunity to pass.

A common topic that is discussed in circles is participants' ancestry. I was taught by John Harris that this is a common practice in some Indigenous communities because it helps people to make connections and it situates them in the current context by identifying where they come from. One of my Indigenous instructors from UVic also taught me that this is a great practice for non-Indigenous people to participate in because it locates them in the story of how they came to live on these lands. However, ancestry might not be common knowledge for some students, so I always give them at least a few days' notice so that they can talk to their families. Additionally, this would be another instance when I would allow students to pass, as Kate explained to us:

Talking about ancestry for me is a little bit uncomfortable because I don't know it and my family doesn't like to talk about it because there's trauma and everything else, so what do I say? Where am I from?

As I recorded in my journal, when our group talked about our ancestry, I believe it helped us to get to know one another better and create stronger connections, and even though Kate was not able to share where her ancestors were from, she shared her story and that helped the rest of the group to get to know her better.

While there may be some obstacles and some complexities that we, as educators, need to hold space for when participating in circles with our classes, the majority of our group had at least tried if not regularly led circles in their classes and found the experience to be positive:

CASSANDRA: It's going beautifully with my grade 9s, I have two blocks of grade 9.

They're super into it. They don't think anything otherwise, it just feels comfortable and natural to them.

COCO: I think circles are very powerful, and in all the classes that I've ever taught high school right down to kindergarten I've used a circle every single day and it takes time....,

but taking that time and getting that trust and building those relationships...it just makes your classroom life so much easier.

CHELSEA: By participating in circle together we get to know each other better and build relationships and this is the work of decolonization. Relationships are essential to decolonization.

For educators, the work of decolonizing our teaching practice can quickly become overwhelming, however, as Kate said, "Just baby steps, start...in a circle."

Valuing Other Forms and Sources of Knowledge

One topic that Christine brought up a few times in our sessions was this idea of what we value and what counts as knowledge and learning, and as I discussed in the literature review this is a significant aspect of decolonizing our teaching practice. It is clear what our education system values, as Paula shared:

The subjects are Science, Math, Social Studies, Language Arts and Physical Education and that's the core and then all the other stuff is just extra. Why isn't Indigenous education a core subject? It's just the last little bullet point on every subject of the curriculum.

Yet it is about more than what subjects are valued, it is also what we have been told learning should look like. Christine explained, "This piece of decolonization is starting to value things other than what looks like work, just traditionally 'oh you're sitting at a desk and you're doing something, and it's written and it's on this topic' and somehow that counts." Similarly, I shared with the group that, "For so long we've only valued this very specific idea of what knowledge is, but there's other ways of learning. There's other things that can be counted as knowledge." Part of valuing other forms of knowledge is understanding other perspectives. As part of my journey to decolonize my teaching practice, I participated in a five-part series of workshops organized by the Indigenous Education Department in our district. The workshops were led by the director of Indigenous education in our district and Carolyn Roberts, a Doctoral Candidate and Indigenous

Teaching Fellow in the Department of Education at Simon Fraser University. There is something Carolyn said in these workshops that has always stood out to me: decolonization is teaching more than one perspective (personal communication, April 27, 2022). Currently, the Western education system teaches a colonial perspective, so if educators want to decolonize their teaching practice they need to start teaching other perspectives. As Carolyn explained, educators need to be asking the following questions: Whose perspective is this? What other perspectives exist and how do I include these in my teaching? (personal communication, April 27, 2022).

Connecting with the Land

One source of knowledge that is significantly overlooked in our Western Education system is the land. There was some discussion in our group about how taking our classes outside is another form of holistic learning and how beneficial it can be for our students. Kate shared with our group how taking her class outside was especially beneficial for one student in particular; “What happens when we're outside is amazing. We have a selective mute, and the only time she talks is when we're outside.” Christine similarly described how she had talked to her class about the positive impact that going outside can have on a person’s mood:

I can see we're all half dead here, we're so exhausted. So, we're going to go up Mount Tolmie. The sun is shining and trust me, once we start walking, you will all just feel this lift. And sure enough, everyone's coming back, and we're invigorated.

Not only is taking students outside good for both their physical and mental health, but Kate also remarked that by spending that time outdoors the students are learning “more than we even imagined.” I noticed this as well when I looked at the final projects my students had created based on what they had learned from our Eco Ed class, especially, “some of the quieter kids. You see the things that they've written and wonder, *when did you learn that? How did you learn that?*” The land is teaching them even when it is not part of the lesson we have designed. Furthermore, as I discussed previously, connecting to the land in her English class, is what

helped Cassandra to make a connection with the Indigenous student that she was struggling to connect with. Thus, by creating stronger connections with the land, it can help educators to create stronger connections with their students.

Both Kate and I taught Eco Ed this year for the first time and neither one of us had much experience with outdoor or land-based learning. Our intention in teaching this course was part of our efforts to decolonize our teaching practice as Kate explained:

The choice to teach Eco Ed was one that was exciting for me because I've never done it before, and it was part of my own growth in connecting with the land and connecting students with the land and really learning about where we are.

As I mentioned before, as exploratory teachers, we see our students 3 days a week, and on the first day in my class we start with a sharing circle to check-in and see how everyone is doing, and to work on building relationships. On the second day we always go outside regardless of the weather. There is a forested park close to our school that we can walk to, and we have gardens at both our campuses that the students have been working on. On the third day I give the students some time to reflect on their learning and we end the week with a closing gratitude circle. Kate and I have both used the young adult version of *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Monique Grey Smith to help us teach Indigenous perspectives of the land and proper protocols for being out on the land. One of the assignments we have students complete is a land acknowledgement. Having students draw on their connection to the land is a really great way to help them develop meaningful land acknowledgements. Yet, I discovered in the past when I first taught students about land acknowledgements that many of them do not have a connection to the land or are at least unaware of their connection to the land. So, Kate asks the students to create a land acknowledgement at the beginning of the course and then again at the end to see how their connection to the land has changed.

Again, there are limitations to teaching this type of class that have been imposed by the system, namely the constraint of time. It is challenging to travel with the class to natural spaces

or spend quality time outside when we are limited to 56 minutes. However, it has been an incredible learning experience for both of us. Kate shared with the group:

I know I'll never teach the same again after teaching Eco Ed. It takes me an hour to walk to Kings Park and walk back and we do it every week and I would never not do that in a class. I took a group today and there's this one girl and she came into the park and she laid down on the ground and looked up and watched a woodpecker for about 40 minutes and she was so at peace and so safe. I was just like, "Oh my god this is so beautiful," yeah, it was pretty amazing.

I agree with Kate, and I can see the value of including land-based learning in my teaching practice.

Letting Go of Control: Learning to trust our students

Letting go of control has been a significant theme for me on my journey of trying to decolonize my teaching practice. Almost every single one of my journal entries talks about this idea of letting go of control:

It all comes back to this idea of needing to let go of control, which is clearly something that I will need to continue to work on. And this only proves how deeply rooted these behaviours are, we've been trained in a system that teaches us that we as teachers need to be in control, but what happens when we let go of that control?

I know that I am not the only teacher that feels this way because it often comes up in conversations with colleagues including the colleagues in this group. One of the Indigenous educators from our Indigenous Education Department recently made a comment to me about how many people who get into the profession of teaching are in it because they like to be in control, and they have a really hard time relinquishing that control. Astra also shared:

This is what brought me to this group was to actually talk to other people about what it feels like to be so unsure and to just try these sometimes chaotic things in your classroom and not know how it's going to go and then to not really know what to expect.

As anticipated, this concept of control in the education system came up in many of our discussions. For example, when we talked about being responsive to students' needs and giving up control by not following the plans we had created. Or when we talked about the bell system, which controls both students and teachers. The bell controls when we eat and go to the bathroom. Astra described how the bells enforced that control, "It's almost like the bells are like got to be here and...where are you? What are you doing? What's going on?"

So why is it so difficult for educators to give up control? As Christine explained, there can be a lot of fear around letting go of control, "I also didn't realize how much fear there is around the adult worrying that they can't manage off site or doing it differently...and losing control." I similarly shared this feeling of discomfort, "We all grew up in a colonized educational system, so we are so used to the teacher being in the front. And it's that discomfort of having to let go of control a little bit. And that's scary." Part of that fear comes from the fact that we do not know what is going to happen when we give up control. When we were discussing Cassandra's circle dilemma and giving up control by offering students the choice to decide whether to sit in the circle or not, Cassandra said, "I have to be prepared for the response if everybody chose to sit at their desks." Although it might be scary, as our group discussed, to decolonize our teaching practice we, as educators, need to learn to let go of control.

Dismantling the Hierarchy

One way that educators can start to let go of control is by dismantling the hierarchy that exists in the classroom. In the Western education system, the teacher is seen as an authoritative figure who is above the students in the hierarchy, and it is their job to transmit knowledge to the students. However, as Coco shared with me in an email, "Indigenous pedagogy recognizes the role of the teacher and students as more of a mentorship, rather than a hierarchical relationship." Astra commented on her experiences in attempting to dismantle the hierarchy in her classroom:

Building this reciprocity and acting more as a facilitator and I feel like that has taken me

up until now to get comfortable with doing. Instead of the teacher as the instructor, teacher at the front of the room all the time, it's taken a long time to get comfortable being more teacher-facilitator or teacher's guide.

Dismantling the hierarchy is not an easy process and from what I have discovered it is not easy for the students either. As I previously mentioned I tried to dismantle the hierarchy in my classes by allowing the students to decide what we would learn about, but their "responses were either things that were not logistically possible for us to do or things that I had already mentioned we would do." Like teachers, students are not yet accustomed to having control over their learning, so it will take time for them to adjust as well. However, this is something that we, as educators, can and should work through together, and as Astra pointed out, why not involve the students in the process of decolonizing our teaching practice? When we are unsure about something or we have questions, why not ask the students what they think? When our group was discussing the difference between FNESC's First Peoples Principles of Learning and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation's (BCTF) Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Coco suggested that it would be a great activity for students to look at the differences and similarities between the two. We know we do not have all the answers, and this is an opportunity for us to learn alongside our students. We might worry about how much the students are learning, but as Cassandra said, "It's really interesting how much I think they are actually learning and thinking about if we kind of give it over to them a little bit because kids are just so naturally curious."

As I have shared, this idea of dismantling the hierarchy has not been easy for me and I know it will take time, but there are some small steps that educators can take to start the process. As we discussed being responsive to students' needs, Christine talked about giving her students choice over their daily activities and collaborating with them to plan their day. Also, Coco shared how circles can level the playing field so that everyone in the circle, including the adults, are seen as equals.

Making Mistakes: Creating safe spaces to normalize not being the expert

A topic that came up numerous times during our discussions was the idea of making mistakes. Unfortunately, the colonial system has led people to believe that making mistakes is something that they should feel badly about. Jordana commented on something she had read about white supremacy, which is a defining component of colonialism:

I remember a few years ago reading something that was talking about the values of white supremacy and one of the values of white supremacy is perfectionism...And so I think, not that all teachers are the same, obviously we have different qualities, but like there are certain qualities of achievement that have been so woven through our entire education [system].

As I shared with the group, the expectation to be perfect can make people feel anxious when mistakes are made, and, as Jesse alluded to, perfectionism seems to be prevalent among educators. Not only does it make us, as educators, fearful of making mistakes, but it also inflates our sense of importance, as Kate expressed, there is this feeling that “I should be the one that knows it all or I have all the answers.” Again, when we think that we have all the answers or that our way of doing things is the only way, it perpetuates colonialism. Coco explained that “racism still occurs in our system and the thought of decolonization threatens some. I have found that for some, their egos are threatened because they are no longer the experts on the subject.” Likewise, Jordana talked about how she felt comfortable joining our group, but she knew that others would not:

I think that one of the things that I notice is just the ability to learn and to not be the expert and to be like, I'm putting myself in a position where other people know more than me and that holds people back.

So, in order to decolonize our teaching practice, we need to normalize not being the expert, making mistakes, and being wrong. As Fern said:

It's not too hard to say, "I was wrong," it's not like someone is attacking my identity. It's just like, "Ok I learned something today." How do we get to a place where one can be truly comfortable with being educated and learning something without making it...it's not about us, it's about learning to do right by people.

Kate similarly talked about how making mistakes is part of learning, "I don't really like to think it's bad, I just think it's new learning." Despite the learning that can take place, as Fern later said, "It is hard to make mistakes because we all want to do a good job." So, we discussed how educators can learn to accept making mistakes and being wrong. One of the ways we can do this is by creating safe communities in our schools, where we support one another and hold each other accountable. Astra questioned what this might look like:

How do we come together when we're talking about calling people out in a gentle way?
How do we create a forum where we can ask questions? What do you want to know?
What is not ok to say? Let's talk about words that we shouldn't be saying as professionals in our building.

By supporting one another, as we did in our group, educators can become more accustomed to making mistakes, however, it is equally as important for educators to hold each other accountable. We had a valuable discussion about *calling out* our colleagues by telling them when they have made a mistake or having a conversation with them about racism. As Jordana pointed out it can feel awkward, uncomfortable, and even scary, and she is not really sure how to respond in these situations:

If a teacher denies someone's experience, because I have had someone in a staff meeting be like, "What do you mean racism at school? Like what are you talking about?" I'm really not sure how to respond and I think I almost have in some ways a bit of a fear of having bigger group discussions because I know they can be really unsafe...even as a white person it can feel unsafe to have the conversation and then for anyone who is feeling targeted by it.

It is challenging to have these kinds of conversations and there can be significant repercussions. Cassandra described her experience of when she called out her department head:

But sometimes you do have to call it out and that's a tricky thing with your peers. I had an experience with that not too long ago when we were talking about the grad requirement. And there were a couple of folks who, the really predominant line that they were pushing along was this kind of begrudging on "Oh, we got to do this thing," and then the 'circle the wagons' metaphor came out and I was just like, "Holy mackerel I can't actually sit here and not say something." But it's interesting then when I did say something I also created, I think, some discomfort for everyone. I had to say, "This isn't a thing we should begrudge. Thank goodness this is a requirement now, because finally, these courses will actually go, even though they've been on the books for 15 years."...I think when you have to call a peer out sometimes and you really feel like you can't because it's such a public thing that it is uncomfortable for people who would prefer not to talk about it.

Cassandra was very concerned about the discomfort that she might have caused other people in the meeting, but we all thought that she had done the right thing. Jordana responded:

I think sometimes there's so much managing of other people's feelings, especially white people's egos. You shone a light on the discomfort that was already there. You did not create the discomfort. The discomfort was created by the comment that was racist. It's not wrong and I can imagine, I would feel exactly the same as you do, but you just said something about it, and that's not creating discomfort.

We also discussed the burden that taking a stand can put on individuals and how it can negatively affect people in different ways:

FERN: So, I think you're awesome, I think it was a great thing to do, but when I talk to people who do things like that, I'm always going to be cautious of them that they're not

always the one that has to be the person who steps forward when everybody else steps back. That's a hard burden to put on people's shoulders, to be the person who's always calling shit out.

CASSANDRA: Well, then you sort of weigh, I'm like, "Oh, it's only my second year here and things are going pretty swimmingly. Is this the moment that you're actually going to...? Or do I keep things going along nicely?"

CHELSEA: Well it also impacts your life by speaking out, especially because it was your department head, then that can make things more difficult for you going forward.

Yet, what a privilege it is that we, as white people, have the choice to make the decision whether we want to stand up or not. That is a privilege that many others do not have, and if we do not say something, who will? Jordana commented on this privilege:

White people are clearly in a uniquely privileged position to have these conversations. So if we are able to hold it together...and have that conversation in a way that people can hear, there's potentially a lot of good to be done from that.

We talked about how having these uncomfortable conversations is part of the work of decolonizing, and if we can create safe spaces and normalize making mistakes, hopefully these conversations will get easier. As I shared with the group, "In one of my IED courses at UVic...my prof called me out in the middle of me presenting to my class." Fortunately, I knew I was in a safe space with my instructor and my classmates who knew me and understood that making mistakes is a part of learning. So, how can educators create these safe spaces to have these conversations? As Fern said, "I think we need lots of tools in our tool kit." Astra talked about how sharing my story is one way that we can create this type of community among our colleagues where being vulnerable and making mistakes is accepted:

Being vulnerable, being like Chelsea, sharing your story "I was called out," and then people feel safer being like "Me too, I was also called out," or "I'm still learning." So it's not top down. It's not like I know everything about this topic and you don't, so you

shouldn't even try. But more like we're all learning this from so many entry points. And let's do this together and we're going to help each other.

Christine talked about how maybe the key is to practice having the conversations with people that we feel more comfortable with, such as our family members or maybe a close colleague. Astra also suggested prompting with a question, "I'm curious what made you say that? What made you say that statement?", so that you're actually forcing a reflection because then that might actually build some self-awareness." Christine also suggested being less direct and confrontational and Fern agreed:

Have I ever changed by somebody pointing a finger at me? Never, never, never, never. I get my back up and I'll probably double down if someone's pointing a finger at me. But if something is modeled or the confidence or the direct question or whatever, I'm more likely to change my mind...It's like triage. Sometimes you got to be in someone's face and sometimes, you don't, and how do you have the wisdom to know the difference?

It is challenging to know the difference. We also talked about how, as educators, we need to be mindful that people are at different places in their journey, and how we do not want to make educators fearful of doing this work. Kate explained to the group, "We have so many different entry points, and unless you talk about it and become aware of it, it just continues to happen." We agreed that educators wanting to do the work of decolonization or anti-racist work need to speak up when they know something is wrong, but they need to do it in a way that will allow the message to be received.

Additionally, Coco shared that, "It's important to let our kids know that we're on this journey and it's new for us and we're going to make mistakes." In this way, we can model for our students that it is ok for them to make mistakes too. I noticed in my classes that when we were talking about land acknowledgements some of my non-Indigenous students seemed uncomfortable talking about topics that are related to Indigenous peoples and I wrote this in my journal:

One student even said he didn't want to say what he thought reconciliation meant because he was worried that it would offend someone...They also seemed unsure of the right words to use. If we're uncomfortable and worried about making mistakes, of course students are too, they also do not want to be called out for being racist. We have to model that making mistakes is ok, but we need to be mindful of how we do this in order to ensure that it is a safe space for all students, especially our Indigenous students. By showing our students that it is acceptable to make mistakes, hopefully the next generation will grow up to show more humility and a willingness to admit to and learn from their mistakes.

Chapter 5: What I Have Learned

I have learned a great deal from participating in these group discussions with my colleagues. Many of the experiences and ideas that we shared confirmed what I learned from my literature review and the courses I participated in as part of the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives program at UVic. First, as educators, to decolonize our teaching practice, we need to think and teach differently, we need to hold space for complexities, we need to prioritize relationships, and we need to hold each other accountable. Additionally, I believe that through education we can work towards true decolonization, which Tuck and Yang (2012) define as the “repatriation of Indigenous land” (p.1). Finally, there are many obstacles and challenges that prevent educators from decolonizing their teaching practice, however, I believe it is both possible and necessary to work through these challenges and obstacles.

Thinking and Teaching Differently

As I have explained, many Western-informed educators are looking for easy step-by-step guidelines, but the process of decolonizing one’s teaching practice is more about changing the way that educators think about teaching and education. Accordingly, decolonization is going to require a lot more work than just following some step-by-step guidelines. We, as educators, have been taught to teach in a certain way; now we need to go through the process of unlearning and re-educating ourselves so that we can teach in a way that is more in line with Indigenous knowledge systems.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, we, as educators, and our society are accustomed to the teacher being the one who is the authoritative figure and the one who is in control in the classroom. This idea that we need to be in control of everything our students do is a colonial concept. If we can control our students, we can control what they do and think so that they do not disrupt the status quo. As discussed, educators can begin to let go of this control by dismantling the hierarchy in our classrooms. Nonetheless, educators are similarly controlled by the education system: teach this, do not teach that, assess students this way etc., which is why

researchers Carroll et al. (2020) explained by referencing the work of Mignolo that to decolonize their practice educators must participate in an act of “epistemic disobedience” (p. 10). Carroll et al. (2020) further clarified that “this ‘delinking’ process, or ways in which one delinks/refuses these [white settler colonial] types of knowledge systems (authority, economy, knowledge and subjectivity, and race, gender, and sexuality), is part of a lifelong journey of self-reflection and education” (p. 10).

We, as educators, have been taught that the Western knowledge system is the only knowledge system that counts, however decolonizing our teaching practice means we need to not only acknowledge other knowledge systems, but we need to adopt these other knowledge systems to guide our practice. As Paula shared, the First Peoples Principles of Learning are not only lessons that we need to teach our students, but they are also principles that we need to embody as teachers. We have also been taught that learning happens in specific ways such as reading a book or repeating a skill over and over again. However, there are many ways to learn, and many of us know that, and we know that our system fails some of our students because they learn in a way that is different from what the education system offers them. Therefore, we need to start looking at other ways of knowing and learning. As suggested by Carroll et al. (2020) educators need to self-reflect and examine their own teaching practice to see how they perpetuate colonialism through their teaching. They need to ask themselves, “What is my understanding of knowledge and learning? What type(s) of knowledge do I value? What do I value as learning? How can I change the way that I think about knowledge and learning and how do I bring that new understanding into my teaching practice?” This is difficult when we, as teachers, have been educated in the same system. How can we learn about other forms of knowledge or other ways of learning? Fortunately, there are professional development opportunities that focus on Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, and there are courses and programs that are offered through post-secondary institutions, such as the program I am

currently enrolled in. Unfortunately, there is no quick solution to decolonizing one's teaching practice, educators need to take the initiative to self-reflect and educate themselves.

Holding Space for Complexities

As demonstrated by the inquiry partners, the work of decolonizing our teaching practice involves asking a lot of questions. Usually when we ask questions, we expect to find answers. When I first began my journey to discover how I could decolonize my teaching practice, I was searching for clear and concrete answers that would tell me exactly what I needed to do. Like many teachers I wanted a step-by-step guide that would lay it all out for me (Calderon et al., 2021, Tanaka, 2015a). However, I have discovered that not only is this not possible, but it is a very colonial way of approaching learning. Instead, I have learned that I may not find an answer, or I might find multiple answers that contradict each other. During one of our discussions, I shared with the group that the instructor for my course called Indigenous Environmental Activism and Education told my class about a book she was reading called *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*, and she explained that in this book the author, Machado de Oliveira (2021), discussed this concept of *holding space for complexities*. This is a concept that I have become very familiar with throughout my journey. Often when I feel that I finally understand a specific aspect of what it means to decolonize and Indigenize my teaching practice, someone will offer me a different perspective that might be completely contradictory to the "answer" that I thought I had figured out. So, I have learned that often there is no right or wrong answer, the world, and the concept of decolonization in particular, is much more nuanced than that. So, as educators, we need to get used to holding space for complexities and know that we will never have all the answers. As I shared with our group:

I think...this place of being unsure is such a good place for us to be in. And I think that we need to be in that place of being unsure, and become, not comfortable because we

don't need to be comfortable, but we have to get used to being in this place of being unsure. And I think that's good because it means we're questioning.

Previously I explained that I think most of the group members would agree that these discussions were very beneficial to them, but I would also say that many of our questions were left unanswered. So, we learned to hold space for complexities. For example, when asking a question about the difference between the FNESC's First Peoples Principles of Learning and the BCTF's Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Kate responded by saying, "Well I mean it doesn't answer my question. I'm just glad that I'm not the only one that has the question because what do you put up? Or does it matter?"

The need to hold space for complexities was evident in many of our discussions, such as when we talked about resources. There were resources that many of us had been using that suddenly we were told that we could no longer use for reasons that we were not yet able to understand. Kate discussed a complexity that she experienced as a librarian:

One thing that I wanted to mention, something that really sat with me. This was about a year ago I went to a workshop and it was about decolonizing the library. It was about where books are situated in the library and kind of what the label does...And I had always had this idea that LGBTQ stickers on spines, like you do a rainbow on the spines, so that you know what that book is about. And I was always against putting them all in the same place. "Othering" is how I saw it in my head. And I remember I used to go around to the libraries and consult a little bit a few years ago and I remember walking into Craigflower library, and they have a huge Indigenous population, and I walked in and they had all of their Indigenous books on one shelf. It was so against everything I believed; they were othering...And then this last [workshop] I went to, she said, "You're not othering you're amplifying," and I was like "Ohhhh" and it just clicked for me and now for the last year it's really felt different.

Later that night, I went home and reflected on this story in my journal because in my Educators Working Towards Reconciliation as Allies and Activists course at UVic, we had recently had the Education Librarian as a guest speaker, and she had discussed the same topic:

Another discussion topic that came up tonight and one that has come up for me numerous times throughout my journey is this idea that there is always another perspective to consider, and just when I think I've figured something out someone will flip it around and then I no longer know what to think. [In regard to Kate's story] both points make sense to me and I wouldn't say one is right and one is wrong.

Like I shared in my reflection, I notice these complexities all the time and I am learning to be able to hold space for them.

We also noticed a lot of complexities in our discussion around racism. There were a lot of questions and not a lot of answers. Paula actually found comfort in holding space for complexities as she referred to the book *Wayi Wah!*:

This is actually the little blurb called epidemic racism on page 100, but it says understanding just how pervasive various forms of racism are in education systems will continue to be our work in the upcoming years. So it's like, oh thank God [Chrona]'s acknowledging that we don't understand yet. All of these things that we're trying to figure out. We know there's racism, but we don't know what that looks like yet. And that's ok¹⁸. And we're going to try to work to figure it out. So having someone like her who you read this and you're like, "Oh my god you're amazing, like we still don't know. Ok, good. That's ok." Like you said too, Fern, you have to be ok with not knowing but be aware of it and then work through that.

¹⁸ Paula is not suggesting that it is ok that racism exists in our education system, rather that because many, if not all, of us have been raised in a racist society, we tend to be ignorant to how racism shows up in our system and it may take some time for us to become aware of and understand those blind spots and then take action.

What a relief it is that we do not have to have understand everything right now, that we can take our time to fully understand and work through it in a thoughtful way.

It was also evident in Cassandra's self-reflection about drumming that she was holding space for complexities. Indigenous drumming is promoted in our school district. There are Indigenous educators who go to the schools and teach educators and students how to make drums and how to play them. Most schools in our district have a drumming steward and the drumming stewards came together this year for a professional development opportunity. Yet, a close Indigenous friend of Cassandra's questioned whether it was appropriate that we were drumming. Later in the discussion I questioned, "We want to honor [Indigenous] culture and bring it into our schools, but should we not be doing that?" Kate and Fern shared a similar sentiment during our discussion around the practice of circles. Fern thought maybe Kate's Indigenous students might not want to participate because they feel this cultural practice has been co-opted by white people. And Kate questioned why circles were even considered an Indigenous practice, "Why is sitting in a circle and going around and sharing, why is that automatically tied to Indigenous culture? Because people for years and years have sat around in circles and shared." Should we continue drumming in schools? Should we continue to practice sharing circles? As our group discussed, all we can do is keep asking the questions and do what we think is best until we learn otherwise.

This concept of holding space for complexities is something that we can share with our students as well. In fact, Astra discussed how she was approaching this concept in her classes. She explained,

So students are looking at James Douglas and what did he do? And taking a perspective that might have been like, "Oh he was amazing because he did this, but also he did this" and how can we see that [complexity]?

Similar to their teachers, students have been taught to believe that there is only one correct answer; Sir James Douglas is either a good person or a bad person, he cannot be both. I have

also noticed in my classes that when I ask my students what they think, I must be very clear with them that there is no right answer, I just want to know what they think, and some students really struggle with this. Thus, it is just as important for our students to learn how to hold space for complexities.

Finally, teachers need to get used to not just holding space for complexities, but also being open to receiving whatever the answer may be. As Fern said, “I feel like it comes back to the humility of being wrong again? Ask the question and then be told that actually that's not an appropriate question to ask.”

Relationships Are Key

Whether it is relationships with students, colleagues or Indigenous communities, it is evident that relationships are essential in the work of decolonization. When I first began thinking about how I would decolonize my teaching practice, I can remember learning from various people how important it is to develop relationships with Indigenous people. I also remember thinking how it seemed forced or unauthentic to me to develop a relationship with someone knowing that I had a deliberate intention for developing that relationship. I have since discovered that it is not about forcing a relationship, rather it's about being intentional and open to new opportunities. As part of my efforts to decolonize my teaching practice I reached out to our Indigenous colleagues in IED to ask for support, I joined our union's Indigenous Education Committee so that I could support the work of Indigenous education in our district, and I enrolled in the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives program at UVic. Through these experiences I developed authentic relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Much of what I have learned about decolonizing my teaching practice is as a result of the relationships that I have built with my colleagues from this inquiry group, my classmates and instructors in the Teaching and Learning Indigenous Perspectives program at UVic, and my Indigenous colleagues in the GVSD. These individuals have shared their knowledge, experiences, perspectives, and teachings with me, they have encouraged me to question and

reflect on my own teaching practice, and they have held me accountable by helping me to understand my colonial ways of thinking. I truly believe that the work of decolonizing my teaching practice would not be possible without these relationships.

I discussed the importance of collaboration as a way of asking questions in Chapter 4, but I would like to further discuss how collaboration is significant in terms of building relationships and creating accountability among colleagues, which is important in regard to educators decolonizing their teaching practice. I believe that many educators choose to collaborate with colleagues that they have a positive relationship with, but I also believe that collaboration can be a way to *develop* more positive relationships with our colleagues. Several of the teachers in the group discussed collaborative projects that they had worked on together. Astra, Fern, and Paula created a collaborative project for Language Arts and Social Studies about the history of Canada pre and post contact, the residential school system, Truth and Reconciliation, and the 94 Calls to Action. Christine and Fern had also collaborated on a Language Arts project based on white privilege. And Kate and I often collaborated on ideas for our Eco Ed classes. Not that comfort is essential, but there is a sense of comfort when educators know that they are not alone, and that what they are teaching is not solely based on their own ideas and perspectives. Collaboration, in this sense, can create some accountability between those who are collaborating. When working with a colleague we may be able to offer a different perspective or help to identify a bias that others may not have been aware of, which is essential in the work of decolonization. Kate explained that, "Having a conversation...might allow us to open up a little bit more and decolonize our own practice."

As our group discussed decolonizing our own teaching practices, we also talked about how we could support our colleagues in this work. In our discussions, we acknowledged that our colleagues may be at various stages in their journey and as Jordana shared some of our colleagues do not believe that racism exists in our schools. Consequently, as I have experienced and heard from other teachers, even talking about decolonizing our teaching

practice can cause significant tension between colleagues. Many years ago, as part of some training I had to do to become a youth camp counselor, I was taught that you must earn the right to be heard. People will be much more likely to listen to you if you have a positive relationship with them. Thus, developing positive relationships with our colleagues may make it easier to support our colleagues in decolonizing their teaching practice.

Finally, as I have already discussed, connecting with the local nations may not come easily, and like any relationship it will take time, however, I cannot stress enough how important it is. Indigenous groups across Canada are also working to decolonize and I believe that we have a greater possibility of achieving decolonization if we work together.

A “Move to Comfort”

While relationships are key, I have noticed a tendency among educators, especially those who tend to be more familiar with one another, including myself, that there is what I refer to as a “move to comfort”¹⁹. We have a natural desire to feel comfortable and to help our colleagues feel comfortable. For example, I noticed in our first session that we spent most of the time discussing resources, however, based on what I learned from my literature review, decolonizing our teaching practice needs to be about more than including Indigenous content into our current teaching practice. So, I decided to share what I had learned with the group at the beginning of the second session as a way of suggesting that we should focus on more than resources. After listening to the recording of the second session, I noticed and documented in my observations that when I shared this sentiment with the group it:

¹⁹ Researchers Tuck and Yang (2021) use the phrase “settler moves to innocence” to define the actions of settlers that are intended to relieve their guilt and complicity, and ensure a future that benefits them (p.1). I am using the phrase “move to comfort” to define the actions that settlers take to comfort one another and encourage those feelings of innocence. For example, saying things such as, “it’s ok that you said that, you’re a good person, you didn’t mean any harm”.

kind of shut down further conversation about resources, and I also seem[ed] to backtrack a little bit maybe because no one [was] agreeing with me or maybe because I want[ed] to comfort others by saying that it's ok to talk about resources.

Paula also talked about how white fragility can influence those of us who are white to want to surround ourselves with colleagues who are going to support us and tell us that we are doing a good job:

It goes back to the white fragility thing, of like, well me and the wonderful person that I am, I would never do anything the wrong way because I'm lovely and I'm wonderful. And so I'm going to make sure that I find someone that's going to be like, "You're doing great!" and then I'm like, "I know I'm doing great."

Certainly, having supportive colleagues is very important and I will not argue with that, however, teachers also need colleagues who are going to be honest with them when they make a mistake. When we, as educators, see our colleagues being hard on themselves about a mistake that they have made, we naturally want to comfort them, but what is more important is that we help them to learn from their mistake. If our colleagues' actions or words have caused any kind of harm, we cannot simply dismiss it as a simple mistake. We can help them to work through it and take the steps to make things right, but we have to hold them accountable. In a similar manner, one of my instructors at UVic cautioned us about the "guise of professionalism" (Chaa'winisaks, personal communication, March 2023). Claiming that we cannot say something to a colleague because it crosses professional boundaries only perpetuates the harms of colonialism. Our students come first, and we need to protect them when another educator is acting in a way that may cause harm. We also need to show students that racism is not ok and will not be tolerated. As discussed in Chapter 4, evidently, we have to be thoughtful in how we address our colleagues and there are many ways that we can approach these challenging conversations. However, the important thing is that we speak up, otherwise racism and colonialism continue and nothing changes.

It's All About the Land

Although there was some conversation about taking students outside and the benefits of outdoor learning experiences, we did not really examine or discuss what it means to connect with the land from an Indigenous perspective. Nor did we discuss the topic of Indigenous land rights. However, based on what I have learned in my courses at UVic, I know how important connection to the land and Indigenous land rights are to the work of decolonization. In fact, as I mentioned previously, researchers Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that the term decolonization should only be used when referring to the “repatriation of Indigenous land” (p. 1). Colonization is and has always been about land. And if people were encouraged to build connections with the land and see the land as a living and spiritual being, as many Indigenous people do, then people would feel differently about extracting resources from it, and this could impact the economy of our country. Thus, I think one of the reasons that we did not have a lot of discussion around connecting to the land is because, as educators who have been raised in a Eurocentric system, we still do not fully understand what it means to connect to and learn from the land from an Indigenous perspective. So, one way that we can decolonize our teaching practice is by better understanding Indigenous perspectives of the land, as well as developing our own connection to the land, and helping our students to do the same.

Kate and I wanted to teach the Eco Ed exploratory class to help both us and our students connect to the land and gain a better understanding of Indigenous peoples' connection to the land. Although it was a great experience and I do believe that some students developed a greater connection to the land, I found that I was limited by the timetable and was not able to provide students with the experience that I had expected. We were limited by how far we could walk in 56 minutes and the types of activities that we could do. I am planning to return to teaching a grade 6 advisory class where I will have more time and flexibility with my students so that I can try some of the same activities that I was not able to try with my Eco Ed classes. I also want to enrich the Eco Ed curriculum that I was teaching. As part of my program at UVic, I took

two courses called Indigenous Environmental Activism and Education, and Educators Working Towards Reconciliation as Allies and Activists. In both courses I learned a lot about Indigenous land rights and how Indigenous peoples are consistently denied sovereignty over land that legally belongs to them. I was shocked and appalled by what I learned, yet being fully aware of the racist system in which we live, I should not have been. Admittedly, I do not pay much attention to the news, and I am sure there are educators who are more aware of these issues. However, I think I could confidently say that many are not. As I defined earlier, the goal of decolonization is to dismantle the structural and ideological elements of colonial domination. I will discuss in the next section how it is challenging for educators to dismantle the structural elements, but I do believe that we have the ability to dismantle the ideological elements. So, as part of my process of decolonizing my teaching practice, I want to create more awareness among students about Indigenous land issues and offer them another perspective of the land. After all, we are teaching the next generation of leaders; the ones who will make decisions in the future about Indigenous land rights. If students are better informed, then hopefully they will make better decisions than our current leaders.

Another important aspect of understanding our relationship to the land is learning how to self-situate. I provided an example of how I self-situate in the introduction, but I am still learning how to do this. Our group also went through the process of self-situating when we went around the circle and talked about our ancestry. In order to understand our relationship to the land, we need to learn about and share the story of how we came to live on stolen land. Where did our ancestors come from? And under what circumstances did they move to what is known today as Canada? Self-situating helps those of us who are settlers to understand what role we play in colonization and to recognize that we are not innocent bystanders. We are the beneficiaries of colonization and we have to acknowledge this. As previously discussed, another way that we, as educators, can acknowledge our relationship to the land and teach our students about Indigenous land issues is by teaching them about land acknowledgements. Land

acknowledgements are common practice in many schools and most of our students have heard them since they were in kindergarten. However, as I discussed with my students, a lot of the land acknowledgements we hear are disingenuous. Therefore, it is important for us as teachers to educate our students about why we do land acknowledgements and how to create one that is meaningful.

Although Tuck and Yang (2012) may disagree with using the term decolonization for the work that we are doing in schools, I do believe that by helping our students to create a stronger connection to the land, it will help to make Tuck and Yang's (2012) definition of decolonization possible. If our students learn to develop a relationship with the land and understand the connection that Indigenous peoples have with the land, and the struggles that they have in trying to reclaim their land, they may grow up to create change in those systems that currently prevent the repatriation of Indigenous lands.

What is Preventing Educators from Decolonizing Their Teaching Practice?

As our group discussed *how educators are working to decolonize their teaching practice within a colonial system*, it also became apparent to me *what is preventing educators from decolonizing their teaching practice*. In taking on the task of decolonizing our teaching practice, there are evidently going to be many obstacles and challenges. After all, we are attempting to change the dominant ideology of our society. As previously mentioned, one of our greatest obstacles is the education system itself. Again, in order to decolonize our society, we have to dismantle both the colonialist structures and ideologies, and I believe that, as educators, we can work towards changing the ideologies, but it is much more challenging to change the structures. As Coco explained, "Everything's chopped up into little blocks and units and that's not the Indigenous way. Everything is not linear. It's circular and holistic...But we are stuck in this education system." The focus of my research inquiry was to figure out how we could decolonize our teaching practice *within a colonial system*. Indigenous education scholars and imperfect accomplices have ideas, and we know what it is that we are trying to accomplish, but we are

limited by this colonial system. This can be a very frustrating and confusing task and some of the group members expressed their feelings about doing this work. For example, Astra shared:

When I think about decolonizing, I think about it as a systems approach in school and then it gets confusing because we're working within a system that is a colonial system and we're trying to dismantle that and how do we do that?

Jane also expressed similar feelings:

In many ways it feels that for all the things we as individual teachers can do, there's just so much that it feels like we don't have control over, such as access at a district level to resources with the Nation that we live in. So, yes, I can do a lot, but I can only do so much from down here.

Jordana also talked about feeling so limited in what she could do:

I mean everything has been challenging this year from the scheduling to the split classes [and] all of that stuff really affects the way advisory teachers are able to teach. How can we do some of these things within what we're working with? Because it has felt that at every turn we are being stymied now. You can't do this because of music, you can't do this because of exploratory, you can't do this because of class composition.

Christine and Fern similarly talked about how everything we do in school is controlled by the system, whether it is bells or schedules, it all comes from a colonial system. I also wrote in my journal, "Colonialism is like a monster that controls everything and it's so hard to try to escape it." Likewise Jordana commented on the *Wayi Wah!* book:

[Chrona] explains that this is the system that we're dealing with. This is what we live within. So, this is what we have to do right now. But how do you work within a system that is so broken in so many ways?

Christine explained how disheartening this can be for educators:

It feels like what you had said before when the system's so broken and when you are so invested with your heart and wanting to connect and make a difference for kids and you

see the system failing and you feel like you can't do anything and it's heartbreaking and then it happens over and over again.

The system hinders teachers in so many ways, and as I shared with our group even the idea of trying to incorporate Indigenous education into our Western education system seems impossible. Fern used an analogy of renovating a house versus building a new house:

What came to my brain was, isn't it so much easier trying to build a house from scratch than trying to renovate it? We've got this existing structure and trying to add on a floor or raise it up and put a new foundation in, it's easier to destroy it all and build it from the ground up. But we can't destroy the education system, well maybe we could.

The decolonization of our education system can feel like a hopeless task, but as Fern also shared, "This is all so complicated, and then I just come back to the point that everybody's made in some different way is that we do the best we can given what we can do."

As I discussed in the literature review, governments and school districts are starting to make attempts to work towards decolonizing the education system, however, they struggle to implement these changes. Cassandra suggested maybe this change needs to come from the bottom up instead; "If teachers were to empower their administrators to be able to be vulnerable, then administrators could empower their higher ups to be vulnerable, which is the way to move through the system." Although this is an admirable notion, it creates more responsibility for the small number of us who are doing the work, as I wrote in my journal, "It feels overwhelming to try to change a whole system when there are so few of us who are working towards this goal." However, at the time of writing this our group had invited our administrators to join us for one of our meetings to discuss how we might start to decolonize our staff meetings. Then at the following staff meeting, staff sat in three smaller circles, and we began our staff meeting with a circle. The feedback from colleagues about this change to our staff meeting was positive. It is a small step, but it demonstrates that change is possible. At one point in our discussions, Fern asked, "Are we doomed to failure in the sense of a greater overall

picture or is success going to be picking away at it?" I believe the same thing that I did then, "I think it's just picking away at it for a really long time."

Beyond the system itself, there are many other obstacles or challenges that educators will face as they are working to decolonize their teaching practice, and what follows are some of the obstacles that were discussed most frequently in our group: Fear, Anxiety and Discomfort, Educator Overwhelm, and Working Against the Dominant Ideology.

Fear, Anxiety, and Discomfort

As I conducted the literature review for this inquiry, I found a number of articles that discussed how fear, anxiety, and discomfort prevented many educators from working to decolonize their teaching practice. This was evident in our group as well, I think almost all of us at one point or another talked about feeling fear, anxiety, or discomfort in doing this work. I even included discomfort and anxiety as potential risks on my participant consent forms. And it was not only us, but we also talked about fear, anxiety, and discomfort being a significant reason as to why some of our colleagues were not engaging in this work. Coco remarked, "I have met educators that are very uncomfortable with decolonization, and they become quite defensive." As much as we talked about feeling fear, anxiety, or discomfort, we also talked about wanting to feel comfortable. When Kate introduced herself to the group, she talked about how she was just in the beginning stage of learning about Indigenous pedagogy, and she said, "I am here to feel more comfortable." Yet, in a later session, Kate told us about a workshop she had attended and what the speaker had told the group: "He said, 'If you're not feeling uncomfortable right now, you're not doing the work' and there was lots of different people in the room and we all needed to hear that." In fact, all educators need to hear that message because the nature of this work is going to make those of us who are settlers feel uncomfortable.

That is not to say that the feeling of fear is not justified, as I have discussed previously there are many aspects of decolonizing one's teaching practice that could make educators fearful or anxious. As educators, we are afraid of using resources that are not appropriate, we

are afraid of making mistakes, we are afraid of letting go of control in our classrooms, we are afraid of being called a racist, we are afraid to examine our own biases, we are afraid to have challenging conversations, and some of us are simply afraid of change. The reality is that there are a lot of things that could make educators fearful and uncomfortable, but we cannot let that stop us from doing the work. As Carroll et al. (2020) explained we have to find a way to work through the fear, anxiety, and discomfort.

Accordingly, Carroll et al. (2020) recommended practices such as mindfulness as a way to work through these difficult feelings, and this is one of the reasons why our group started each of our sessions with a mindfulness practice. Of course, as Jordana explained, mindfulness is not a practice that works for everyone, so educators must find a strategy that will work for them. Carroll et al. (2020) also discussed the importance of collaboration:

Although many educators felt uneasy about including Indigenous content and epistemologies into their classrooms, many others were eager to collaborate with other educators, administrators, and Indigenous peoples to include these perspectives in their classrooms. (p.17)

As I mentioned before, there is a sense of comfort that comes when educators work together and know that they are not alone in this work. Paula also made a suggestion when we were talking about vetting resources:

I wonder if to rectify something like this happening in the future and to prevent that fear of making mistakes to have a principles of teaching or something, not about how teachers should conduct themselves, but things that we should be wary of as we're using resources and talking about things and if we had some kind of guidelines.

Again, there is this desire to have someone tell us, as teachers, exactly what to do so that we do not make mistakes, and as I said before, I do not think it is possible to have a guide that gives us all the answers in black and white because this work is so much more complicated than that.

We also should not necessarily see our feelings of discomfort as all bad. As Paula explained, our feelings of discomfort can be an indicator that what we are doing is not right, and these feelings can force us to ask ourselves some important questions. Discomfort can also lead to change as Fern shared with the group, “Some of the strongest leaders in our school, people that I admire the most, cause a lot of discomfort because they say things that need to be said.” Discomfort can lead us to question and then change how we are conducting our classes, which is part of decolonizing our teaching practice.

As exemplified in the literature review, teaching Indigenous pedagogy and content is not optional, it is our responsibility as educators, so we cannot continue to let our fear, anxiety and discomfort hold us back. Carrol et al. (2020) explained:

Moving from giving space to reflect and learn is important, but action is the ultimate goal. To overcome the ‘fear,’ teachers feel they have, they should focus on what they can do in their classrooms. Each small activity, resource, or conversation is important and needed in a colonial education system. (p. 17)

Educator Overwhelm

The obstacle that seemed most prevalent amongst our group was educator overwhelm. As an educator myself, I am familiar with this feeling, however, I did not expect this topic to come up in our discussions as often as it did. While some of the group members actually voiced their own experience of being overwhelmed, there seemed to be a general understanding that all teachers are overwhelmed right now. Here are some of the sentiments that were shared by our group:

“I kind of feel like right now I don't have a lot of that capacity to do that.”

“When everybody is so depleted, none of us can hold the school up on our shoulders.”

“There's so many colleagues that I know are just beaten down.”

“I have to retreat inwards and not keep fighting because I'm tired and I need to put my energy back into my class.”

“It's like whatever I'm done, and you retreat because you've just hit the same wall over and over again. And I think, unfortunately, that's where many people are.”

“Just seeing how burnt-out people are and I know it's not just our school.”

As educators, we have many responsibilities and we feel pressure from so many directions, it is not surprising that we feel overwhelmed. All day long we are managing student behaviours and expectations, and we are trying to create lessons that are engaging and meet the needs of all our students. Fern shared how tiresome it can be to manage student behaviour:

I don't always want to be the one in the hallway telling kids to get to class, but no one else is doing it. No one else is shuffling kids along, so why am I going to be the only teacher up in the hallway? Because everybody's exhausted, nobody wants to go up there and have conflict with the same kids all the time.

Jordana and I both talked about how defeating it can be to put so much effort into our lesson plans only to be met with student apathy or complaints. As I have already expressed, the bell system and our daily schedules also add stress to our days. Not to mention the constant changes as Coco shared, “In the last three years from curriculum to assessment to reporting, it's always something new and changing, and it's hard to keep up. Teaching is a hard job.” A couple of group members also commented on how things have become harder since the COVID pandemic. It seems like a lot of small burdens, but as Jordana explained, it all adds up:

A couple of weeks ago I was feeling like I was a great teacher and right now I'm really not, it seems like everything is not working great and kids aren't happy and when we see a lot of kids who aren't happy to be at school it's really hard. I was just trying to make a child protection call and all of those things that just kind of add up.

And as Jane pointed out in referring to the book *Wayi Wah!*, eventually it can feel like there is nothing left to give:

How are you going to pour from an empty bucket? I don't know what page it was on, but it was one of [Chrona's] little anecdotes where she's talking about the student who took

her class three times and she was like, “I should have done better. I should have given more resources.” I was like, “But should it have been on only you as the teacher?” At what point do we say, “I cannot do everything. I cannot provide a curriculum for all these students and individualize every student’s needs, I just can’t. I want to do it. I have done it and I’m burnt-out, I’m done, I can’t do anything anymore.”...The system is eating not just the Indigenous students but the teachers alive, as well.

As a result, teachers create boundaries to protect themselves. Jordana told us, “The only reason that I’ve been able to survive as a teacher is having certain boundaries.”

Without even talking about the efforts of decolonizing our teaching practice, the demands on teachers are high. Thus, when teachers are told that they need to put in more effort to decolonize their teaching practice it can become overwhelming. Jordana shared this with the group:

Bringing me back to this question about what prevents you from decolonizing your teaching practice...basically...I think we’ve probably all come up against our own moments of resistance or, “Oh, this is too hard or too this or that.” And for me, it’s mostly been around just that feeling of overwhelm.

There is no denying how important the work of decolonization is, but it does demand a lot from teachers. For example, we talked about how building relationships with our students is essential to decolonizing our teaching practice, but this requires a lot of effort and as Jordana explained:

In some ways, and maybe I’m wrong about this, but putting relationships at the front, and I do think there’s a slightly different way of doing that in decolonizing your practice, but I guess I find it personally challenging because it maybe comes up against some of those boundaries that I feel like I have established to protect myself.

Not to mention it takes a lot of time to build meaningful relationships. For instance, Cassandra used her prep time to connect with a student to build a stronger relationship, however prep time is normally a time that most teachers use to prepare lessons and complete assessments. It is

amazing that she was able to do that, but this might not be an option for other educators. Thus, it begs the question: how far do teachers go to build these relationships? We also talked about self-reflection and how this work can bring up some difficult feelings as we examine our unconscious biases. Thus, as Jordana shared in referring to Chapter 4 in *Wayi Wah!*, “So many of the things that are being asked here take people who are very psychologically healthy.” It is really challenging to do any work, let alone the work of decolonizing our teaching practice, if an educator is not mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy. This is why when our group discussed the importance of holistic teaching and learning, it is not just for the benefit of our students, it is for our benefit too.

I asked this question in my journal, “If teachers are struggling because they are overwhelmed with all that they are expected to do, how will they have the time to learn about Indigenous knowledge and ways of being?” I understand that there are “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p.1), and we, as educators, need to ask ourselves honestly why we are not doing the work, but I do not believe anyone in the group was trying to make excuses to not do the work. I also think it is important to note that even though many of us talked about feeling overwhelmed, these women showed up once a month and gave up two hours of their time in hopes of improving their practice. As Fern said, “It feels like we're all beat down and yet we're still coming to this. There are people in the building who have a little spark and pilot light. I'm not Susie Sunshine, but it feels like it's something.”

Cassandra actually talked about how decolonizing our practice may be a way to decrease educator overwhelm. If we, as teachers, can dismantle the hierarchy in our classrooms and give more responsibility to the students and participate in an act of epistemic disobedience, this may ease some of the overwhelm. In fact, we can blame a lot of educator overwhelm on the principles of colonialism. As Coco pointed out, “It's always that push, more, more, more, be more perfect, produce more, make more money, more power. It's so exploitative.” This pressure to produce more and accomplish more is a value of capitalism,

which is a significant component of colonialism. I listened to a podcast that featured Tricia Hersey from the Nap Ministry and she explained that taking time to rest and take care of ourselves is an act of decolonization (Doyle et al., 2022). The importance of self-care was mentioned a few times during our discussions. Astra talked about how self-care was a consistent focus of her staff meetings at a previous school and some of our group members expressed a desire for self-care to become part of our staff meetings as well. We cannot let educator overwhelm prevent us from doing this work, but we do need to look after ourselves because as Jane said, "You can't pour from an empty bucket."

Pressure to Follow Expectations or "Rules" (curriculum, assessment, schedules etc.).

One contributing factor to the feeling of overwhelm that many educators experience is the pressure to follow certain expectations or rules. Our group also discussed how this pressure seems to hold people back from decolonizing their teaching practice. As previously discussed, decolonizing our teaching practice requires us, as educators, to teach differently and that is challenging to do when we have been trained to teach a certain way. Coco shared this sentiment with the group:

It's hard for us because we've been trained, we've got to get through this, we have to report, we have to assess, we have to be accountable. But if you're decolonizing your class, just remember that's ok. That relationship you're building is so important. That nature walk is so important because you're giving them a chance to connect with nature.

Since we were students ourselves, we have been taught that we have to follow certain expectations. Just as it does not feel good to make mistakes, for many of us it also does not necessarily feel good to break the "rules" or not follow expectations. Christine shared with the group, "I feel like it comes back to this fear of doing something that isn't the rules, and what the rules say we're supposed to do, and when we're going to do it, and that somehow that's bad."

One topic we discussed a lot was the pressure that we all feel to make sure that we cover all the required curriculum of the courses we teach. Astra shared a feeling that the whole group could relate to, "I sometimes feel like I'm falling so behind in curriculum and content." The work of decolonizing our teaching practice requires us to slow down and take time to do certain things such as building relationships, which means we may not have time to cover all of the curriculum. For example, Coco talked about how circles help us to build relationships with our students, but they can be very time consuming. We also talked about being responsive to students' needs, which means we may need to change the plans at the last minute, and we might not get to the curriculum as we had hoped. As a result, teachers feel forced to compromise. Christine shared with the group, "I'm going to do it, but it's maybe because I [have] to take away from something else and lots of people don't feel like they can, or you feel like, how am I going to justify this?" Jane shared the same feeling: "What am I not doing to do this?" There is only so much time in the day, and we just cannot do it all.

I explained to the group that one of the aspects that I love about teaching Eco Ed is that there is no set curriculum, so there is no pressure to make sure that I teach all of it. However, I still felt and continue to feel the pressure to assess. I mentioned before how I began the year by assessing their participation in circle, which was wrong. I also had the students create final projects based on what they had learned from the course, and although there is value in the process of reflecting on our learning, I felt like, "I [had] to assess them, I [had] to get them to do something to show [what] they've learned." Students are learning all the time in our classes, but there is a pressure on us as teachers to be able to prove that they have learned something.

The idea of what counts as education and what "work" should look like adds to this pressure. Christine explained how she often feels guilty when her class is doing an activity that does not cover the required curriculum in a Eurocentric sense:

I feel so much guilt saying I just went for a walk instead of doing English, and how much guilt I feel like I should be in the classroom, like I did less English...and feeling like

probably someone else down the hall that's finishing off that essay that I didn't get around to because I was like I'm going to go play tag on a mountain.

Similarly, Jordana explained, "There's a lot of things that I used to do just as a given that I've felt have fallen to the wayside because it's kind of like, ok, we just got to get some learning done." I am sure what Jordana was doing before was learning, it just was not learning in the Western sense. As previously discussed, part of decolonizing our teaching practice is valuing other forms and sources of knowledge and other ways of learning. Students do not have to learn everything from a book, as Christine explained it still counts as education for the students to "go to the beach and...actually get to see the thing that [they're] learning about on the page." When educators teach differently from their colleagues or from what they have been trained to do, they feel like they have to defend themselves, but as Christine said, "I actually don't have to defend myself because that's part of advocating for other things counting as learning."

It is true that educators are professionals, and they should not feel the need to defend themselves. Yet, many educators do not want to feel as though they are going against expectations or breaking the "rules". So, our group talked about how we need to give educators permission to do this work and shift away from the expectations so that they can try different approaches. We discussed how we could support each other by collaborating and talking about the ideas that we are trying in our classes, and how, in a sense, that gives other educators permission to do the same. However, Jane talked about how this needs to be a system wide movement:

Something I personally would like to see on a larger basis of decolonizing our schools is working to explicitly give educators more room for that. Because I feel like often some of the messaging, we get is well...you should be teaching this and this and this and it's so beyond just our core subjects. And I think for me personally, I don't have enough hours in the day ever. And so, what could be done on a larger scale to give us more of that permission? We're talking about pulling back a little bit from that really academics,

academics, academics, but also giving us the room to do more of that heart work that we all know is so important in middle school especially.

Fern also reminded us that there are no curriculum police and that, at least, at our school our administrators rarely, if at all, check in on what we are teaching in class. She said, "Internalize that. You don't have to get through everything. That's impossible. And if our administrators are telling us that...Especially because we're professionals...We're going to take it as a professional to go do something [appropriate]." Resources can also be helpful, as a lot of us felt like the book *Wayi Wah!* was giving us permission to teach differently.

Returning to the capitalist value of perfectionism, so many teachers want to follow the expectations because they are still striving for perfection. However, at some point, as I discussed earlier, educators need to let go. As Paula said, "Ok didn't get there today, that's fine, maybe tomorrow." Teaching children is about so much more than following curriculum and assessing where they are at. If we want to decolonize our teaching practice, then we will need to let go of some of the expectations and rules.

Working Against the Dominant Ideology

As I mentioned earlier, one of the most significant obstacles in decolonizing our teaching practice is the fact that educators are working against the dominant ideology, and it is pretty challenging to change the way an entire society has been raised to think. As Jordana said, "There are a lot of people who have a vested interest in protecting the beliefs that they grew up with." When I asked the group, "What do you understand decolonization to mean?" Coco responded, "To change the way society thinks about Indigenous people - to discard the stereotypes and Hollywood Indian ideas that are damaging." As I shared with the group and explained previously, by decolonizing our education system we may be able to change the current ideology of our society, so that changes can then be made to the structural elements of colonial domination.

This is a challenging task and this became evident as we discussed Chrona's (2022) chapter on racism in *Wayi Wah!*. There is no denying that racism exists in our society and our schools, yet so many people are still unaware. We talked about how as educators we tend to be more aware of topics such as racism, as Jane explained:

I think as teachers, even aside from doing groups like this, this is very much at the forefront of our minds like how do we celebrate, how do we incorporate all this stuff? And then I feel like for most of the people in my life who are not educators, that is not their experience at all, they might hear it on the news, but that would be about it.

In referring to a section she read in *Wayi Wah!*, Paula similarly explained how, as educators, we also tend to have a better understanding of what racism really means:

Maybe this is why it's such a struggle for us to engage with the idea of racism because especially in non-educative systems where we're not already reminded to check our bias and where we come from, we think of racism as only something that's overt. So when we don't see it as, that's so obviously racist, then it's like, oh well that's not racism because I can't point at it right away...But that was a wakeup call for me. That's why other people have such a different approach to understanding racism than maybe I do, and I'm able to see it more clearly because I understand that it's not only overt [actions].

Evidently, not all teachers are as educated or mindful of racism and how it plays out in our world, as Jordana mentioned, there are teachers who do not believe that racism exists in our schools. Nonetheless, there are a lot of educators who are doing the work to check their biases and create anti-racist environments in their classrooms, but as Jane asked, "How can we help to amplify that message outside of schools?" To which Kate aptly responded, "Well that's the great work that we're doing...we are educating our kids now," so that hopefully the future will be different. It is going to take time, but this is how we change the dominant ideology, and this is how we decolonize our education system.

Resistance from Students and Families.

As much as some of us educators are hopeful that the future will look different, we are still working with students now who may be resistant to the changes that they experience as a result of decolonizing our teaching practice. Unfortunately, this resistance can sometimes make it really challenging to teach, and we end up changing our plans to accommodate for these behaviours in class. As Fern shared, “How many times do the kids in our class just hijack what we can and can't do because they can't manage.” Even more unfortunate is that even though there may only be a few students who are resistant, those students can sometimes influence the other students. Cassandra explained, “I don't mind letting the other ones have whatever their experience is, but I don't want it to ruin the experience for someone who's really earnestly open to trying.”

As some of us experienced, students can be resistant to the way in which we conduct our classes, such as leading the class in a circle. However, students can also be resistant to the content being taught or the topics discussed in class, especially when they are topics that evoke strong emotions, such as racism. Jordana talked about a project she had created for her class called *Racism in Archaeology*, but because the examples she provided were not overt examples of racism, the students refused to accept that it was racism. On the contrary, Jane and Fern explained that their students had argued with them that calling someone black was racist. Jane also pointed out that the term “racist” has become a joke to many students, and that they use it flippantly to make fun of each other. I shared with the group that I had two students in one of my classes laughingly tell me about the racial slurs they were calling each other. Evidently, when students see racism as a joke, it makes it challenging to have a serious conversation about it. We spoke about where this resistance might come from and came up with a number of different reasons. In terms of discussing racism, we agreed that for many students it's a lack of understanding. Christine shared,

I wonder too does that come from a place of, even our discussion on what does the word mean? And maybe when [students] start to use it and they don't understand what it's about...that's even more reason that we have to talk about [it].

Despite how challenging it can be, we, as teachers, need to talk about racism more frequently in our classes.

As we all teach middle or high school students, we also recognize that this is a time in students' lives where they are developing their identities and part of that is challenging everything. Jordana explained:

It feels like there's a high level of jadedness, for example, you show a cute little video and there's a constant patter of them trolling whatever is going on...I just feel like that's the default, not "How does this make me feel?", but let me make fun of something.

Christine also reminded us that students at this age are concerned about their image and have mechanisms to cope with their emotions because they do not always want to reveal how they truly feel. There are many reasons why students may be resistant, however, one of the reasons we discussed that students may be resistant to hearing new and different perspectives, or learning in non-Western ways is because of the influence of their families.

While there may not be any curriculum police, there are parents. When Cassandra shared her story about the students who were resistant to participating in circle, she also shared that the parents of these students had come to parent teacher interviews and complained about her teaching style. They did not agree with her doing mindfulness in class and they did not believe that teaching Indigenous ways of knowing and being would adequately prepare their children for university. Although students at this age may be trying to develop their own identities and move away from their parents, as Astra shared, "If their parents are at home talking about how this doesn't align with their worldview...that's a big internal conflict." Parents have certain expectations of what school and learning should look like, mostly based on their own experiences in school. For example, Christine shared, "Especially in middle school where

there's much more parent involvement, it's this idea of somehow trying to justify, but there's always their lens is still what they think is learning.” Similarly, Christine also explained how discussing racism in class in an authentic way can be challenging because families may associate racism with only overt examples of racism. The reality is that many parents have been raised in this colonial system, and the colonial agenda was very intentional. As Justice Murray Sinclair said:

[A]t the same time that aboriginal people were being demeaned in the schools and their culture and language were being taken away from them and they were being told that they were inferior, they were pagans, that they were heathens and savages and that they were unworthy of being respected — that very same message was being given to the non-aboriginal children in the public schools as well. (Kennedy, 2015)

These beliefs are deeply rooted and as I explained to the group, “We need to educate our parents.” However, our conversation did not go further than that and in light of the discussion about educator overwhelm, it seems unfair to expect educators to also educate parents.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As I began this journey, I was frustrated because it seemed like nobody was talking about *how* educators could work towards decolonizing and Indigenizing their teaching practice. However, through this inquiry, I have discovered that the reason no one or very few people are talking about how educators can do this work is because the process of decolonizing and Indigenizing one's teaching practice is complex and overwhelming. There is no quick guide to help educators decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice. In fact, the idea that decolonizing and Indigenizing our teaching practice could be simplified into a series of step-by-step instructions is a Westernized way of thinking. In order for educators to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice it is going to take time and persistent effort. There is so much for us as Western educators to discuss, unlearn, and learn.

What Do We Do Now?

Fortunately, through this inquiry our group discovered some actions that we can take to work towards decolonizing and Indigenizing our teaching practice. We determined that as educators we need to: be diligent in finding authentic and appropriate resources, ask questions, self-reflect, support each other and hold one another accountable, teach as our whole selves and see our students as whole people too, focus on relationships, think and teach differently, hold space for complexities, recognize that knowledge is diverse and advocate for other forms and sources of knowledge, be open to new and different perspectives, seek connections with the land, let go of control, dismantle the hierarchy in our classrooms, normalize making mistakes, get used to feeling uncomfortable, take care of ourselves in the process, and give each other permission to do things differently. However, this is a challenging set of concepts to address and it is a lot to expect from educators who are already overwhelmed. As we discussed many times in our group, time is a considerable obstacle for educators wanting to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice. Beyond taking on this work during their personal time, as

I have done, there is very little time, if any at all, provided for educators to do this work.

Therefore, educators need to be provided with time to do this work.

Furthermore, as I have previously discussed, relationships are essential to the work of decolonization. Thus, as I had hoped, I believe that this inquiry provides a model for other educators, schools and districts who are wanting to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice. By gathering together once a month for a couple of hours, I believe that each educator in our group gained more knowledge and confidence in working towards decolonizing and Indigenizing their teaching practice. Moreover, as Tanaka (2015a) explained, by engaging in self-reflection, we were able to create personal change “and that personal change affects other people and, thus, the institutions we create” (p. 84). In example, we were able to bring what we were learning to our entire staff by making changes to how we conduct our staff meetings. Starting our staff meetings in a circle may seem like a small change, but I believe that it is significant.

Additionally, it is clear that working within a colonial system has made it challenging for educators to decolonize and Indigenize their teaching practice. There are so many limitations and obstacles based on separation of knowledge from our students' lived experiences on the land, hierarchical relationships, and systems of control. However, as I have stated many times already, I do believe that through education we, as educators, can start to dismantle the colonial ideology, which will hopefully help to dismantle the colonial structures that perpetuate our existing educational system.

Significance of the Inquiry

It is my hope that the ideas and thoughts relayed here contribute to the ongoing discussions that educators and educational institutions are having about the work of decolonizing education. Some of the ideas reinforce what has already been shared by other scholars, researchers, and knowledge holders, but some will hopefully offer a new or different perspective. The intention of this inquiry is to contribute to the field of education by providing

further knowledge of the actions that some educators are taking to decolonize their teaching practice. I have highlighted specific approaches that educators have found to be successful in decolonizing their teaching practice, the obstacles these educators have faced, and their strategies for overcoming these obstacles. As a result, this inquiry has the potential to not only improve the teaching practice of the inquiry partners, but also to influence the teaching practice of other educators, and provide recommendations for professional development to the GVSD. There is also the opportunity for this inquiry to inform policy through recommendations from inquiry partners for systemic changes to the education system to work towards decolonization.

Final Thoughts

Evidently the journey of decolonizing one's teaching practice will require a considerable amount of time. What is important is that we, as educators, start the journey and we continue to take steps forward. We will undoubtedly come across many obstacles, but we need to be persistent and continue to do the work, as that is the only way that we can change the system. Finally, one of the many lessons that I have learned on this journey is to be open to new and different perspectives. In fact, I am sure that a year from now, I will look back on what I have written here, and I will have a new perspective on many of the ideas and thoughts that I have shared. So, I ask for your grace as I am still working to decolonize my thinking and my teaching practice, and I still have much more to unlearn and learn.

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Appendix A: Discussion Questions

- What do you understand decolonization to mean?
- How are you currently working towards decolonizing your practice?
- What prevents you from decolonizing your teaching practice?
- What do other people you come into contact with think about decolonizing education?
- What are your principal's/district's conceptions of decolonizing education?
- What do you understand Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy to be?
- What do you already know about Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy?
- What are the district's/government's official and unofficial requirements for teaching Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy?
- How are you made aware of these requirements?
- How do you feel about decolonizing your practice and teaching Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy?
- What types of professional development have you been offered to help you in decolonizing your teaching practice and teaching Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy?
- How do you feel about this professional development?
- What other opportunities have you been given to learn about decolonizing your teaching practice and teaching Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy?
- What incentive is there for you to decolonize your teaching practice and teach Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy?
- What would help you to decolonize your teaching practice and teach Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy?
- What do you notice about your colleagues' interest in decolonizing their teaching practice?
- What do you think prevents your colleagues from engaging in this work?
- How could we best support our colleagues in engaging in this work?