

Decolonizing Education and Educators' Decolonizing

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Abstract

This article specifically speaks to decolonizing within social work education and practice from an Indigenous Anishinaabe perspective. Social work is situated as a site for decolonizing education in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. This article illustrates the context and development of an Indigenous-centred program with a goal of decolonizing social work education teaching and learning. It tells a story of the newly formed Centre for Indigegogy as a professional development site for *de-colon-izing* social work education. De-colonizing is much like detoxing from all the toxins we ingest into our bodies. De-colonizing is similar to detoxing and clearing out the colonizing knowledge and practices that we have ingested and adopted from colonial social work education. Decolonizing has to be *wholistic*¹ in terms of detoxing our spirits, hearts, minds, and bodies (Absolon, 2016). This article explores the meaning and intention of decolonizing coupled with a call for action for all social work educators to pick up the theoretical work of learning and understanding the truth in the truth about colonization and its impact on both settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples (Freire, 2008; Memmi, 1965). The Centre for Indigegogy promotes critically reflexive practices of teaching and learning, steeped in Indigenous perspectives and anti-colonial knowledge, and offers certificates in decolonizing education and Indigenous education. This article highlights the programming of the Centre for Indigegogy and illustrates the transformative, uncomfortable, challenging, inspiring, and healing work that decolonizing education offers. The absence of any of these experiences raises the question: Is decolonizing really happening?

Keywords: decolonizing, wholistic, Indigegogy, Indigenous

A Beginning Story

The intersectionality and layers of my identity as Anishinaabe and British causes me over and over to search for understanding, meaning, and balance. I privilege my Anishinaabe roots, consciously working to restore my cultural identity as an Anishinaabe kwe (Ojibway woman). My 25+ years of experience as an Indigenous decolonizing social work educator and practitioner informs the writing of this article. This article contributes to the circle of experiences of those also involved in decolonizing in social work education. My lens of decolonization has been formed from my immersion in colonial education, either as an Anishinaabe student or

¹ *Wholism* and *wholistic* are spelled with *wh* to affirm they are derivatives of *whole*.

educator. Further, my structural and decolonizing analysis was deepened with the mentorship of Cree scholar and social worker, Dr. Lauri Gilchrist. Today, I am an Indigenist structural social worker (Kennedy-Kish [Bell], Sinclair, Carniol, & Baines, 2017). I see the personal issues people have as a consequence of political structures, institutions, and systems we rely on for education, support, money, healthcare, etc. Institutions are either set up to support people, police or control them, or in the case of Indigenous peoples, eradicate or assimilate. From this perspective, I tend to perceive educational structures as sites of change. This article specifically focuses on social work education and the capacity of educators to engage in decolonizing practices within a new initiative called the Centre for Indigegogy within the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. I author this article as the Centre's Director, an instructor, and a participant. I wear multiple hats in my various roles in social work education.

This article challenges the complicity within social work and social work education in a call to decolonization. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action continue to provide launch pads for decolonizing actions (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a). I also illustrate the Centre for Indigegogy as a site for transformative education in social work and in decolonizing education. I have sequenced subsections of the article to move readers on a journey of reconciling social work as a necessary site for transformative education. I then move into decolonizing social work education by calling upon educators to engage in decolonizing journeys. I take the reader deeper into a specific context of decolonizing education through the work of the Centre for Indigegogy, in the Indigenous Field of Study, Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. This article speaks specifically to educators and professionals and their necessary work to reckon with the meaning of reconciliation. This article is more about truth telling and sharing than reconciliation. Truth, to me, is the foundation of reimagining and shaping any efforts of peaceful reconciliation in Anishinaabe-settler relations. I use Anishinaabe(k) and Indigenous peoples interchangeably, and I do not capitalize eurowestern as a political reframing.

Social Work Is a Site for Transformative Education

There is simultaneously a deep refusal to see colonization as occurring in the present, and blindness to the realities of how the distinct kind of colonialism operating in Canada today targets Indigenous peoples, and continues to define the lives of Canadians.... The colonial history and ways of the legacies of colonial institutions and practices continue to disadvantage Indigenous peoples are not contested or commonly understood in Canada today.

— Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 3

Social work education and places of practice are implicated as sites for change throughout the TRC Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a). The TRC Calls to Action clearly point in the direction of child welfare legislation reform and organizational power redistribution, and the

development of culturally relevant programming in many areas and levels of social work practice. Full legislation redrafting is called upon for Indigenous education with full inclusion with and by Anishinaabek/Indigenous peoples. Social work has a role to play in advocacy, agency, and activism for Indigenous cultural and language revitalization and preservation within both social service and education programs and in practice within either. Social work structures and systems are called to action to change. Social work arenas are implicated further in areas where the Calls to Action address Anishinaabek peoples' involvement and control over developing culturally based services in areas of fetal alcohol effect, addictions and abuse, family violence, inmate and penal justice, and sexual abuse trauma. The TRC Calls to Action additionally call for a revamping of the health care system with Indigenous peoples to reflect service needs and appropriate responsive services and programs across the board with Anishinaabek peoples. The Calls to Action necessarily implicate social work and challenge the complicity within social work and in education with a clear message that the existing system must be disrupted for real change. Furthermore, the TRC Call to Action specific to education (including social work education) calls for consultation and collaboration on curriculum development and in integrating Anishinaabek knowledge into schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods (TRC, 2015a, p. 331). The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation report call for educational institutions to engage with Anishinaabek/Indigenous knowledge and Anishinaabek/Indigenous scholars can lead the way in actualizing decolonizing education. We are, however, still challenged by institutional racism and the educational cultures of ignorance, amnesia, and elitism when it comes to critical engagement in change (Daniel, 2018; Dion, 2009).

In my analysis of social work as a profession and in education, I continue to see the complacency and blindness of social workers and educators who unconsciously engage and uphold eurocentric and imposed "Christianize and civilize" ideologies of colonization. As Hart (2003) suggested, and I agree, we all must continually ask ourselves if we are gatekeeping modern-day mechanisms of colonization in our practice and in education. Social work education is largely criticized by Indigenous scholars and allies for upholding eurowestern norms of practice through eurowestern dominant education that generate social work practitioners without relevant knowledge or critical skills to adequately effect systemic and structural change (Kennedy-Kish [Bell] et al., 2017; Thompson Cooper & Moore, 2009). Social work education is obligated to generate critical thinkers and educational platforms for Anishinaabek perspectives in curriculum, teaching, and program development to counter the harm that education and social work has generated. As harsh as this sounds, it is also true.

Justice Murray Sinclair in 2015 asserted that education has been a strategic method of oppression of Anishinaabek peoples. He also reinforced that education, despite its fraught historical context, remains a crucial site for decolonizing and supporting the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and culture (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b). This article offers an example of how education is a site for decolonizing and Indigenizing by highlighting The Centre for Indigegogy. Educators and social workers who actively teach and

practice are questioning why they were not taught to interrogate oppressive structures and identify mechanisms of colonization in social work. They were not taught to connect practice issues with the history of Indian Residential Schools, child welfare, justice, and the Indian Act in all its complexities. I suspect students are not taught because educators themselves do not know what they do not know. In order to develop capacity of settler peoples to teach in solidarity as change agent partners, change building within education and within educators is a must. My obligation as Director of the Centre for Indigegogy falls in line with my commitment to tackling colonial arrogance, amnesia, and ignorance through decolonizing and Indigenizing in education.

Historic colonizing policies continue to unfold and perpetuate negative impacts across the board among Anishinaabek peoples because, as scholars have noted, colonial policies translate to practices of assimilation, alienation, and cultural genocide (Adams, 1989; Alfred, 2009; Battiste, 2013; Fanon, 1963; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). The academy is also responsible and accountable as culprits and as a key institution in instigating change because “racism and its purveyors are central figures in each academic institution. They are embedded within the leadership, the faculty, the board members, and at the administrative level. There are very few spaces of safety and escape from its tentacles” (Daniel, 2018, p. 60). Transformative approaches in social work education are required to actualize change that makes a difference in educating and training transformational social work practitioners.

Many post-secondary faculties in the humanities and social sciences continue to demonstrate minimal commitment to generating lasting changes to curriculum and pedagogies in relation to Anishinaabek peoples’ experiences and Canada’s colonial history on the traditional lands of Anishinaabek peoples (Battiste, 2013; Daniel, 2018). Faculties of education, for instance, continue to graduate hundreds of students who do not understand or have a grasp on teaching Canada’s history in relation to Indigenous peoples (Cote-Meek, 2014; Dion, 2009). Schools of social work are no exception and continue to demonstrate a lack of core curriculum that offers accurate and quality Anishinaabek/Indigenous perspectives and decolonizing courses. This means that graduates continue to be ill prepared, to the point of being unethically incapable of doing meaningful work with Indigenous peoples or tackling structural and systemic racism. Without a critical point of decolonizing education, graduating students from any discipline will continue to perpetuate what they know and what they do not know. With curriculum dominated by colonial theories and perspectives, learners naturally internalize a colonial mindset of practice without the critical skills to engage in decolonizing; not until they get exposure to decolonizing education through teaching and learning that is grounded in a problematization and rejection of colonial dominance will this change (Daniel, 2018). The absence of de-colonial educators and curriculum does not make academia safe spaces where cultures of colonial violence thrive and where Indigenous students are subject to ongoing colonizing forces (Daniel, 2018).

Social work education has a responsibility to teach critical, structural, and transformative decolonizing approaches to teaching and learning. Social work students' critical skill development involves learning to question reports and documents that inform legal and political systems. For example, Cree scholar Megan Scribe (2018) offered a deep critical analysis of a Royal Canadian Mounted Police report on missing and murdered Indigenous women that was released in 2014 (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2014; Scribe, 2018). She presented a compelling analysis of the research lens of the RCMP report. Her analytic decolonizing lens exposed flaws and misrepresentations of contexts. Scribe concluded that the above-mentioned report perpetuates problematic messages about Indigenous girls who are missing and or murdered. Through her critical review, she revealed how "Canada not only fails in the task of protecting Indigenous girls, but also enacts harm" (Scribe, 2018, p. 47). Educational structures have a responsibility to educate learners to deconstruct research and generate knowledge with a critical anti-colonial gaze so that reports do not perpetuate negative stereotypes or blame oppressed peoples for the very conditions colonizing institutions have generated as Scribe portrayed in her critique of the RCMP report. Without the inclusion of decolonizing knowledges, the colonial systems and structures continue to fulfill the colonial agendas. The evidence is in the increasing number of Indigenous children in care, the alarming rates of suicide, and astounding number of unresolved missing and murdered women cases. Complicity in the rampage of colonialism is evident everywhere in the lives of Indigenous peoples and in the devastation of the Earth.

I believe the omission of any decolonizing critical and Anishinaabek/Indigenous perspective is problematic and unethical. When do educators become accountable for the outdated, often inaccurate, and downright offensive curriculum that is regarded as higher education? Finally, how will existing educators develop the skills and knowledge to generate decolonizing shifts if they do not know what they do not know? There is much to contemplate. This article is one example of work we are undertaking at the Centre for Indigegogy, but first the context of colonization is fundamental to the work of the Centre.

Decolonizing Social Work Education Through Educators' Consciousness

Decolonizing education implies that whole systems need to be changed to combat cognitive imperialism and intellectual racism (Battiste, 2013; Cote-Meek, 2014; Mastronardi, 2009). The reality is that unless educators actively engage in their own decolonizing, reckoning and reconciling with Indigenous peoples is a far-off vision. Mastronardi (2009) in her chapter indicated:

several pathways toward a decolonized social work pedagogy. At the broadest level, explicit acknowledgement by the university of the effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples and its role in this history is a crucial first step. Educational institutions have a pivotal role in transforming the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society. (p. 43)

Reconciliation has many pathways, requires process that calls attention to restoring relationships based on truth and respect and “in order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior” (TRC, 2015a, p. 6–7). The TRC summary report further stated that while we are not there yet, a respectful relationship is possible through public dialogue, education, and a transformation of Canadian society as a whole. The absence of having historical knowledge combined with a deep history of colonization and oppression in this country leads to “poor public policy decisions. In the public realm, it reinforces racist attitudes and fuels civic distrust” (TRC, 2015a, p. 8). Truth and knowledge are possible through education. Canada as a country, the provinces and academies must demonstrate their commitment through the provision of truthful education. How can educators who subscribe (even unconsciously) to colonial ideologies, thoughts, and theories decolonize education or understand what Indigenization means? One site of change in decolonizing education involves the educator’s journey of decolonizing. Educators’ capacity to pursue authentic representations of social work, policy, and practice relational to Indigenous peoples is integral to decolonizing social work education.

Truth comes first in the truth and reconciliation journey. I believe truth precedes reconciliation in any context. Consider for instance the case of a victim and offender who are contemplating a journey of reconciliation. Truth is necessary to create a pathway for amends and retribution for the victim and in order for a healing and reconciliation processes to begin. In a similar manner, with the history of dehumanizing actions and abuses against Anishinaabek peoples, truth telling must happen about historical facts and impacts for authentic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples to begin. Reckoning with one’s ignorance is a cornerstone to taking steps to learn the truth. Education at all levels is the key. Further, decolonizing education is for educators who want to develop their capacity to understand their own location vis-a-vis colonization and journey toward unpacking and unlearning their own internalization of colonial ideologies. Decolonizing education enables one to take inventory of one’s path and further determine what shifts are necessary moving forward. Decolonizing education enables one to determine one’s own site for decolonizing in terms of one’s role, responsibilities, and duties in engaging in respectful relationships that do not replicate the power and control dynamics of colonizer/colonized. Decolonizing education confronts issues of fear, assumptions, and false realities. I have witnessed and experienced decolonizing through transformative learning by privileging Anishinaabek knowledge and ways of seeing, being, and doing in my teaching and learning spaces: Indigegogy.

The Centre for Indigegogy: Transformative Education

Indigegogy is a term that affirms Anishinaabek/Indigenous people’s ways of teaching and learning, and learning and teaching. *Indigegogy* is a term used to describe culturally based and land-based social work programming that is grounded in Indigenous knowledge. The Indigenous Field of Study (IFS) Master of Social Work (MSW) program at Wilfrid Laurier University’s Faculty of Social Work is

grounded in Indigenous wholistic knowledge through the application of Indigenous scholarship, decolonizing knowledge, and Anishinaabek/Indigenous culturally land-based practices. The term *Indigegogy* was applied by esteemed Cree scholar and Elder Dr. Stan Wilson, who said that the IFS was doing Indigegogy in its Indigenous approach to teaching and learning (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014). Critical Anishinaabek scholars and knowledge keepers promote Indigegogy in many areas of teaching and learning. We in the IFS and at the Centre for Indigegogy are simply affirming this term (Absolon, 2011, 2016; Baskin, 2016; Dion, 2009; Grande, 2004; Hill & Wilkinson, 2014; Kennedy-Kish [Bell] et al., 2017; Simpson, 2011). Indigegogy is Indigenousizing our curriculum and our teaching and learning practices and is decolonizing our classrooms (Cote-Meek, 2014; Graveline, 1998). Indigegogy, depending on the nation and land, will differ in accordance to the traditions, language, and environment of the particular territory and region.

The Centre for Indigegogy was developed in 2017 to deliver professional development training (PDT) for social work educators who are interested in creating Anishinaabek-centred education and who are interested in a process of decolonizing their educational institutions or programs. The forming of the Centre for Indigegogy is a story that is historical and cumulative.

My vision for a critical learning space stems from my own education and community practice experiences. My social work education was void of educators who knew or understood Anishinaabek anything. Additionally, I had to decolonize the eurocentric practice approaches I had been taught. During my education, I had to take control of my own learning and self-direct most of my assignments if I was going to prepare myself to understand Anishinaabek contexts. Just because I was Anishinaabe did not equate that I had the understanding or knowledge to contribute to practise in Anishinaabek contexts. Many social work educators did not have the knowledge, understanding, or application experience for Anishinaabek/Indigenous social work practice. In my practice as an Indigenous mental health program manager, all of the PDT available was eurocentric. I took eurocentric crisis response, suicide prevention, case management, and had to re-write most of it for relevance in our Anishinaabek contexts. I had to take eurocentric training programs because that is what our agency funded for PDT. There were plenty of opportunities to engage in colonizing eurowestern-centred training in mental health on crisis intervention, trauma responses, suicide intervention, short term therapy, and the list goes on and on. In my experience, none of the PDT included generating awareness and knowledge of Canada's aggressive social policies of assimilation and genocide, nor did they accurately contextualize Indigenous peoples' experiences and the direct impact of colonization in our lives. Education, training, and professional development in social work marginalizes or more typically omits Indigenous peoples' history and experiences of the impact of living within the restrictions of the Indian Act, family dismemberment as a result of the Residential School system, impacts of living in a racist and oppressive society, and the list can also go on. I encourage readers to further study the impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples that have been extensively documented (Aboriginal Healing Foundation Research

Series 2002–2010; Dussault & Erasmus, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a).

Wilfrid Laurier University put out a call for proposals to advance innovative programs that aligned with the strategic academic plan. Our Vice President Academic encouraged me as the Associate Dean (at the time in 2016) to engage in Anishinaabek/Indigenous-centred training of Anishinaabek educators. I collaborated with the IFS team and lead the development of a proposal. The first proposal for the Centre emphasized developing a “train-the-trainer” model. With the input from the IFS team, we reflected on the pillars of Indigegogy within the IFS MSW program. This formed the basis of what we would offer other Indigenous educators in building knowledge, confidence, and capacity to implement Indigegogy in their contexts. The first train-the-trainer model for Indigenous educators was based on the curriculum of the Indigenous Field of Study to support the restoration of Indigenous knowledge and the resurgence of our cultural identity as Anishinaabek/Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2002; Simpson, 2017). Needless to say, our proposal was successful. Though we hoped for a grant, we received a loan to initiate a self-sustaining centre.

The Centre had a whirlwind and ground-breaking first year. With the support of a research assistant, setting up the Centre was exciting and demanding. First, we worked on giving the Centre an identity in terms of a formal name, logo, website, business cards, and establishing a presence within our Faculty of Social Work. Additional work included the articulation of job descriptions, acquiring space, equipment, and hiring a staff person. With an additional person hired part-time, we continued working on articulating curriculum, learning modules, and identifying instructors with module delivery dates. Setting up the website and creating a marketing plan were operating priorities to the Centre’s development in 2017. In the first year, my centre work was done in addition to my full teaching and workload. I have since acquired course release for my work as Director in the Centre. Since 2017, we have launched and are actively offering three streams of PDT: An Indigenous Educators Certificate (our primary goal); Decolonizing Education Certificate; and a Wholistic Practice Series of Indigenous-centred PDT sessions on various topics.

The development of the Centre provides learning opportunities for educators and practitioners who already have their degrees and credentials. It is these people who are challenged to address the TRC Calls to Action and decolonize curriculum, classrooms, and social work education in general. Decolonizing is about our personal and professional journeys to get real about building capacity to enact a truth and reconciliation stance. One central goal of the Centre is to generate decolonizing shifts in social work education by offering PDT to educators, administrators, and practitioners. Ironically, the Centre is emerging from the crevices in colonizing educational institutions through the leadership of Anishinaabek educators. We are carving out spaces within a mainstream university to unlearn, relearn, and decolonize. The Indian Residential Schools and educational systems are colonial arms of colonial governments, and yet despite these mechanisms to eradicate us, Anishinaabek peoples have emerged as leaders in our own education. These acts of

resistance and resilience fuel the hard work required to shift colonial institutional beasts. Decolonizing social work education requires educational leaders who are ready to do some unpacking and who have the capacity to educate about: colonization and decolonization; Indigenous peoples' rights; social responsibility for the land and water; restoring Indigenous knowledge; asserting Indigenous peoples' jurisdiction over Indigenous wholistic curriculum, research, and scholarship; and understanding treaty relationships and respectful co-existence. My responsibility as an Indigenous educator is to understand and know how to teach colonizing history, my Indigenous history, unlearn internalized colonialism, and restore Indigenous knowledge. I have a responsibility to generate changes and shifts toward both decolonizing and Indigenizing social work education. We have a responsibility to restore healthy relationships between people and with the Earth and Creation.

The personal is political and the political impacts our personal lives spiritually, socially, politically, and economically. Decolonizing from internalized colonialism is not easy, tidy, or comfortable; and in academic settings it can feel unsafe when academia is constructed to reinforce colonization and its ideologies as normative (Daniel, 2018).

Decolonization internally means a disruption of the very belief system one has come to know. Decolonization recognizes and accepts that colonization exists and continues (Adams, 1989; Aquash, 2013; Battiste, 2013). Decolonizing is a systematic rejection of colonialism through a critical encounter and gaze at the dominance and hegemonic knowledge, representation, and theory used in teaching and learning within education, and specifically social work education in this context. To de-colon-ize is to detoxify and cleanse from the internalization of a colonized mindset about what informs what we teach, and how we teach methods and theories of practice. To decolonize is to question, to wonder, to re-think and re-theorize how, what and why we practise, teach and research the way we do. To decolonize is to cleanse one's spirit, heart, mind, and body from the toxins of colonial knowledge, teaching, and learning. It means to question the norm and status quo of the application of theories and methods within Anishinaabek peoples and community contexts. To decolonize is to become uncomfortable in the detoxing, and to engage in a journey of learning from Anishinaabek perspectives what colonization looks like and how it has seeped into every fabric of life in such a way that we don't even know it is there. To decolonize is a return to the land and to support the development of land-based programming. Decolonization is a restoration of respect with Mother Earth, water, and all sources of human life. To decolonize is to reject being a host of colonization; to reject being the carrier of eurocentric dominance and to journey into restoring wholistic and humane means of teaching and learning about the truth of genocide and colonization of a peoples within our own homeland.

Indigenous and settler colleagues are reinforcing decolonizing messages from their own vantage points. A settler colleague, Laura Mastronardi (2009), says that non-Indigenous educators:

need to move toward greater accountability for our pedagogic practices, a process that begins with recognizing that we are implicated in systems of

oppression that profoundly structure our understandings of one another. As long as we see ourselves as innocent, we cannot begin to walk the path of social justice and to thread our way through the complexity of power relations that infuse our practice. (p. 43)

Mi'kmaw educator and scholar Marie Battiste broadens decolonizing in educational contexts:

in the case of making universities responsive to Indigenous peoples, women, minorities, or diverse knowledge systems, the sites of struggle for recognition, acceptance, and integration were going to require collaborative, interdisciplinary, participatory, and Indigenous research methodologies to decolonize educational institutions. (2013, p. 111)

The implication herein is with educational policy, government, administrators, and educators in institutions to develop the knowledge and tools to understand and learn how to decolonize systems that are set up to diminish and eradicate Anishinaabek peoples. Clearly, the paradox of decolonizing in colonial settings sets an example of the layers and complexity of decolonizing. Given all these complexities decolonizing work is best tackled with support.

Marginalized people have common interests in decolonizing. I have found common interests in the writing of Black liberation scholars. The writings of Black feminists bell hooks (1993) and Audre Lorde (1984/2007) have profoundly resonated with me in understanding my journey and recovery from colonization and internalized racism. Healing out of internalized colonialism was not enough because I understand that decolonizing also means that we cannot dismantle the masters' house using the masters' tools, as Lorde (1984/2007) stated in 1984 in her famous essay. I recently came across a powerful article by Beverly-Jean Daniel, a Black feminist author who writes about the process of moving beyond the colonizers' narratives; and her article resonated with experiences I bear witness to and experience. "The un-reading, re-reading, and re-learning of history beyond the purview of the colonizers, is central to the shifting conceptions of identity" (Daniel, 2018, p. 63). For Indigenous people, decolonization is a journey of unlearning our own internalized self-hatred and rejection. An unpacking of what we have internalized toward a recovery of restoring our Indigeneity, cultural identity, and place in Creation. For Indigenous peoples, transformation within is restoring a narrative and identity rooted in Indigenous knowledge versus the dominant colonizers' narrative of Indigenous peoples' location in Canada. Daniel goes on to say, "understanding that no one invests hundreds of years trying to destroy that which is truly 'inferior' can be an essential starting point towards self-care and healing" (Daniel, 2018, p. 63). Anishinaabek creation stories place Anishinaabek peoples here on Turtle Island. Decolonizing feeds a knowing that we belong within Creation and that we have a right to be Anishinaabek peoples. Transformation does not happen by replicating the familiar, it happens through going into the unknown, trying something different, and changing practices; in classes it happens by generating critical thinking and discussions to challenge hegemonic norms (Daniel, 2018). I completely agree with Daniel (2018) in her conclusion that anyone who

considers engaging in decolonizing within the academy requires a clear goal that is rooted in the above coupled with a means of support and self-care.

The Centre for Indigegogy is emerging as an educational resource to restoring the truth of Indigenous peoples' history and knowledge. Supported by the TRC Calls to Action, we are now moving forward to support our vision and presence of the Centre for Indigegogy. Through decolonizing professional development and training, we restore our narrative of survival, resistance, and resilience. We represent the tenacity of Anishinaabek knowledge and peoples, and the hope that un-learning and relearning releases space in one's whole being to reimagine what peaceful and respectful relationships can be with Anishinaabek peoples.

Centre for Indigegogy: The Decolonizing Education Certificate

We never stand alone in decolonizing. For example, the Thunderbird Circle of Indigenous Social Work Educators Network informed the creation of a Decolonizing Education Certificate (DEC). In 2017, the Thunderbird Circle (I am a long-standing member) through circle process offered responses to the Canadian Association of Social Work Education *Statement of Complicity and Commitment to Change* (CASWE, 2017). While I share my responses to the statement, the Circle's collective responses informed a series of Decolonizing Educations training courses for social work educators. The Statement first acknowledged how colonial mindsets are a limitation toward truth and reconciliation. Further, the statements within the *Statement of Complicity and Commitment to Change* would require professionals themselves to decolonize in order to enact the Statement's intention. As I reflected on the Statement of Complicity, it occurred to me whether or not members of the CASWE or those implicated would understand what the well-intended statements mean. For example, one statement affirms and supports the *United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007) as a framework for reconciliation. In principle, this is great idea. However, if people do not understand what supporting this declaration really means, it is an empty statement. A concern of mine is the ability of Indigenous peoples to exercise our basic cultural rights such as burning medicines, smudging, drumming, and land-based programming. If we could help our colleagues in the CASWE understand the UNDRIP, then our basic rights such as smudging and burning our medicines would be supported and less contentious. We would not be asked to get fire extinguisher training to conduct our ceremonies and burn our sacred medicines. University policing or policing rules should not be imposed on us in such cases as conducting our ceremonies in our classes.

Interestingly, the TRC report recommends the UNDRIP be adopted as a framework for reconciliation and "because Canada has accepted the *Declaration* we hold the federal government to its word that it will genuinely aspire to achieve its provisions" (TRC, 2015a, p. 188). The Declaration is one small example in one statement, and it is essential to know it in order to support it. Through the circle sharing of the Thunderbird Circle, my mind was whirling with ideas that were informed by the circle sharing. From the circle I identified and sequenced eight

modules primarily aimed at engaging settler educators' knowledge to understand Canadian history, treaties, UNDRIP, TRC, social control policies, decolonization, and allyship. I am grateful to the Thunderbird Circle and to those members of the CASWE who sought our input, which caused us to have such an informing circle. Our circle dialogues informed the Centre for Indigegogy and hopefully the CASWE and its accreditation standards.

Here I offer the titles of the eight DEC² modules that emerged from the 2017 Thunderbird Circle and were later tailored within the IFS team. The first five modules are instructed by critical Anishinaabe scholars who represent diverse Nations and cultural locations. The last three modules are facilitated by critical settler scholars who work in solidarity with Anishinaabek peoples in social work education. The sequencing of the modules helped participants understand the building blocks of colonization and Indigenous peoples, while simultaneously examining one's own location and knowing in relationship with new learning. I encourage readers to go to the web link in the footnote to read more about module descriptions. The overview here is to illustrate the sequencing of material that is facilitated by respectful sharing, listening, reflecting, and often smaller group discussions. Each module is grounded in each instructors' knowledge bundle.

- Module 1: Introduction to Indigenous Perspectives and Knowledge: Cultural History and Colonial History
- Module 2: Introduction to Indigenous Perspectives and Knowledge: Policy, Land & Governance
- Module 3: Introduction to Indigenous Perspectives and Knowledge: Social Control Policies
- Module 4: Introduction to Indigenous Perspectives and Knowledge: Resistance, Healing & Anti-Colonialism
- Module 5: Race, Power, Privilege: Taking a Critical Gaze
- Module 6: Positionality in Relationship with Indigenous People: Solidarity
- Module 7: Educating for Change: Critical Reflections & Change
- Module 8: Moving Forward: Creating an Action Plan

The offering of this training has been a highlight for the Centre's work and offers hope in understanding more about the journey of decolonizing for both Indigenous and settler educators and professionals who aspire to reimagine from an anti-colonial space of knowing. The DEC offered by the Centre for Indigegogy occurs throughout the year. Each module is 14 hours of circle room instruction related to decolonizing. In the next section I share what I am learning from this experience.

² The Centre for Indigegogy link is here for further information: <https://www.wlu.ca/academics/faculties/faculty-of-social-work/centre-for-indigegogy/index.html>

Educators Decolonizing: What Have I Learned So Far?

Circle work facilitates a process of truth sharing and listening as educators gather with a common interest in decolonizing (Graveline, 1998). Transforming one's consciousness through circle work is both collective and dependent on each person's individual history, lived experience, and social location. This section focuses on what I am learning in developing and participating in decolonizing education training with Anishinaabek and settler scholars who wanted to carve out a space to understand and explore what decolonizing means and to identify sites of action in their perspective institutions. The settler allies who attended this first year seemed to be aware of their location and seemed ready to tackle their own complicity (Battiste, 2013).

In our decolonizing sessions, we were initially timid with one another; however, the first decolonizing session established a solid structural foundation without shame, blame, or guilt. I learned that decolonizing in groups requires relationships based on intention and truth. The instructors all brought their values and principles to the circle room and worked to establish principles of safety and respect. Important structural and systemic perspectives lead the pathway to deconstructing colonizing structures and understanding colonization as a systemic and institutional beast. Decolonizing, I am learning, must be contextualized within broader institutions and structures to generate concrete contexts for moving from dialogue into action. Ignorance and political illiteracy are by-products of systems that omit accurate and truthful representations of both history and contemporary contexts. Words and sharing are only a beginning. People need to learn and dialogue on how to move words into actions. We are all in this together, and decolonizing approaches are more constructive without shame or blame. This, I believe, moves the discourse to institutional and systemic culpability versus individual blaming.

I have also learned that intention and purpose accompany those people who voluntarily arrive to engage in decolonizing work. Open learning spirits and open minds of both the Anishinaabek and settler educators present enriched the critical learning space I witnessed and experienced. Values of equity need to be visible. Equity is embedded in circle work, in which each person is offered time and space to contribute and, through this process, others listen. From the listening, we all learned. I believe that the decolonizing space must be a safe space and a brave space as generated by one of the instructors, an Algonquin/Mohawk scholar, Dr. Bonnie Freeman. I have witnessed transformative learning in the past year as Anishinaabek and settler educators came together with an explicit agenda to understand decolonizing and to grow. Through this experience, I have learned that decolonizing is not a single action but a process of unlearning, learning, grieving, angering, healing, sharing, etc. I am learning that decolonizing is a cumulative process of tackling, taking apart, and rebuilding. I do not believe it is a singular act, though a series of singular acts contributes to an individual or collective process of decolonizing holistically.

I have learned that decolonizing really means we are all in this colonial state together. The DEC has drawn the attention of a variety of educators, administrators,

and other professionals from a variety of educational settings. At first, we thought that it was for non-Indigenous educators, but I have learned that Indigenous educators desire understanding and knowledge about decolonization. Approximately one third of the participants were Indigenous and Métis and were engaged in their journey of decolonizing. I was one of them.

I learned that “intentions” for decolonizing is important. Coming with purpose matters. Some of the themes that emerged were: learning to unpack internalized colonialism, which helps to identify how to *not* replicate oppressive or colonial ways in our personal and professional lives; and educating ourselves about the means and mechanisms of colonization in order to have a capacity to reject what controls and has power over us. I learned that settler educators who engaged in decolonizing had intention and a level of understanding of colonization, and accepted it is alive and well, and had begun problematizing it to some degree. My colleagues were aware enough to want to explore our “conflicting colonial history... engage in relational truth telling—a critical constructive dialogue” (Regan, 2010, p. 233). At times, I felt uncomfortable in sharing my truth but did so trusting the space and process. Though we shared common space in the circle room, we shared conflicting perceptions of our realities. Respectful listening and presence created safe and brave spaces in this process. Certainly, there were times tensions filled the air; however, in this year the learning was far greater than the moments of tension and discomfort.

Paulette Regan (2010), a critical, white settler scholar, further states, “Those settlers who think that no reconciliation is necessary or that a cheap reconciliation is enough may never aspire to change the socio-political relationships, structures, and institutions of colonialism” (p. 233). Again, I learned that those who registered, paid, and travelled to the sessions came with intention and purpose with a desire and quest to “unsettle their settler within” (Regan, 2010). Education and awareness do have an impact because many participants are engaged in a desire to do better and be better than their colonizing predecessors. What I learned was that whether you are Anishinaabek or not, we are all colonized and have some unpacking to do. I learned that some of us do not accept imperialism and its control over our minds. Some of us want to re-examine, struggle, and be uncomfortable in unlearning and relearning spaces. I learned that white people need hope, too, in taking their place in restoring equity and balance. They have hope in the writings of critical white scholars such as Regan, who has challenged settlers to decolonize and examine their power and privilege. Eloquently, Regan (2010) upholds Okanagan activist Jeannette Armstrong’s call to non-Indigenous settlers to “cast a critical eye on the imperial garden [settlers] have cultivated with our colonial tools, on the lands and in the lives of Indigenous peoples” (p. 235). Regan challenged fellow settlers by stating that in the era of the TRC,

unless we who are non-Indigenous undertake to turn over the rocks that remain in our colonial garden, we will never achieve what we claim so badly—to transform and reconcile our relationship with Indigenous people. Rather, we will remain benevolent peacemakers, colonizer-perpetrators bearing the false gift of a cheap and meaningless reconciliation that costs us so little and Indigenous peoples so much. (Regan, 2010, pp. 236–237)

The decolonizing education training is a means of turning over the rocks in our colonial gardens, examining them, and making conscious pathways for change and action. All of these processes are fundamentally about decolonizing and restoring one's consciousness to the land, water, and Creation as our human source of life. Without critical self-examination reconciliation remains rhetoric. With critical self-examination decolonizing is challenging and uncomfortable work. One of my settler colleagues reinforced in her writing "that the history of Aboriginal education in Canada clearly demonstrates that mainstream programs intended to benefit their communities cannot be a positive force for social change if program goals and content reflect only dominant society culture and values" (Mastronardi, 2009, p. 42). These words do not refer to superficial changes; the shifts being called for come out of transformative learning that causes one to go deeper and further. Going deeper and further requires time for processing and for deep personal reflection of how colonization is alive and well in our lives and in our teachings.

From this experience, I have learned that hope exists in building partnerships, relationships, and finding common ground based on intention and respect. One commonality is that we all need the land and water for life. I find hope in some colleagues who have a will and desire to decolonize their sites of education and practice. I am learning that while decolonizing can be harsh in reality and truth, it is refreshing to have real conversations about things that people often rarely speak about. I have learned that decolonizing is necessary when treaty relationships between Canada, its citizens, and Indigenous peoples are not honoured. Decolonizing is necessary when the relationships between the human world and the natural world are severed and the Earth as we know it is in peril. I have experienced settler colleagues across the country engage with intention, purpose, and respect and move their decolonizing work from words into action in their personal and professional lives. I will choose to collaborate with colleagues who are decolonizing, willing to take risks, be brave, respectful, and listen. During circle work, we all were actively engaged in unpacking what we have internalized. I learned that when we commit to growing our consciousness, we can venture into areas of discourse and possibilities. I also believe that we break down internalized ideas, stereotypes, and false notions that prevent us from building relationships across ethnicities, gender orientations, etc. Having shared this, I also believe that there is a greater need for faculty in social work education, and in all faculties of education for that matter, to engage in a journey of decolonizing.

Facilitators play an integral role in the decolonizing education process. We choose instructors who themselves are decolonizing their scholarship, teaching, and practice. Deep personal sharing happened because skilled facilitators fostered safe, respectful, and brave spaces. Participants arrived with intention and purpose. I am learning that intention is important for participants to be truthful in circle about colonization, racism, and its impacts. Process matters. Relationship matters in decolonizing work. I experienced that participants' learning happened in respectful relationship with one another. As a result of truth telling and listening in action, the circle then began to understand Indigenous people's anger and resistance to white dominance, power, and control. We crossed some incredible invisible barriers and

assumptions held about each other (not often voiced) in circle sharing. I learned that we can cross bridges and engage in powerfully transformative sharing. Transferring moments of transformation and realizations into decolonizing practices and actions within educational structures and systems are the ultimate goal of these sessions. Participants continue the challenge of decolonizing within the broader structures and institutional beasts we educate and practise in. These may have well been “healing moments” from which I hope transformation in sites of education and institutions occur. I know we are not there yet, but these moments in time and process are the seeds and where the essential nature of decolonizing institutions is clarified. Unless we consciously work at decolonizing, reproducing what we think is the norm is inevitable in our research, teaching, and practice. After my experience in decolonizing education I continue to stand by what my mentors have taught me: Decolonizing must precede reconciliation for a re-visioning of peaceful and respectful relationships with Anishinaabek peoples, the lands, waters, and all of Creation. At the Centre for Indigegogy, lessons will continue to emerge within decolonizing spaces and inform its ongoing growth and pathways.

Conclusion

Decolonization in social work education is situated in the obvious context of social policies and practices as mechanisms of colonization. Decolonization requires a concentrated effort to deconstruct in order to reimagine and shift education and social work practice. Anishinaabek scholars tend to agree that decolonizing is a return to a relational accountability to the land and water. The land and water are not a “right” but a “responsibility” (Longboat, 2013; Manuel, 2017; Wilson Danard, 2013). All peoples are responsible for having respectful relations with the land, Mother Earth, and water; they are our source of life. Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2005) asserted that colonial institutions (education is one of them) have profoundly implanted colonial ideologies and the decolonization of thought, and knowledge production is imperative to generate knowledge that respects Anishinaabek worldviews and ways of life. He stated that

in the absence of mental and spiritual decolonization, any efforts to theorize or to implement a model of a “new” Onkwehonwe³–Settler relationship is counter-productive to the objectives of justice and the achievement of a long-term relationship of peaceful coexistence between our peoples. (Alfred, 2005, p. 180)

Colonization was and always has been about land and resource extraction for capitalist power and greed. Colonization of the lands led to colonization of the peoples (who stood in between the land and resource extractors), which led to colonization of the children and re-socialization mechanisms to sever Anishinaabek peoples’ connections to the land from our values and beliefs. Colonization then was directed to re-socialize the children and people through colonial policies of social control. Anishinaabek/Indigenous scholars, Elders, knowledge keepers, and settler allies assert that colonization is and has always been about exploitation of the

³ *Onkwehonwe* means the people in similar way as *Anishinaabe* and applies to Indigenous peoples.

beautiful lands and waters in Canada (Longboat, 2013; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Manuel, 2017; Wilson Danard, 2013). Further to that goal is the imposed infiltration of values, beliefs, traditions, worldviews, policies of one nation over the other (Aquash, 2013). Ultimately, through ongoing exposure, socialization, and education, colonial forces are internalized into policies, procedures, and practice with a goal of disconnecting all peoples from their sense of responsibility to the land, water, and sources of life. Decolonization in social work then ignites a connection between social injustice, environmental racism, land dispossession, and oppressive social policies. Decolonizing social work educators is a requisite to decolonizing social work education and practitioners' capacity to enact decolonizing practices.

The intention of this article is to offer a specific site of engagement and intersectionality for decolonizing social work education and educators with the Centre for Indigegogy. I feel that I have offered that up and encourage readers to consider where their site of engagement can be on their journey of decolonizing. Finally, and as importantly, decolonizing and reconciliation moves beyond people into relationships with the land, waters and all of Creation. We are responsible to our Mother Earth and the life she gives us. Environmental sustainability matters in decolonizing work. Given the havoc and destruction colonization has on the Earth and her natural resources, we cannot forget that eurowestern colonists were out to exploit, extract, and capitalize on our Mother's resources. We Anishinaabek/Indigenous peoples are people of the land and suffered the wrath of colonization as a result. We continue to be land-based peoples and continue to be impacted by the colonizing of the lands. The truth is that all peoples are impacted by the colonizing of the Earth and inhumanities against Indigenous peoples. Social injustices against Indigenous peoples are rooted in the colonization of the lands. Decolonizing actions are acts of solidarity not only with Indigenous peoples but also with Mother Earth and life. We all have more truth telling and sharing to hear as we continue to be challenged to live out our responsibilities with each other, the lands, and waters. Reckoning with truth precedes reconciliation. And reconciliation remains a concept and another empty basket without conscious decolonizing engagement. Miigwech!

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