

# Learning With and From Indigenous People: Navigating Transformative Pedagogy and Privilege in Teacher Education

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*This case study explores the impact of an English language Arts Secondary methods class that focused on learning with and from Indigenous people. By participating in a number of in-class activities, taking a field trip, and engaging in a critical service-learning project that helped decentre the learner/teacher relationship, many non-Indigenous pre-service teachers were able to transform their understandings. Quantitative and qualitative data illustrate that most pre-service teachers challenged stereotypes, deficit thinking, and expanded their awareness; however, a minority experienced some levels of cognitive dissonance as their own privileged worldviews were challenged. This study explores the hope and challenges of decolonizing education, and a continuing need to imagine otherwise.*

*Cette étude de cas porte sur l'impact d'un cours d'anglais en méthodologie au secondaire visant l'apprentissage avec, et de, personnes autochtones. Plusieurs enseignants non-autochtones en formation ont pu transformer leur compréhension en participant à des activités en classe, à une sortie éducative et à un projet d'apprentissage par le service qui a aidé à décentrer le rapport apprenant/enseignant. Les données quantitatives et qualitatives indiquent que la plupart des enseignants en formation ont fait abstraction des stéréotypes, ont surmonté des lacunes de raisonnement et ont amélioré leurs connaissances; toutefois, une minorité d'entre eux ont ressenti une certaine dissonance cognitive face à la remise en question de leurs propres visions du monde privilégiées. Cette étude explore l'espoir et les défis face à la décolonisation de l'éducation et du besoin permanent d'imaginer le monde autrement.*

## **Introduction: Call and Response**

### **A Call to Decolonize Education**

I was first introduced to a call and response song that culminated in a coming together for a group dance at an Elders conference at Trent University, while I was still an undergraduate student in the early 1990's. I remember being deeply moved by this experience; there was joy and connections being awakened intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually through the teachings received and participating in Indigenous culture. Today, there are many calls being made that invite a response. There are calls for social justice in higher education that are calling

us all to engage with Indigenous cultures and people in respectful ways (Association of Canadian Deans of Education [ACDE], 2010). The Deans at Faculties of Education, in Canada, signed *The Accord on Indigenous Education* in the hope of helping to create “a socially just society for Indigenous peoples” (ACDE, 2010, p.4) that supports the creation of “meaningful opportunities for learning about and practicing Indigenous pedagogies and ways of knowing” (ACDE, 2010, p.5).

Certainly, one of the most critical calls to action is as a result of the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In response to the well documented cultural genocide of Indigenous people, we are all being called upon to help end the systemic oppression and marginalization of Indigenous people and knowledge systems (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Education has a pivotal role to play in this regard. The TRC specifically asks that teacher education programs take on the task of “decolonizing teacher education” as well as develop “transformative pedagogies” (TRC, 2015, p.2).

Given the fact that most people, including pre-service teachers, have received a largely Eurocentric education, how will these well-meaning educational directives to include and value Indigenous people be enacted? What experiences, knowledge, and relationships might be conducive to helping to (re)imagine aspects of higher education and professional programs with a view to social justice and decolonization? If we are to respond to these calls and decolonize education, then more deliberate efforts to change curricula and create experiences that bring people together, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, will need to be systemically enacted.

### **Responding to the Call**

Whether one is responding to a formal educational policy mandate, teacher education standards, or a call to social justice to end the marginalization of particular groups of people in the education system, transformation and change can only happen when enacted by educational stakeholders. Given the history of Eurocentric education systems that have historically devalued Indigenous spirituality, worldviews, land, and people (Battiste, 2013; Chandler, 2013) there is not only an ethical and epistemological dimension to decolonizing education, but a sensitivity required to re-envision the teaching and learning dynamic. Battiste (2013) envisions the work of decolonization as both a reactive and proactive educational project. On the one hand, one must respond to the colonial myths, stereotypes, and devaluing of Indigenous knowledge systems that maintains a colonial system that marginalizes and oppresses Indigenous people, while also, proactively affirming, sharing, and valuing, the deep wisdom traditions of Indigenous people.

In acknowledging that most pre-service teachers would not have been given the opportunity in their own educational journeys to learn or even, perhaps, engage with Indigenous cultural groups, it was important for myself to consider learning opportunities that would help support a decolonizing framework. I wanted my pre-service teachers to have the opportunity to not only understand the historical colonial past but become aware of some of the rich Indigenous knowledge systems and stories that could enhance their own pedagogical practices.

This paper explores how those in higher education may value Indigenous people and knowledge in their formal curriculum by sharing a model of relationship building, and repositioning the teacher/learner relationship, while understanding the continuing struggle against oppression. Building upon critical service-learning, in part, this study describes working with twenty-five pre-service teachers in a faculty of education and in a project that focused on integrating the English language arts curriculum with Indigenous perspectives, culture, stories,

and ways of knowing. The project was seen as relational from the outset. The pre-service teachers, none of whom identified as First Nation, Métis or Inuit, would have to learn from Indigenous community members in order to be of service. The learning entailed pre-service teachers having a number of classes focus and incorporate Indigenous perspectives at the faculty, led by myself, a descendant of French, Irish, and Métis people, as well as a field trip to the cultural centre we partnered with, which would enable us to learn with and from the Indigenous people from the territory we live in, over the Fall and Winter terms. We teamed up with this particular cultural organization, as I had previously had the opportunity to attend professional development sessions there. In speaking with the educational coordinator, we both saw a need for both in-service and pre-service teachers to be supported in their efforts to include more Indigenous curricula, and we both felt we were in a position to help support each other in this endeavour. Hence, the learning entailed learning from various Indigenous people and the service entailed pre-service teachers creating Indigenous-focused lesson plans for the cultural organization as they hoped to create a database that could help support other teachers' curricular practices. Here, I share findings from the data that show several pre-service teachers' abilities to challenge stereotypes and value Indigenous culture and enhance their curricula. I also acknowledge a few challenges that emerged during the project, from cognitive dissonance to outright resistance on the part of some students, in order to consider moving forward in a larger aim to decolonize education.

### **Surveying the Field**

It has been argued that a largely Eurocentric model of education is not only not meeting the needs of Indigenous youth and communities, but it is not serving the needs and interests of a wide range of diverse learners, due to gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Sanford, Williams, Hopper, & McGregor, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Taylor et al., 2016). Greater diversity in the student population requires faculties of education to help educators become more effective with a wide variety of learners. The Chiefs Assembly on Education (2012) noted that most provincial educational systems were not meeting the needs of Indigenous learners: "61% of First Nation young adults (20-24) have not completed high school, compared with 13% of non-Aboriginal people in Canada" (p.2).

They did note that some First Nations communities, such as the Mi'kmaq from Merbertou in Nova Scotia have 100% graduation rates; however, this is not the norm across the Country (Chiefs Assembly on Education, 2012). Certainly, different models are worth exploring.

In many Eurocentric and/or colonial models of education, educators are often deemed experts and students learners. In learning about new cultures and people, especially Indigenous people, teachers need to let go of being the all-knowing expert and need to be able to learn alongside, with, and from Indigenous community members (Donald, 2009). It has been noted that there is a possibility of decentering the learner/teacher expert relationship in critical service-learning models; thereby, service-learning has a potential role to play in decolonizing education.

### **Service-learning, Indigenous People, and Social Justice**

Service-Learning is seen as a way to enhance personal and civic learning (Ash, Clayton, & Moses, 2009; Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; McKenna, Anderson, Traynor, & Pedras 2004; Root & Furco 2001), and may encourage students to see themselves as critical agents of social change (Cipolle, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). Service-learning experiences can help some participants enhance

their knowledge, acceptance, and ability to get along with people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Gallini & Moely, 2003). Critical Service-learning has been found to be effective in social justice education in higher education contexts, as it may spread “awareness of social inequality,” reduce “negative stereotypes,” and “empower ... students to work for social change” (Einfeld & Collins, 2008, pp. 104-05). These values, Einfeld and Collins (2008) suggest, are integral for the advancement of democratic citizenship and a socially just society, “whereby society is constantly striving for equality, inclusion, peace, and active participation” (p.105). Indigenous people continue to fight for democratic recognition of treaties and treaty rights, as the colonial project of public erasures of Indigenous presence continues to impact the current educational system and lives of Indigenous people. For example, in Canada, many Indigenous communities continue to fight for clean water and adequate housing on the reserves that were created and remain legacies of the Indian Act. This binary divide between settlers and Indigenous peoples needs to be re-evaluated, as it is in everyone’s interests to work together for a common democratic future. As schools are often a reflection of society, education can be a vehicle to help create new understandings and work towards transformation and change.

Steinman (2011) noted that service-learning with students in higher education who collaborate with “Tribal Nations” could help build “student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (p.7). Moving beyond the volunteer model versus the critical service-learning debate, Steinman (2011) uses Regan’s work (2010) to advocate for “the notion of “making space” (p.5). Making space entails learning to listen, recognizing that many “problems” identified as Indigenous are rooted in “settler” social, political, economic, racial understandings of Indigenous people and land (Steinman, 2011, p.9). Steinman recognizes that the outcomes students potentially gain from their engagement in service-learning experiences that genuinely engage with Indigenous people may look different from other service-learning projects, as learning to be of service may mean building relationships and listening to Indigenous people. Given this model, learning takes on a bigger role, which may help facilitate the deep learning required to begin to decolonize education.

Bartleet, Bennett, Marsh, Power, and Sunderland (2014) also emphasize the importance of relationship building, reciprocity, and reflexivity when students in higher education engage with Indigenous community partners. Although there are few studies on service-learning and Indigenous people, Bartleet et al. (2014) adopted a critical service-learning approach, as they saw reflection as essential to processing service-learning experiences and building a critical engagement that would lead to greater understanding of Indigenous community members.

Similar to my study, though my focus is English language arts, Peralta, O’Connor, Cotton, and Bennie (2016) used a service-learning project as a vehicle to bring pre-service educators and an Indigenous cultural organization together in consultation with an Indigenous educator mentor, to develop cultural competence in teaching physical education. In order to prepare pre-service teachers for service-learning in an Indigenous community, Aboriginal community members and educators were found to become mentors, who would guide pre-service teachers, so they could construct and deliver meaningful and culturally appropriate classes. Overall, it was demonstrated that both pre-service teachers and Aboriginal mentors had “enhanced feelings of belonging, personal achievement and self-confidence” as a result of this collaboration (Peralta et al., 2016, p. 261).

Although the literature on service-learning and Indigenous people, especially in pre-service teacher education, is small, there is a larger body of research on multicultural and social justice service-learning experiences in education. With that said, Holsapple’s (2012) analysis of the

literature indicated that a vast majority of these studies lack sufficient detail as to how to bring these experiences about, and which practices practitioners use to encourage students to experience diversity outcomes (Holsapple, 2012). Though my study is small, it will add to the literature on the how to begin to build the capacity of pre-service teachers with regard to bringing about more opportunities to imagine decolonizing education. In sharing some of the pedagogical steps taken to create this experience in a higher education classroom, it is hoped others may imagine how to value Indigenous people and knowledge in their own curricula.

### **Learning to be of Service: Experiences as Planned**

This project was intended to respond to the need for more in-service and pre-service teachers to develop and use resources that include Indigenous perspectives; in this case, stories and heritage in language arts programs. Some of the stated aims of the project that were shared with the students at the beginning of the year were to: (1) provide the Indigenous cultural organization with curriculum resources to strengthen their teaching resource database; (2) give pre-service teachers the opportunity to move from theory to practice by developing a curriculum and associated materials that are explicitly Indigenous; (3) reflect on the impact of the service-learning experience on pre-service teachers' personal and professional growth and practice; and (4) help raise the consciousness of educators who can then help to promote Indigenous knowledge in language arts and work towards development of a pedagogy that does not oppress; a pedagogy that truly embraces, celebrates, and honors Indigenous ways of knowing.

The service-learning aspect of the course provided the class with an opportunity to participate in an authentic task for a real audience. Further, given the legacy of colonialism in the education system, in order to provide a "service" to the Indigenous Heritage Centre by working on lesson plans for their data base, we would first need to learn more from and about Indigenous people. I, myself, have Indigenous ancestry, and could share a number of teachings, practices, and ways of being with my pre-service teachers. For example, I shared the use of modified talking circles, which we call community circles in our class. There were also a number of in-class activities in the Secondary English methods course that were employed, such as literature circles with Indigenous novels, as well as the study of Indigenous poems, songs, and short stories used as exemplars by authors such as Rita Joe, David Bouchard, and Thomas King. I also relied on content from another course that all students in our B.Ed. program take, a mandatory foundations class, Sociology of Education, which has a number of social justice commitments (see, for example, Kearns, Mitten-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2014). In this course, which I also taught at the time, all students had a module on residential schools, inter-generational trauma, resistance, and resurgence. They had also read Peggy MacIntosh's article on "White-privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," and were introduced to anti-racist and culturally-responsive pedagogy through the work of Geneva Gay. So, my English methods course, as well as the program as a whole, had a few opportunities to learn about Indigenous people, history, experiences, and knowledge.

Through the relationship with the First Nations cultural organization, we were able to work with a Mi'kmaq educator, who was the lead educational coordinator at the cultural centre, at the time of the study. He had created a number of professional education resources and saw a need for educators who ask for lesson plans to have more examples, specifically with provincial curricular outcomes. He thought our pre-service educators could help with that endeavour by creating educational materials that have an Indigenous focus for the English language arts classroom, grades 7-12. The teaching materials that emphasized and explored Indigenous

cultures, values, and stories could be used by pre-service teachers, themselves, or by educators who visit the centre or website, thereby helping to expand the collection of materials available for educators to use in the school system. So, pre-service teachers would learn, and, in return, help create educational materials that reflect Indigenous perspectives and values.

Our class visited the cultural organization in the fall and we planned for a whole day learning experience to immerse ourselves in various aspects of Mi'kmaw culture. The Mi'kmaq teacher-educator toured us around part of the Heritage site, as did other Mi'kmaq guides. We also listened to a presentation by a Mi'kmaq artist and interacted with members of a Mi'kmaq drum group. The last part of the day included an intertribal dance. During the winter term, we listened to a Mi'kmaq storyteller, who visited our class. An Elder was scheduled to visit our classroom, but there was a Winter storm and there was not enough time to coordinate another visit. Overall, the project was created with the knowledge that it was critical for pre-service teachers to interact with Mi'kmaq people, in whose traditional territory we reside, and other Indigenous community members in order to be prepared to develop and promote the use of culturally-responsive, anti-colonial, and anti-racist curricula, and incorporate educational strategies and materials with an Indigenous focus.

### **Approaches to Research**

This case study, bound in time, in one particular classroom, over a particular period of time, (mid 2010s), not identified specifically to protect the anonymity of the group, has several several “detailed, in-depth data collection ... sources of information” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.40). An anonymous quantitative survey was administered at the end of the term. Additional data sources included a number of qualitative approaches. Observations of students and experiences were noted in a journal as I was the instructor and am always mindful of wanting to improve my own practice and be aware of those I teach. Students were asked to use the “DEAL Critical Reflection Model”—Describe, Examine, Articulate Learning—to support their reflection on their service-learning experiences so as to achieve deeper awareness of their learning (Ash et al., 2009). In addition, students wrote a final reflective paper that provided a synthesis of the Indigenous focus of the class and the service-learning experience in the second semester. Documents, such as student work, were also collected. There were also follow-up interviews conducted with six participants. Sharing circles were conducted in class to reflect on participants experiences, and exit cards, short written reflections at the end of the class, were also used to understand the students' experiences. University ethics approval and consent was obtained for the project, and pre-service teachers were given an invitation to participate in the research and ethics forms were signed by all, as no one opted out of the study.

In order to assess whether the aims of the project were achieved, a mixed-methods approach was used to collect and analyze data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2006). According to Creswell (2003), a “mixed method research provides more comprehensive evidence for studying a research problem than either qualitative or quantitative approaches alone” (p. 9). The quantitative methods have the advantage of collecting data in a short time, whereas qualitative data can inquire deeply into a participant's perspectives and experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The results of the reported outcomes from the quantitative and qualitative year-end service-learning survey were analyzed and calculated with Lime survey software in our service-learning department.

Here, I highlight the research that shows the transformative aspects of service-learning for

intercultural education. I also share personal experiences from my perception of the successes and challenges of beginning efforts to decolonize teacher education. Subsequent papers will detail the voices of the pre-service educators who participated in the focus group and individual interviews after the course ended, as well as closer examination of the students' formal written work to further understand the impact on their learning and emerging identities as professionals in the field of education, the scope of this paper details the findings from the survey, as well as my own observations and some student documents that help to provide a greater context of the study. This study is limited in that it is not reproducible in exactly the same way at our university, or at any other. It could be adapted and modified to suit one's own context and the pre-service teachers and cultural organizations in one's geographic area. Nonetheless, it is hoped that aspects of this study are informative and useful for other social justice practitioners who seek ways to decolonize education.

## Findings

### Experiences as Lived and Documented

This project was, on the whole, deemed successful in the critical service-learning tradition. The measures I took to create opportunities and experiences for the pre-service teachers to learn from and collaborate with Indigenous people, in particular from the Mi'kmaq community, were effective. A majority of students rated their experiences as positive and attested to multiple levels of engagement, professional learning, and even gratitude for the opportunity to learn more about and with Indigenous people. Students recognized the importance of learning with and from Indigenous people and noted their own power in beginning to decolonize education. They attested to feeling more comfortable with oral assessments, for example, as well as being able to draw upon Indigenous authors and stories to enhance their lesson planning.

Here, I highlight the findings from the quantitative and qualitative year-end survey. Twenty-one of the twenty-five students were present on the day the survey was distributed at the end of the term. I focus on three major areas in the analysis below: challenging stereotypes, expanding cultural awareness and acceptance, and creating a space to stretch beyond one's comfort level. Pre-service teachers' responses are identified as students (S) and they were given numbers from 1-21 to coincide with the anonymous surveys.

**Challenging stereotypes.** In response to the question, *Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements pertaining to attitudinal changes: [My service learning experience helped me to reduce stereotypical views towards the population with whom I worked and/or the people served by the community agency.]*, over 90% of the class rated the response as good (7), excellent (8) or outstanding (9), on a scale of 1-10.

The answers the students provided with regard to reducing stereotypes are represented in Figure 1.

Overall, the quantitative data show that pre-service teachers were able to challenge stereotypes through their service-learning experience. Qualitative answers support the quantitative findings; One student reported that engaging with an Indigenous culture gave him/her the experience of "actually experiencing a culture through a non-stereotypical lense" (S4), which was powerful in his or her learning. Another student said that the project "opened my eyes to systemic racism and ignorance towards Indigenous peoples in the education system" (S10). The interactions with Indigenous people, through the sharing that took place in the service-

## Field Summary for 9(2)

Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements pertaining to attitudinal changes:

[My service learning experience helped me to reduce stereotypical views towards the population with whom I worked and/or the people served by the community]

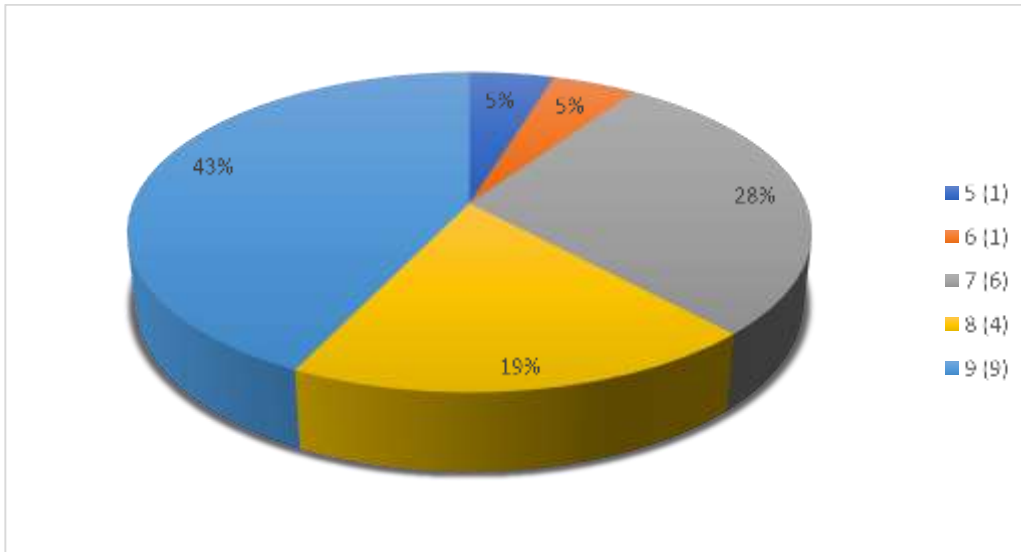


Figure 1. Stereotype reduction experienced by students.

learning experience were invaluable in helping pre-service teachers recognize contemporary Indigenous people, as well as understand more about Indigenous perspectives on history. These experiences were absorbed, not only intellectually as students understood and challenged stereotypes, but the learning seemed to move them deeply on an emotional level. They were able to take the information, process it, and make it part of their own professional teaching repertoire. Several pre-service teachers commented that one of the “main benefits [of service-learning] included increased awareness of the issues and how I can incorporate this into my teaching practices” (S20). Another added, it “allowed me to critically think about my own teaching practices in relation to the importance of incorporating multicultural education into the curriculum” (S5). In taking the time to visit and learn from and with Indigenous community members, pre-service teachers were able to acknowledge their new understandings and stated that they could see opportunities for their learnings to translate into their various pedagogical practices.

**Expanding cultural awareness and acceptance.** In response to the survey question, *Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements pertaining to attitudinal changes: [My service learning experience helped me to be more aware and open to other cultures]*, over 86% of the class rated that response as good (7), excellent (8) or outstanding (9), on a scale of 1-10. The answers the students provided with regard to changes in attitudes are represented in Figure 2.

Pre-service teachers’ responses, quantitatively, show an increase in awareness of Indigenous cultures, through participating in service-learning. This data is further illustrated by the answers students reported. The relationship building, and personal interactions were shown to have been



## Field Summary for 9(3)

Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements pertaining to attitudinal changes:

[My service learning experience helped me to be more aware of and open to other cultures]

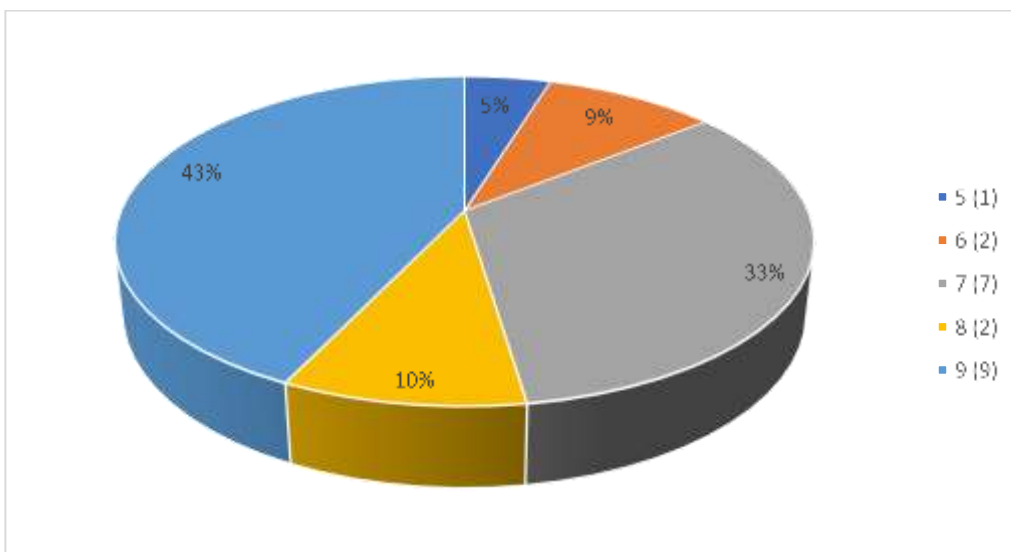


Figure 2. Attitudinal Changes experienced by students.

invaluable in increasing their awareness. One student wrote, the “exposure to another culture and body of knowledge would have been difficult to experience [without this experience]” (S18) and another added that s/he “learned a lot about Aboriginal Culture, a lot more than I would from reading a text book!” (S19). One student wrote, the service-learning experience “will help me to be a more well-rounded teacher when it comes to different cultural groups” (S3) and another wrote, “I can apply it [this experience] as a teacher; I can incorporate Mi’kmaq stories and teachings and eradicate stereotypes” (S12). Another added, “Well, I am definitely more aware of techniques to use with my students who come from the First Nations community” (S7). The increase in awareness is clear on the part of many. There also seems to be an increase in imagining their capacity to integrate more diverse curricula with an Indigenous focus. One student reported, “I now have many more resources that I can bring to practicum that raises awareness towards other cultures and connects to our students” (S5). Another pre-service teacher added, “Now, I have a lesson plan I can draw on, as well as memories of how I should try to include everyone in my classroom” (S9). The experience and memories will have a lasting impact on the pre-service teachers who engaged with the experiences available to them through visiting the cultural organization and learning with and alongside Mi’kmaq people. The application of their learning in the service-learning project is also helping them develop the habits of mind to be more inclusive in their own classrooms, as they are deepening their understanding of the importance of including representations of all learners. There seemed to also be an impact on social justice teaching/learning in that pre-service teachers talked about giving Indigenous youth in their classes voice and acknowledging the importance of their home cultures. As one student notes, “[this project was] great for helping with bringing Aboriginal voices into the classroom” (S14).

## Field Summary for 9(4)

Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements pertaining to attitudinal changes:

[My service learning experience caused me to stretch beyond my own comfort zones]

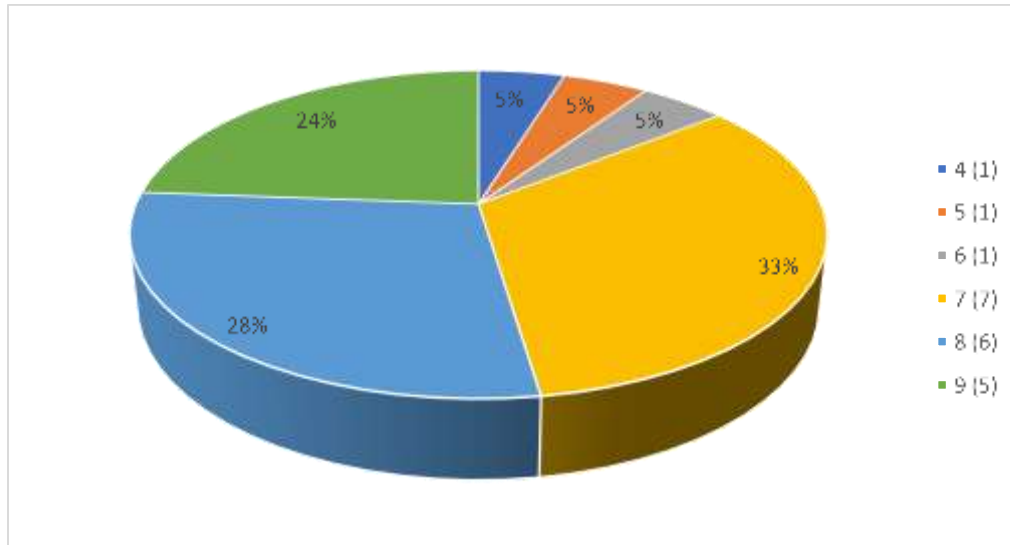


Figure 3. Stretching beyond one's comfort.

**Creating a space to stretch beyond one's comfort in a beneficial way.** In response to the question, *Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements pertaining to attitudinal changes: [My experience caused me to stretch beyond my own comfort zones]*, over 86% of the class rated that response as good (7), excellent (8) or outstanding (9), on a scale of 1-10. 15% of the class gave that response a 4, 5, or 6 on a scale of 10. The answers the students provided with regard to moving outside of their comfort zone are represented in Figure 3. In response to the question, *Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements pertaining to attitudinal changes: [My service learning experience benefited me]*, only a small minority, 10% of students, did not have a strong response to seeing the benefits of the service-learning experience in their methods class. Seventeen of the 21 pre-service teachers, or 80%, felt very strongly that it was beneficial, as indicated with their answers of 8 (excellent) and 9 (outstanding) to the survey question out of a 10 range. The answers the students provided with regard to benefits are represented in Figure 4.

The quantitative data, with regard to being challenged through the service-learning experience and seeing it as beneficial, was overwhelmingly positive. This is further evident in the answers students reported. One student wrote, overall, the experience has “given me this tool to begin to apply Indigenous viewpoints into the future curriculum” (S7). Many saw this as important to their future careers and practice. One student wrote, “It helped broaden my knowledge, which will better my ability to teach” (S2). The transformation was personal and professional; one pre-service teacher wrote, “This applies to my understanding of myself, teaching practices, and pedagogy” (S3). Another said that (s)he was inspired by the experience and it

## Field Summary for 9(5)

Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements pertaining to attitudinal changes:

[My service learning experience benefited me]

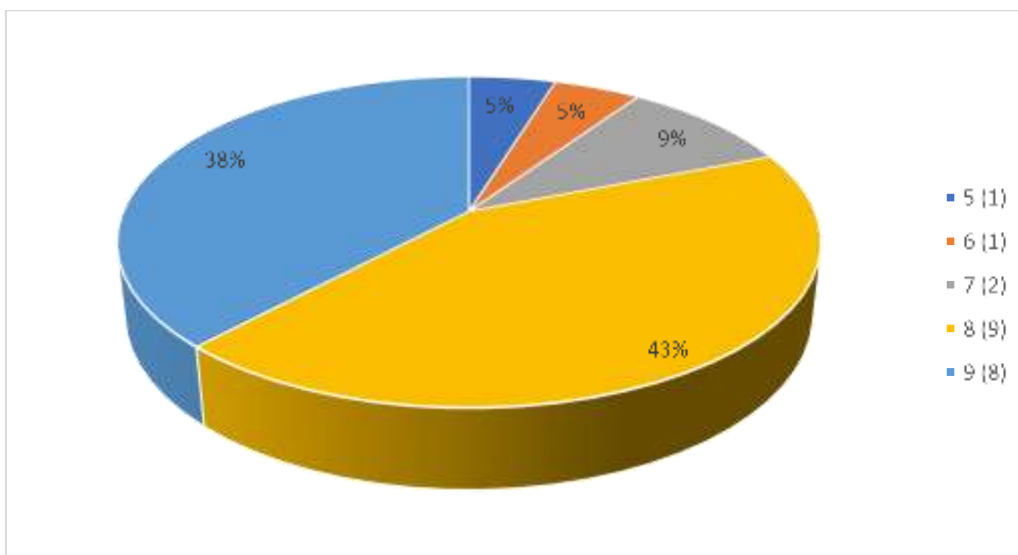


Figure 4. Benefits of Service-Learning

transformed her/his being, in relation to Indigenous people: “This experience has made me want to deepen my understanding of Indigenous culture, so I will continue independent study of the subject” (S19). Similarly, one pre-service teacher wrote that the experience “opened my eyes to more diverse ways of thinking. It inspired me to want to learn more” (S15). The transformation was profound; in the words of one participant “I’m truly committed to a lifelong relationship with Mi’kmaq communities” (S1).

### Cautionary Tales: Unseen Privilege and Cognitive Dissonance

In examining the experiences of cognitive dissonance in the service-learning project, I do not mean to diminish any of the transformative power and genuine learning and sharing that occurred between Indigenous people and pre-service teachers in my class. However, I want to acknowledge that, in our learning community, a minority of students, perhaps those who expressed not being as satisfied as others on the numerical data, experienced cognitive dissonance and there was even a demand for white privilege to be enacted in the classroom. This is something that the formal data does not detail, but rests deeply in my heart, mind, and spirit as being problematic. Further, given that this was my first service-learning project, a project that I enthusiastically committed to, I realized, in retrospect, that I was prepared and excited about the possibility for transformation and change, but not overt resistance. Other colleagues, who had participated in service-learning projects, seemed to have met with no resistance; I now realize their projects did not entail a critical (re)examination of (un)consciously held beliefs and points of view. As always, systemic racism and white privilege still remain in educational settings in spite of well-meaning

and planned pedagogical experiences, as pre-service teachers are also products of an unequal society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). I do not think student resistance should diminish the importance of collaborations with and alongside Indigenous people; some service-learning projects, anti-racist assignments, or asking students to be involved in projects that may challenge people to move outside of their comfort zones are integral to developing critical thinkers who are able to promote more socially just classrooms. However, it is important to note, name, and respond to dissonance. The work of social justice educators often takes place in small ways and may in fact be messy (Kearns, Mitten-Kükner, & Tompkins, 2017).

## The Fall

In the fall term, we visited the Indigenous cultural centre and spent some time with a Mi'kmaq artist and storyteller. One of the works of art the Indigenous artist shared with our class was that of an image of an installation of Christian crosses turned upside down—like swords. The crosses represented the use of Christianity to persecute Indigenous people and children, especially at residential schools. A few days later, unpacking the whole-day visit to the cultural centre, one of the pre-service teachers shared how offended she was by the artwork that displayed the upside-down crosses. In class she was visibly upset. In some ways, it was good that she was able to express herself, as we talk about creating a space to do uncomfortable work, and I was able to follow up with the student afterwards and further speak to the pre-service teacher in private.

After our discussion, I rationalized that the pre-service teacher did not understand the horrors of residential schools (see, for example Milloy, 1999; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In another class, in our Faculty of Education, Sociology of Education, students are all shown part of a documentary called *Muffins for Granny* (McLaren, 2007), there is one haunting story that all pre-service teachers see; it occurs when an Indigenous man recalls being a young child, being taken away from his home and seeing the Christian cross for the first time. In the documentary, he shared:

... [being taken away to residential schools] was the moment that destroyed my family the way I knew it. And the first thing I saw was this huge sculpture or image of a man nailed to the cross. And I didn't know what it was. I was thinking, is that what they are going to do to us? (*Muffins for Granny*, 2007)

There is disorientation and culture shock when people, especially children, are taken from their culture, home, language, spirituality, and family, and inserted into a new place. I am not sure how anyone could listen to the narrative in this documentary, or those of any residential school survivor, and not be moved to be more empathetic. We now know from well-documented evidence that the residential schools, run by several Christian institutions nationally and transnationally, inflicted physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and spiritual abuse on children in those schools. I asked myself whether the student, who felt offended by the Indigenous art, had missed that class in her other course, as it is mandatory for all Sociology of Education students to attend the residential school presentation as part of their foundations program. I recall being very upset, as I had never imagined someone taking this perspective once they had listened to the narratives of Indigenous people.

I recall discussing the incident with an older Jewish colleague, who helped me unpack the experience, as we discussed the power of the arts to offend and holocaust deniers. The experience

made me want to make sure that residential schools were deeply understood, as well as the intergenerational trauma they created; clearly covering these important topics in classrooms for one period or one day is insufficient. This was the only overt rupture that came to light in the first semester of my humble attempts to create the conditions for transformation and change, and affirming Indigenous people, knowledge, and cultures.

## Winter Time

In the winter term, I recall being very excited to enter my English methods class. The day before, we had an Indigenous storyteller come to the class. This day was the day students would begin to plan their lessons and/or units. I had thoroughly prepared and was going to begin the class by sharing a story on the Seven Grandfathers and I had brought a cart full of poems, short stories, and novels for the students to look at for inspiration as they were going to begin to create their lesson plans with an Indigenous focus. I had also put posters of the Seven Grandfather teachings up around the classroom: Love, Courage, Respect, Honesty, Humility, Wisdom, Truth. In my mind, I had set the stage for a wonderful and productive class. At the beginning of the class, as I was going over the agenda for the day, one white male stood up and said that “many of us feel this is an English class and we are doing too much on Indigenous people, and this is not a Mi’kmaq class.” He asked for a show of hands as to who felt the same. The rest is a bit of a blur. I tried to address his outright public resistance to the teaching/learning focus of the class by refocusing on the course expectations and requirements. He did eventually sit down.

I showed a video, as planned, on the Seven Sacred Teachings, as taught and illustrated by Bouchard, Martin, and Cameron (2009). The students worked independently. I asked the students to fill out exit cards at the end of the class. Most people apologized for my being “ambushed” and a few, perhaps 3 males and 1 female, out of a class of 25, did suggest that we spend too much time on Indigenous stories as a “genre.” One said he understood that I was modeling “diverse cultures” but it was “Black history month” so, could we please “focus on that?” Others wrote supportive exit cards; one wrote “people in the class clearly do not know that we need to focus on diverse cultures ‘all year,’ not just at one time of the year.” Another wrote “don’t back down; we’ve barely scratched the surface, we need to learn more.” Someone who seemed very mathematically inclined wrote, “13 of our classes are focused on Olson [literacy textbook] and 4 of our classes on Indigenous cultures [guest speakers, readings, storytelling, lesson planning] ... please continue ... it is appreciated by most students.” Another reasoned, “... perhaps if certain people weren’t late for class and did their course readings, they would get more out of the class” (personal communication with students). I did continue. Although, I was really shocked by such an overt demand for a Eurocentric curriculum.

In contrast to a vocal demand for a narrowing of the curriculum in my class, that many students quietly did not support, I am mindful that there is a growing effort to include more Indigenous curricula and pedagogies in the K-12 education systems that we are preparing our pre-service teachers to be educators for. There is a growing body of Indigenous focused policies and education training branches, for example, *The Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (Aboriginal Education Office, 2007) (see Kearns, 2013, for a discussion on its impact). Saskatchewan also has an *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2018). Alberta that has its own First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education directives. In British Columbia there are efforts to include Aboriginal Education from Kindergarten to Grade 12, as well as an Aboriginal Education Branch. In Nova

Scotia there is one Mi'kmaq course in Grade 11 and Treaty education is in development, to name a few Indigenous educational initiatives across the Country. Hence, the need to focus on Indigenous curricula persists.

As with many social movements, and the movement to decolonize education is one, those on the margins need allies and advocates. Although, I have previously encountered resistance to some of the content of my team-taught courses, such as Sociology, with course evaluation comments stating that “there are too many community circles” in my classes, and one pre-service teacher thanked me for “the white guilt.” I had never actually been overtly challenged. As the sole instructor, teaching a singular course, I realized there was more of a vulnerability teaching an individual course as opposed to one that is anchored and supported by a team. So as an untenured female Indigenous scholar, at the time, I actually invited our Dean, a tenured white male, who helped create and sign *the Indigenous Accord*, to give further context on the need to educate ourselves on our treaty obligations and Indigenous peoples. Clearly more time was needed for some pre-service teachers to understand, and more voices are needed in the efforts of pre-service teacher education to bring about transformation and change.

### **Discussion and Reflection**

The quantitative and qualitative documented survey findings show most pre-service teachers experienced transformative pedagogy and felt empowered and genuinely engaged with the Indigenous focus and opportunity the service-learning project offered our class. It was a unique experience that allowed us to learn from and with Indigenous people, in whose territory we lived and studied, and to give back in our own small way. The data showed that several pre-service educators had their awareness of and appreciation for Indigenous people awakened, and their capacities to engage Indigenous-focused curricula expanded as a result of the in-class curricula and service-learning project. Like other social justice service-learning researchers (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Peralta et al., 2016), I found this experience important in developing pre-service teachers' cultural competence. Pre-service teachers attested to reducing stereotypes, and challenging deficit thinking based on false and/or negative assumptions about Indigenous people. This deliberately constructed and scaffolded experience was found to be hopeful and helpful in realizing the aims of the project. Further, the Indigenous Educator at the cultural organization was very satisfied with the collaboration (personal communication).

However, the few instances of overt disruptions and resistance give me need to pause and recognize that I need to learn more, and that decolonization will require multiple and ongoing critical interruptions to dominant knowledge systems and planned learning experiences for those we teach. As Kishimoto (2018) recognizes, educators, who try to create a classroom climate that challenges power and promotes an anti-racist framework, need to be self-reflexive (p. 548), as there may be “uncomfortable moments of crisis, difficulty, or emotions ... [which] require a process of working through ... rather than achieving the same expected outcome for all students” (p. 547). Ultimately, before the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives can be seen as an opportunity to learn, rather than a threat, or as a topic of worth and not a topic taking the place of something or someone else to a vocal minority, we must acknowledge that history has shaped present day relations.

The problem, as Donald (2009) conceives it, is not just a lack of knowledge, but the imposition of a binary colonial frontier logic which constructs colonizers as “insiders” and Indigenous people as “outsiders” (p. 23). Instead of viewing Indigenous people as contemporary people who are in

relation to all others, Indigenous people are construed as separate, often relegated to being a people in the past, a one-day teaching topic, and excluded from the stories of nation-building. These faulty one-sided representations are obscured by Eurocentric discourses that purport to be culturally neutral, based on universal social, economic, and democratic values. Kishimoto's (2018) discussion of anti-racist pedagogy in the classroom reminds us, "power relations in knowledge production" may be oppressive, ... oppositional or transformative, and are always present (p. 541). There is a continuing need for ongoing critical analysis of one's own social location, power, privilege, and oppression.

In addressing the need to acknowledge and recognize the historical impact on existing present-day relations and reframing Indigenous perspectives as an opportunity to learn rather than as a threat to existing knowledge/social good, we need to find ways to create experiences that help move the dialogue past a largely Eurocentric educational system that often silences, subjugates, and/or misrepresent Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Critical service-learning can be an integral part of this endeavour, as can more general collaborations or field trips to Indigenous cultural organizations, Indigenous guest speakers, and incorporating Indigenous materials as examples throughout one's own curriculum in higher education. Further, having critical anti-racist faculty is important to move this work forward as all social movements need advocates. As well, Indigenous faculty members in tenured positions in universities are important to normalize Indigenous presence and perspectives in a largely Eurocentric educational system.

Decolonization is an opportunity for society and educators to accept Indigenous knowledge systems as viable expressions of culture that require a respectful place within the curriculum, and not simply as an add-on (Battiste, 2013; Donald, 2009). It is an opportunity for educators to engage with Indigenous peoples and their wisdom traditions in ethical ways. Donald (2009) has identified, however, that some of the greatest challenges to decolonizing public knowledge is the anger, frustration, and resentment (to name only a few responses) that many settlers experience when confronted with the facts of historical violence directed towards Indigenous peoples. Rather than recognition or empathy, this unsettling knowledge is perceived as a threat to settler lifestyles and knowledge systems.

It has been recognized that service-learning projects that seek intercultural competence may, in fact, lead to cognitive dissonance. De Leon (2014) explains: "two outcomes can emerge from cognitive dissonance: the experiences are rejected and previously held schema remain intact, or cognitive schema change to accommodate new experiences" (p. 22). So, the transformation that some students encounter, when previously held stereotypes, assumptions about the people and cultures unlike one's own, or knowledge are challenged, may not always be processed positively, but resisted.

In our class, cognitive dissonance rendered visible the "pedagogy of whiteness" (McIntosh, 1989). The overt resistance was voiced by some in a class, demanding a neutral education on behalf of other white students in class, a handful of whom seemed to agree. Kelly and Brandes (2010) also found tensions in highlighting how power and privilege circulate, seemingly neutrally, for many pre-service teachers, unless it is explicitly taught. Earlier studies show that, even when "white privilege" is explicitly interrogated, the work of helping student-teachers continuously unpack and interrogate their taken for granted assumptions is ongoing and complex (Solomon et al., 2005). Our service-learning project was humbly premised on the notion that white students were not all knowing about Indigenous curricula and were not immediately ready to create meaningful lesson plans in classrooms or to serve the interests of Indigenous people, or the Indigenous cultural community centre; as such, we sought to support pre-service teacher

candidates as they questioned their own positions and recognized the need to transform their own Eurocentric pedagogy. Part of the challenge one white male student made regarding the content was the amount of time required to learn and feeling as though one had learned enough to be an expert. Such cognitive dissonance, experienced by some members of my class, also shows that we are faced with a “failure of imagination” and a need “to move beyond [our] colonial past” (David, 2010, p. 14). In order to “re-story” our past, though, we need a “genuine *leap of imagination*” that compels us to “question our assumptions” (Regan, 2010, p. 227) and create a multidimensional view of the world and curriculum.

Taiaiake (2010) says that all North Americans need to draw on their “radical imagination” in order to “reimagine themselves, not as citizens with the privileges conferred by being a descendent of colonizers or newcomers from other parts of the world benefitting from white imperialism, but as human beings in equal and respectful relation” to one another (p. 6). The qualitative and quantitative data showed that most pre-service teachers were able to take a genuine leap of imagination and embark on a transformative pedagogical project. Yet, some students did experience cognitive dissonance, I do not see that as a failure of the project, but as an important lesson; the circulation of power and privilege in higher education is real, and there is an ongoing need for social justice and anti-racist educators to continuously work towards the decolonization of educational and public spaces.

I concur with Morton and Bergbauer (2015) when they conclude that “racism and inequality are not solved in the abstract ... we learn about [diversity] ... as a lived experience of relationship building in contexts that require us to negotiate historic and present-day conflicts” (p. 27). There is some risk and unpredictability in opening up the educational space to a variety of social dynamics; however, in risking to learn through intentional anti-racist and decolonizing experiences in classrooms and in critical service-learning, we were given the opportunity to learn more about being social justice advocates. Power and privilege continue to operate in all of our lives, through oppressive socially constructed structures such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, in the myths of knowledge as neutral, and in meritocracy. In overtly recognizing areas that needed further advocacy, we are provided with more direction as we navigate towards a hopeful future that sees more decolonization and socially just pedagogy in the educational system.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Continuing to Work for Transformation and Change**

Any attempt to respond to the calls to decolonize education requires being open to listening to Indigenous people and their perspectives. Learning about diverse worldviews, stories and knowledge, and spirituality takes place over time. Being engaged in authentic tasks inside and outside of the classroom, such as critical service-learning, are ways that pre-service teachers may gain greater civic awareness and promote social justice. The pre-service teachers in this study, who engaged in decolonization through critical service-learning, who were open to decentering the learner/teacher relationship and “learning” prior to being of “service,” were able to challenge themselves personally and professionally to build relationships with Indigenous people. The inclusion of Indigenous stories throughout the curricula in genre studies, such as short stories, poems and novels, also represents another opportunity to learn and deepen one’s understanding and appreciation of diverse Indigenous perspectives.

In our circle of learners, there were moments of hope, critical engagement, and encouragement to continue to challenge oppression; there were also moments where some showed privilege and dissonance. In being self-reflexive, one understands that, when privilege



surfaces, this can help those who advocate for social justice name the continued challenges they face in education. This project is a step on a longer path of decolonizing education. Transformation and change were apparent for many pre-service educators as they challenged stereotypes and many wanted to continue to learn more with, from, and about Indigenous people and perspectives. In an age where educators must resist the corporatization of higher education, the commodification of education and the neutrality of dominant knowledges, the ability to build community and connections between and amongst people working hard to be self-aware, to recognize their own privilege and to transform education with Indigenous knowledge that has not historically been valued in their own educational journeys, is hopeful.

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