

# It's Not Just a Matter of Time: Exploring Resistance to Indigenous Education

Shannon Leddy<sup>1</sup>, Susan O'Neill<sup>2</sup>

1 University of British Columbia, 2 Simon Fraser University

*This article explores resistance that occurred during the implementation of an Indigenous education curriculum within a teacher education program. The goal was to assist student teachers (STs) in developing a level of decolonial literacy that would help them unearth the colonial roots of their prior Indigenous education. Multiple data sources (STs written reflections, email communications, and researcher observations), were analyzed using narrative analysis to illuminate instances of resistance. Although the project showed great promise for transformative learning, the manifestation of resistance indicates the dire need for such work to continue. In our conclusion we offer some key considerations for teacher education regarding approaches to Indigenous education.*

*Cet article explore la résistance qui était produit pendant l'implémentation d'un programme autochtone dans un programme de formations des enseignants. Le but de ce programme était d'encourager le développement d'alphabétisation décoloniale pour révéler les racines coloniales de leur éducation précédente. Plusieurs sources de données ont utilisé (des réflexions écrites, les communications courriel, et les observations des chercheurs) et ont analysé par méthode de l'analyse narrative pour illuminer des instances de résistance. Bien que le projet démontre beaucoup de potentiel, les manifestations de résistance indiquent le besoin vital pour ce travail a continué. En conclusion, nous offrons des considérations clé pour des programmes autochtones dans les programmes de formation d'enseignants.*

Educational researchers and writers who engage in Indigenous and anti-racist education are no strangers to the many forms of resistance that can be enacted in classrooms and institutions in response to the recently required introduction of Indigenous content (Battiste, 1998, 2013; Dion, 2009; Schick & St. Denis, 2005, St. Denis, 2011; St. Denis & Schick 2003). Defensive anger (Berlak, 2004), disengagement (DiAngelo, 2011) and microaggressions (Bhattacharya, 2015) are just a few of the ways that students make their positions on these subjects clear. This is of particular concern within teacher education, because of the responsibility teachers hold to care for and connect with students from diverse backgrounds, and to be alert to the historic negative impact schooling has had on Indigenous populations. According to critical social work theorist Bob Mullaly (2010), there are multiple ways in which resistance to antiracist interventions manifests itself. At the personal level, there are ideas, attitudes and assumptions held by individuals that support dominant culture norms and race-based oppression. Another level is cultural oppression, which consists of the meta-messages delivered by the dominant culture regarding the status quo. These are normalized through curriculum and mass media, and reified

through “common sense” notions. A third level, referred to as structural oppression, includes the institutional enactment and enforcement of cultural and personal oppression through exclusionary policies and practices, curricular control, and adherence to colonial mythologies.

These many forms of oppression are interwoven within the manifestations of resistance to Indigenous education and yet few studies have explored how they might impact decolonial literacy practices in the classroom. After experiencing different forms of resistance during the implementation of an Indigenous education curriculum within a teacher education program, our reflections helped us to identify the impact resistance had on engaging students in decolonial practices. We hoped that by illuminating these key instances we would gain a better understanding of how to improve practices involving curriculum and pedagogy associated with Indigenous education. Although we agree with Restoule and Nardozi (2019) that humour, experiential learning, cultivating care, and strategic assignments can each disarm or mitigate resistance, we have also come to understand time and relationships as fundamental to decolonizing practices within teacher education.

### **The Colonial Myth and Indigenous Education for Pre-Service Teachers in Canada**

For many years, public education has been steeped in the colonial mythology that anyone who works hard enough can be successful in Canada. In the last number of decades, however, the production of key documents such as the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* in 1996, and the *Report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* of 2015 have brought to the fore the deeply untrue and harmful nature of that mythology. Now, as provinces develop and implement curriculum that includes Indigenous perspectives and histories, and teacher education programs adhere to the *Accord of Aboriginal Education* put forward by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education, they must grapple with preparing new teachers to take on these curricular changes. This also means that instructors must grapple with student teachers’ resistance to learning about oppression, which we argue also occurs within Mullaly’s (2010) matrix of the personal, cultural and structural.

In order to consider Mullaly’s work (2010) in context we looked at Verna St. Denis and Carol Schick (2003) who pointed to three common sources of resistance amongst pre-service teachers in their work in antiracist and Aboriginal education in Saskatchewan; namely, a lack of freedom in course selection where such courses are required (cultural, in that students were not predisposed to see the need for such a course due to their entrenchment in dominant discourses of justice and freedom); a perceived lack of relevance as most student teachers do not imagine themselves teaching Indigenous students (cultural, in that students assume that Indigenous education occurs only in reserve schools or in predominantly Indigenous communities and neighbourhoods); and a fear that they may be exposed as a racist, whether overtly or subconsciously (personal, in that students do not wish to examine their assumptions and beliefs or to have their moral integrity questioned).

Although these factors go a long way towards getting to the heart of resistance, they do not attend to the full gamut of resistance in postsecondary institutions. Marie Battiste (2013) and Susan Dion (2007) offered insightful assessments of the impact of colonial curriculum on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the school system, helping us to address how resistance at the cultural level is both developed and supported. Ann Berlak (2004) and Robin DiAngelo (2011) wrote extensively on the challenges involved in teaching in the field of anti-racism and anti-oppression, providing some of the language and ideas we used in our analysis as

their work crosses both cultural and personal resistance narratives. Further, Kakali Bhattacharya (2015) and Sarah Ahmed (2006) devoted considerable attention to the operation of oppression within institutions, especially those of higher learning, so we looked to them to support our analysis of resistance at the structural and institutional levels. Sheila Cote-Meek (2014) wrote extensively on the impact of both tacit and overt racisms towards Indigenous students at postsecondary institutions. She pointed out that unpacking Settler/Indigenous relations can be even more complex for those students who continue to experience the impacts of that narrative. Brooke Madden (2017) examined how whiteness can function within institutional settings to hold both teachers and students in a colonial status quo. Verna St. Denis (2011) examined resistance to Indigenous education rooted in the discourses of multicultural education.

This article aims to contribute to the improvement of practices involving curriculum and pedagogy associated with Indigenous education for pre-service teachers by probing those instances of resistance that emerged, and pointing to considerations and practices that might ameliorate resistance in future work. To offer some indication of our investment and location in this work, Shannon Leddy (Métis) was situated in this study as the teacher-researcher who developed the curriculum, facilitated classroom sessions, and responded to students' reflections during the study. Susan O'Neill (White settler), Shannon's doctoral supervisor at the time of the study, brought her narrative analysis expertise to the study and a focus on meaning-making through a social semiotic lens that makes space to analyze a range of signifying practices beyond narrative content, such as gestural, verbal, written, and musical modes of communication.

To explore how resistance manifests in teacher education at the personal, cultural, and structural levels, we examined multiple sources of data that were generated during the implementation of an Indigenous education curriculum. The goal of the curriculum was to assist student teachers (STs) in developing a level of decolonial literacy that would help them understand the colonial roots of their prior Indigenous education experiences in order to facilitate new understandings. The new understandings were not about Indigenous cultures themselves; rather, the focus was on the tropes of colonization that have defined Indigenous peoples in the public imagination as "romanticized, mythical, victimized, or militant" (Dion, 2009, p. 331). Decolonial literacy, then, involves an excavation and examination about one's assumptions about Indigenous peoples, the acquisition of relevant terminology, and learning about relevant legislation. This type of literacy invites learning about Indigenous peoples, histories, and cultures in ways that avoid monolithic representations and the reproduction of colonial stereotypes, and is at the heart of the content delivered through the program.

### **Methodology**

Our methodology involved taking an holistic approach to multiple sources of data that included written reflections, assignments, emails, and teacher-researcher observations. We were interested in the full meshwork of the curriculum as it unfolded, and in particular how resistance was manifest during the classroom curriculum, understanding the limits of isolating any one part of a curriculum. The combined data enabled us to examine STs' experiences as narrative representations based on meaning-making from different forms of expression (Riessman, 1993). According to Riessman, "precisely because they are essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents' ways of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished" (p. 4). We, therefore, made a concerted effort to respect the coherence of the narratives we encountered and used ethnographic

tools (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) to capture meaning-making as it unfolded over the course of the study. This entailed videotaping classes, audiotaping discussion groups, and gathering written reflections.

## **Participants**

The study participants were Student Teachers (STs) in a teacher education module headed by two seconded Faculty Associates (FAs), and one Faculty Member (FM). Neither of the FAs nor the FM were enrolled in the study, but at least one of them was present during each session with participants. We met frequently for planning and debriefing purposes, so they do form part of the research context. There were 30 participants in the study, the majority of whom were of European descent and most of whom were female. That is to say, they were statistically consistent with the make-up of many teacher education programs across the continent (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Permission to participate was collected from each ST in the module in the form of a signed consent form. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their privacy and anonymity, as per the ethics agreement and the participants' consent.

## **Program**

The program involved an Indigenous education curriculum delivered in ten contact hours spread out over five sessions, and consisted of a combination of didactic presentations to ground participants in relevant terminology and content, as well as some open-ended practice discussions in phenomenological art inquiry. This program formed approximately one third of the course hours of Indigenous education content required by the British Columbia Teacher Regulation Branch. FAs intended to undertake the remaining 20-25 instructional hours themselves. Through the program we devised, STs were exposed to a number of works by contemporary Indigenous artists and invited to explore their reactions to and relationships with the art, including considering what learning they might need to undertake to better appreciate the art and artist.

## **Analysis**

Given the multiple data sources and our focus on meaning-making, we looked to social semiotics within literacy education to inform our analytic approach. To focus our analysis in ways that could accommodate contradiction and nuance while still making the findings intelligible, we juxtaposed from different data sources (e.g., field notes, video, student emails and assignments) to find “the relevance of actors influencing experience with curriculum” (Perillo & Mulcahy, 2009, p. 45). This also allowed us to employ “the relations, connections or associations between actors” to issue “the signals” for us “to trace and describe” (Perillo & Mulcahy, 2009, p. 45) the effects of the curriculum, most notably its affordances and constraints. We attempted to be aware of the shifts and complexity of the data by taking a “looking down” (Fenwick et al., 2011, p. 124) approach to the data, meaning that we zeroed in on what STs did within the meshwork to produce effects. We also attempted to foster trustworthiness through this looking down as well as through other key strategies identified in the literature (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) such as the collection of multiple forms of data from various perspectives (e.g., STs, instructors, teacher-researcher), triangulation of the data, frequent discussions between the researchers, and rich description.

## Findings

The findings from the study were analyzed to reveal four main emergent themes. The first of these, Angst, was born of participants' expressions of fear of getting things wrong or offending people when addressing Indigenous content in the classroom because they simply had not had enough education in this area. The second theme was Art, and drew upon participant quotes such as the following: "I had never thought of art as a medium that can really teach me anything. It was a transformative experience learning so much through Aboriginal artists" (Jacqueline, R5). As well: "[the] lessons encouraged continuous conversation, reflection and dialogue with art. Soon I started noticing aboriginal art, culture and PEOPLE all around me. It was as if they came out of nowhere!" (Cole, R5). The third theme that emerged was Action, exemplified by this selected quote:

... regarding the 'lack of practical resources' ... I now realize that ... we were missing the point altogether ... Aboriginal education is not to be given the answers on a silver platter ... It is instead about the depth of our roots in Aboriginal education so that we can take the principles we have learned and move forward into meaningful incorporation of Aboriginal education into our classrooms. This realization was humbling for me as a student teacher (Leah, R5).

Overall, the program was deemed successful through findings based on the analysis of data gathered, including the results of a post-pre survey. However, a fourth theme emerged as well; namely, Resistance. This became an important consideration as we worked through how to mobilize the implications of our work.

We identified several examples of resistances to the curriculum that were produced through the relationships between STs, instructors, the teacher-research, and the multiple data sources. We next provide illustrations of the resistances we encountered according to the personal, cultural, and structural affordances and constraints that were identified through the analysis process. Although we have separated them here to clarify their significance, we recognize that they are complex and interrelated as they are all part of a matrix within the curriculum practices that were taking place and which unfolded over time. We unpack them here to support our claims about the importance of time and relationships.

### Personal Resistance

Mullally (2010) reminded us that "oppression at the personal level comprises the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours that depict a negative prejudgement of a particular subordinate social group" (p. 62). To illuminate this form of resistance within our study, we found ourselves drawn to participant Shelley. In her first reflection, Shelley disclosed that she had family members (through marriage) of Indigenous ancestry, including a grandfather and an uncle. The reflection culminated in a discussion of some of the initiatives she had undertaken to educate herself about Indigenous peoples, ending in an affirmation to be conscious of the language she used around Indigenous education in her teaching practice.

Shelley's second reflection, therefore, was a surprise. We offer, below, a rather extensive quote, that expresses her reaction to viewing *Vigil*, by Rebecca Belmore:

Something I am very curious about is why no one ever seems to portray Indigenous people as strong people? I feel as though they have never been looked at as a strong culture. But at the same time, have

they tried to speak out, or done an art piece that represented the strengths that they as a culture hold?  
... (Shelley, R2).

Belmore's video documents an on-site performance that was part of the 2002 Talking Stick Festival. Set in Vancouver's downtown east side, Belmore appears in a red dress with the names of several missing and murdered Indigenous women inscribed on her arms. After a short time spent reading the names and tearing a red rose through her teeth for each name, Belmore then repeatedly nails her dress to an adjacent telephone pole before spending the remainder of the performance wrenching herself free from both the pole and the dress. At no point in the performance is there any overt reference to or portrayal of addictions, so it appeared that Shelley was conflating the reputation of the neighbourhood where the performance was situated and the performance itself. She further rejected Belmore's reputation as an internationally acclaimed artist and a successful self-actualised Indigenous person, bringing to the fore instead her sense that the portrayal limited the ideas of who Indigenous people can be.

Shelley's final reflection offered a more nuanced picture of what was in operation for her. "[the] classes overall were fine. Nothing really stood out for me other than the game we did that showed a visual representation of what happened to the indigenous people once the Europeans came" (Shelley, R5). This excerpt, in its reference to the Kairos Blanket Activity as a game, is potentially an example of hasty writing, submitted without consideration or editing. However, the term "game" could also be interpreted as condescending. In the course of this activity, a micro version of Turtle Island (North America) is created by spreading blankets across the floor. Through a narrative offered by the facilitator, participants walk through several epochs of colonization, moving about the blankets as stand-ins for Indigenous peoples, until asked one by one to leave, mimicking attrition due to disease, genocide, and cultural genocide. Through the activity's condensed linear narrative, kinaesthetic opportunities, and powerful first-person accounts, it is often experienced by participants as transformative and deeply moving. So, the selection of the word "game" implied some things about the particular semiotic and linguistic framework through which this activity was viewed. The first definition of game in the *Oxford Online Dictionary* is "an activity that one engages in for amusement or fun," which casts a significantly different light on the activity than what was intended. Since other participants described the activity as "heavy" (Martha, R4), "moving" (Leah, R4), "sad" (Chrissy, R4), "impactful" (Terry, R4), "powerful" (Jacqueline, R5; Frances, R4), and "effective" (Michelle, R4), it was difficult to make sense of the potentially more dismissive response from Shelley. In addition, despite asserting that this class was the only one that stood out to her, she did not submit a reflection for that session, so it is impossible to say why it stood out to her, or what she was able to take away from it. Overall, however, Shelley's reflections consistently revealed traces of the sort of defensive anger that Berlak (2004) described encountering in her work, and which the researchers initially found both puzzling and troubling.

Kiley presented a slightly different case. During the first classroom session, in relation to a discussion of identity politics, she asked why "it was such a no-no about claiming to be Métis, whereas if we went around the room, I could have said I was Scottish and no one would have been offended by that?" (Kiley, S1T). She went on to ask if this was because First Nations and Métis were victims. In reply, Shannon (who is Métis) pointed out that membership in the Métis nation is sometimes contentious because the term has been misused to describe anyone of partially Indigenous descent.

Kiley's first written reflection revealed that she was a Canadian history major who considered

herself “well educated on the Indigenous people of Canada and the terrible struggles they’ve faced” (Kiley, R1). Her question regarding the potential victimhood of Indigenous peoples, however, raised questions about the criticality of the education she received. The approach to this study was predicated on the understanding that all of the participants in the group, reflecting a microcosmic glimpse of society as a whole, were beginning their journey into Indigenous education from different and often divergent starting points. That meant not only trying to balance capitalizing on prior knowledge from those students who were more learned, but also scaffolding concepts for learners closer to the beginning of building understanding. Offering evidence of her prior knowledge suggests she did not feel the need to further explore Indigenous and Settler histories and relationships. In considering this with regard to the theme of resistance, we return to St. Denis and Schick (2003) and their articulation of the sources of student teacher resistance. In this case, Kiley’s attitude could perhaps be linked to the feeling that her participation in this program assumed a “moral lack” (p.57) on her part, which thereby evoked a reaction of resistance. It could also be, given some of the descriptions of incidents to come, that she was also afraid to “be caught out in the shadow of [her] own racism” (p. 57), and so did not wish to be pushed further along this path. Her reflection also meets the criteria for Mullaly’s (2010) discussion of personal oppression in that her ideas were clearly set, and she insisted on maintaining her pre-existent ideas about Indigenous peoples.

Kiley did not submit reflections for either session two or three, which may present another form of resistance. Here, we were again reminded of DiAngelo’s (2011) work, and of her assertion that anger and disengagement are common reactions to the challenge of facing difficult conversations around race and difference. Given that we had no evidence of her thinking about these sessions beyond anecdotal observations regarding her engagement level and comportment, it is difficult to corroborate our thinking here. Kakali Bhattacharya (2016), characterized moments of tension in intercultural interactions as micro-aggressions, which, she pointed out, “are often conveyed through actions and behaviours that [are] ... dismissive and exclusionary” (p. 315). This phrase was particularly instructive as it not only characterized the tone of some of the key moments during the program, but also anticipated their impact.

By this point, there had been cause to speak to the FAs for the module about this participant. There were concerns about an email communication received from Kiley, an excerpt of which follows:

I think it is safe to assume at this point that we all have a solid sense of the horrors faced by *our* Indigenous Canadians, and though we remain remorseful, we are more concerned with how we can *celebrate them* instead of just feeling the need to redeem what our ancestors have done. We want to explore and understand the *beauty of the race* we are intended to teach. (Kiley, EM1, emphasis added)

These assertions were particularly troublesome given the earlier statement about her general knowledge of Indigenous histories. Because Kiley felt very strongly about her level of understanding regarding Indigenous peoples, she seemed to feel challenged by the curriculum and adopted a position of defensiveness (Berlak, 2004; St. Denis & Schick, 2003). Rather than being open to the discourse of anti-racism introduced to the class through asking STs to examine their assumptions, Kiley remained resistant. This was demonstrated through her use of the words “race” and “our” with regards to Indigenous peoples; these terms invite connotations of both divisiveness and possession, both tropes of the colonial narrative (Battiste, 2013). In the course of this study, this reflection has perhaps shed the most light on how deep the roots of colonial

thinking can go, and on how difficult it is to track and loosen them. The presence of resistance here begins on the personal level, but also extends to a cultural level as Kiley was explicit about her comfort with her prior level of learning through Canadian history curriculum.

During our final session, Kiley indicated that she had turned up information about the way crests are viewed amongst Northwest Coast First Nations, in that they are considered as the rightful properties of the families to whom they belong (Townsend-Gault & Kramer, 2013), usually earned and passed along through matrilineal lines. In her concluding comments, however, she stated that she wished she hadn't learned any of that, because it interfered with her ability to enjoy the aesthetics of the work (Kiley, S5AR). The culturally grounded information Kiley uncovered was dismissed out of hand as irrelevant. This, in addition to her previous statement regarding celebrating the beauty of Indigenous peoples, reminds us of a similar finding in the work of Schick and St. Denis, who noted "as students like to say: 'I am fascinated by all the cultures. I love learning about them,' a preoccupation in which students unselfconsciously participate as consumers whose only troubling moment is in the plethora of choice" (2005, p. 309). Although Kiley had previously engaged in learning about Indigenous peoples through history courses in a Western academic setting, her response to this opportunity to learn from Indigenous people again presents a resistant stance.

In considering what might inform these reactions, we returned again to Berlak (2004) who described a moment in which one of her students realised for the first time that the thoughts and ideas of non-White others were as valid and rooted in experience as his own, and that this was the beginning of his coming to grips with his own positionality and its implications for those others. In this instance, Kiley's resistance manifested itself in her refusal to accept that the political and cultural dimension of Indigenous art necessarily supersedes aesthetic concerns. Those who remain entrenched in a pre-transformative position blind themselves to realizing why discussions around normativity and difference are crucial to both antiracist and Indigenous education. Exposure to examples of Indigenous self-representation, such as through visual expression, music, and literature, affords the opportunity to examine the ways in which Indigenous misrepresentation and erasure have long informed the public psyche, which can spur transformative understandings. We are reminded of Dion's (2007) description of perfect stranger positioning, characterised by not only what one thinks they know, but also by what one does not know, and by what one refuses to know.

### **Cultural and Structural Resistance**

In our final stage of analysis, we found several examples of resistance at both the cultural and structural levels of oppression. According to Mullaly (2010), "oppression at the cultural level consists of the values, norms, and shared patterns of seeing, thinking, and acting, along with an assumed consensus about what is right and normal, that taken together endorse the belief in a superior culture" (p. 63). Mullaly's (2010) notion of oppression at the structural level involves "the ways that social institutions laws, policies, social processes and practices, and their economic and political systems all work together primarily in favour of the dominant group at the expense of subordinate groups" (p. 63). These interrelated ideas are illuminated through the following examples of cultural and structural resistance.

The original plan for the final classroom session, during which participants shared their phenomenological art inquiries, was to facilitate the unpacking of these inquiries in the context of a whole-group sharing circle. The Faculty Associates (FAs) wanted to maximize the time



available by dividing participants up into groups to share their dialogues in a smaller setting. We found that the impact of this decision compromised the clarity and pedagogical intent of the original plan, and created a circumstance that prevented Shannon's ability to address and encourage emergent understandings as they occurred. Since she was the only Indigenous educator present during these classroom sessions, we read this as a subtle micro-aggression that undermined the aims of the program and the study. With five groups in operation over a 45-minute period it was impossible to spend more than a few moments with each group, leaving the researcher almost more concerned with time than with the unfolding dialogues.

Instead of the inclusive process of emergent meaning-making envisioned in originally conceiving this activity, which would have honoured the principle of knowledge as a series of concentric circles (Cajete, 1994), and the principles of inter-relationality and relational reciprocity (Wilson, 2008), we instead had to contend with an extension of the Western tendency to view experiences as discreet, rather than interconnected. Further, STs self-selected the small groups they formed, so the ethical responsibility to relate to and interact with the ideas of the whole group, which is at the core of circle pedagogy, was also compromised. The incumbent cognitive imperialism inherent in this tendency to affect separability (Battise, 2000) represents one of the many forms of cultural oppression enacted by higher learning institutions as they continue to grapple with the vagaries of addressing diverse approaches to knowledge and meaning-making. It enforces the Western ontological perspective that the researcher should be able to get at the truth remotely by interpreting participant interactions after the fact through particular forms of rigorous academic methodology. From an Indigenous and relational perspective, however, such a supposition belies the importance of relationship to this process, undercutting in a way the very meanings the research was intended to glean. So this particular instance represents both cultural and structural oppression/resistance. In effect, despite the mandated inclusion of Indigenous content, and the move to hire Indigenous faculty to deliver it, Western academic conventions remained dominant, which as Stein (2019) pointed out, is a form of structural racism in which Indigenous academics are invited in to change curriculum, but still expected to adhere to colonial conventions.

Several moments stand out as significant missed opportunities to help STs further unpack their phenomenological inquiry dialogues with art. In the first instance, Group A, of which Kiley was a member, presented some troubling dialogue. When group member Terry presented the work she had chosen, Kiley expressed surprise at the word "whore" as it appeared in one of the portraits in KC Adams' *Perception* series (2013), stating that she thought "white girls" heard this word more often than Indigenous girls (Group A audio recording). Here, despite the fact that the word was drawn from the portrait subject's own experience, Kiley's directly contradicted the subject's lived reality. Rather than digging into the meat of its cultural and social significance, this comment so dominated the ensuing discussion that even those few attempts on the part of their dialogue group to make connections to the larger significance of the work were largely ignored. Although Terry attempted to situate the discussion back into the concerns of racism against Indigenous peoples (Indigenous women in particular) by recounting the anti-rape signs she saw during her time in the far north, a relational dialectic developed in the group that avoided the implications of this by continuing to focus on surface considerations related to their own experiences, rather than to those being expressed by the portrait subject. Without the presence of the researcher, there was no opportunity for an intervention to help students attend to Terry's learning and thoughts about the work.

One other critical moment from the final session involved Group D and their discussion of

cultural appropriation connected to the inquiry of two group members into the music of A Tribe Called Red (TCR). At the onset of this group's dialogue there was considerable time given to discussing TCR's well-publicized request that fans not attend concerts dressed in costume war bonnets or decorated in Indigenous "war paint". Several members of this group had clearly deeply considered the implications of cultural appropriation at some point earlier in their education, and worked hard to get their classmates to see why attending to TCR's request is a fundamental requirement of decolonizing relations with Indigenous people.

Upon listening to the recording and reviewing the transcript from this session, it was interesting to question the degree to which the semi-privacy of small group discussion not only allowed this conversation to go on long enough to preclude the meaningful unpacking of other group members' inquiries, but also necessitated their complicity through the prolonged tolerance of the contributions of those who adopted the position that TCR's requests were spurious and did not deserve serious consideration. Further, this instance laid bare "how well-intentioned colleagues may be unaware of their roles in creating and reinforcing dominant, imperialistic grand narratives" (Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 316), in ways that extend to organizational decisions and the manner in which content is included in curriculum. We suggest further that these dominating grand narratives also prevented those group members who agreed with TCR's request and reasoning from pushing their point lest they rock the boat too much. Here again, had the researcher been able to hear these comments within the context of a large circle, she could have offered more support in unpacking the dialogue and ensuring there was enough time for each person in the group to share their thoughts.

Towards the end of the study, we received an email from the Director of the teacher education program requesting a meeting. Despite the researcher having met with both FAs and the FM the week before to address participant questions, the FAs had reported to the Director that there were questions and concerns lingering amongst STs and FAs about the purpose of the project, the nature of the research, and data collection methods, specifically the video recordings of each classroom session. We were deeply concerned that the study, which had already been postponed by a year due to some structural reorganization within the teacher education program, was going to be cut short, jeopardizing the usefulness of the work already done. Worse, we were concerned that termination of the study would send the message to participants that this work was not important enough to continue, or that Indigenous education itself was an unnecessary discourse, reinforcing colonial hegemony.

It is important to understand that Shannon had taken great care during the first classroom session to make clear to participant STs the scope and purpose of the study, the data collection methods, and the expectation of contributing artefacts to the study in the form of written reflections. In the first moments of our first session, STs were provided with the consent letter and form that had been approved by the Ethics Committee, and shown a slide that contained information about the study, data collections methods, and assignments. This discussion took place with both FAs present, and questions were invited and responded to. At the end of the second session, clarification about the reflection parameters was offered again, and space was made for questions about the video recording. And yet, at the end of the third session, one of the FAs raised the same questions again and stated that the students were still not clear about what was being asked of them. When students were then invited to ask for clarification, only three participants actually asked questions involving concerns over selecting an artist and the due date for the final reflection.

In looking back, we wondered if the repeated calls for clarification by the FAs were about the

need for clarification for the STs or an indication of a growing tide of resistance. Here, cultural resistance worked in combination with structural resistance to create a climate of lateral aggression that favoured the dominant group. Despite assurances that Shannon and her program were welcome, events were unfolding that indicated this was not really the case. This reminded us of Sarah Ahmed's (2014) note that "sayings are not always doings" (p. 107) when it comes to including historically marginalized people and content. As we struggled to make sense of how concerns over the research study could have precipitated a meeting request from the Director of teacher education, we came to realize that the act of bypassing us and going to the Director to voice their concerns was a form of micro-aggression common in the face of discussions around difference (Bhattacharya, 2016), and leading to "rendering a target group as outsiders—as *Them*" (p. 315). Approaching the Director could be interpreted as an effort to undermine her credibility with students, and with the University, as well as simultaneously undermining the import of the work she was doing in Indigenous education. Structural oppression worked in concert with personal and cultural resistance to try to ensure the maintenance of dominant cultural norms.

The meeting with the Director itself was very collegial and we were invited into a dialogue to determine how to go forward in a better way. As issues concerning particular interactions with participants were raised, such as those accounted for above, the role this type of mute resistance might be playing in our interactions took on greater import. Shannon was reluctant to push the issue of her concerns further with FAs, conscious of her position as a guest in their module, and of the protective feelings teachers often (and ought to) harbour for their students. But we wondered, if the nature of the subject matter these participants were resisting was rooted in other aspects of teacher education curriculum, such as special education or subject specific methodology, whether her concerns would have been so easily dismissed.

The final instance relates to the return rates of participant reflections. In the end only twelve of the thirty participants submitted all the requested reflections. Although there are myriad possible reasons for these drops in willingness or ability to participate, taken in the larger context of the study, a reading of the situation might conclude that resistance played a role in how this aspect unfolded. Reflections were routed through FAs via email before being passed along to Shannon, so each FA could see who was and who was not submitting reflections. They were therefore aware of the particularly low response rate from reflection four, which yielded only 18 responses. It may be that this particular reflection fell through the cracks, since, as noted above, the request for a meeting with the Director happened very shortly after this session. But it was our feeling that something more was at play. Shannon shared her own data collection tabulations to indicate to FAs those participants missing assignments. This yielded a few more submissions, but in the end, the numbers remained low.

Although there were several reflections, especially in the final batch, that exceeded one page in length, the vast majority consisted of only a paragraph or a few sentences. Overwhelmingly, these reflections indicated an enjoyment and appreciation of the program, and a great number indicated transformative growth through the sessions. But the absence of reflections for some key sessions remains troubling. We looked again to DiAngelo (2011) who articulated just a few of the defensive moves that resistance can precipitate, including "the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, guilt, and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation" (p. 57). Although there were no overt expressions of anger during our sessions, certainly fear and guilt emerged both during session debriefs and in post-session reflections. We suggest further that the reluctance to submit certain reflections may represent a symbolic form of leaving a stress-inducing situation, and further, that failed efforts to secure a complete body of

data for this study may also fit this category. St. Denis and Schick offered some additional instruction in how resistance can play out in institutional settings in a way that seems also to fit the circumstances and questions above. They suggested that “countless forms of denial are necessary to maintain oneself as innocent, including the following: ... dismissing experiences of oppression among target groups; and dismissing the credentials of one who brings bad tidings” (2003, p. 66).

### **Final Thoughts**

This paper explored several instances of resistance that occurred during a study about the potential of art to provoke decolonizing dialogues. The findings indicated that the methods used were largely successful and we offer the following quote as just one indicator of that success: “What you have shown me ... is a transformative part of history that brings one to a place of humility and sadness, but creates passion and courage out of those emotions” (Dan, R5). As we worked through the data, however, it became clear that resistance was also a factor in the work.

We hoped that an increased understanding of the forms of resistance encountered would help to inform practices in the development and delivery of Indigenous education for pre-service teachers. Although it did offer us a clearer view on the relative successes of particular pedagogies and approaches, we have ultimately concluded that time and relationships, above all else, are essential factors in assisting pre-service teachers to work through their resistance.

First, with regards to time, it is clear that the delivery of teacher education is a fraught and busy, beset with competing priorities in the areas of pedagogy, curriculum, and professional standards and responsibilities. Many universities offer teacher education as a post-degree program over the course of a single calendar year. However, one of the greatest ironies of such programs is that they are so tightly packed that they can actually prevent the kinds of deep and transformative learning they claim to be striving to achieve. If the delivery of Indigenous education is to be effective, then programs must include time for establishing relationships, a key principle of Indigenous teaching and learning. Students need time to process their learning, especially those who previously had only limited exposure to Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and pedagogies. Further, instructors need time to listen to their students’ ideas and concerns in order to tailor instruction and resources to directly meet student needs. All learning requires time and patience, and transformative education in particular requires the building of trusting relationships that allow for the vulnerability and courage that enable shifts in one’s perspective. Teaching is a human enterprise, so we must consider carefully how we educate our teachers, offering them the same time and patience needed to acquire new concepts and new literacies as we ask them to offer their own students.

Linked to this, our second thought is twofold. First, it is clear after completing this analysis that there is still a dire need for meaningful Indigenous education not only within the K–12 system, but within postsecondary as well. This includes not just the delivery of Indigenous education courses to students, but also to faculty and staff across all areas. In other words, the resistance we identified was situated within a wider institution that needed to make a concerted effort to decolonize its practices within a much wider sphere of influence, and to build relationships that will support those efforts. Many of the struggles we faced over the course of this work were not matters of blatant bigotry; rather, we identified numerous small misunderstandings and micro-aggressions that were rooted in and unknowingly nurtured by unexamined colonial learnings. We caution that it is not enough to merely make the space for this

work to be done through the addition of Indigenous-focused content, courses, or extended program delivery. Institutions must encourage, hire, and promote Indigenous faculty and staff to teach such courses and facilitate program delivery until a critical mass of decolonized allies, who truly understand the meaning of that term vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples, is formed. But creating policies that bring Indigenous scholars in often results in those scholars bearing the brunt of the emotional labour involved in decolonizing work (De Leeuw et al., 2013). Making space is one thing, but caring professional relationships are also required if we are really going to affect the shift to decolonize and Indigenize the shape of education (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

As the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair has offered, “education got us into this mess, and education will get us out” (Davidson, 2016). Helping student teachers overcome resistance in Indigenous education requires a concerted effort on behalf of the entire postsecondary community—there is a pressing need for everyone to be open, self-critical and inquiring in the pursuit of understanding Indigenous peoples, histories, knowledges, and pedagogies. This leads us to reflect on the often binary (us/other) nature of resistance itself. It is important to understand how these binaries function in teacher education if we hope to deconstruct their inherent power relations and emerge with new possibilities. One side of a binary is afforded a higher privilege, regardless of whether it is focused on a personal, cultural, or structural value within a matrix of oppression. These binaries within resistance also reflect political, social, and economic power imbalances, and filter down into knowledge systems, social structures, and human relationships. It is also important to understand that the binaries of resistance are not rigid, but shift and change over time in response to different contexts. They contain within their parameters nuances that cannot be captured by a dualist interpretation of experiences. Within teacher education, resistance is often downplayed and inequities are disguised. For example, identity-neutral language of individual success and failure makes it difficult to claim that an Indigenous student is treated unequally, does not have equal access, or is marginalized. Like the three forms of oppression relied upon here as a framework, resistance is neither binary nor dualistic. Rather it is nuanced and flexible, like colonization itself. It might hide deeply, or in plain sight. And we are obligated to help those around us detect it and resist their own resistance by making time to nurture the kinds of supporting relationships that we know to be at the heart of good teaching and learning.

### Acknowledgements

This research was funded in part by the Social Studies and Humanities Research Council. We also acknowledge with gratitude the many Indigenous activists, researchers, and educators who have paved the way through their tireless efforts to make our work possible.

### References

- Ahmed, S. (2006). The nonperformativity of antiracism. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 7(1), 104–126. <https://doi.org/10.2979/mer.2006.7.1.104>
- Ahmed, S. (2014). The politics of good feeling. *Critical Race & Whiteness Studies*, 10(2), 1–18. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58ad660603596eeco0ce71a3/t/58becb77893fc0f72747d4e8/1488898936274/The+Politics+of+Good+Feeling.pdf>
- Battiste, M. (1998). Enabling the autumn seed: Toward a decolonized approach to Aboriginal knowledge, language, and education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 22(1), 16–27. <https://www.cbu.ca/indigenous-affairs/mikmaq-resource-centre/mikmaq-resource->

- guide/essays/enabling-the-autumn-seed-toward-a-decolonized-approach-to-aboriginal-knowledge-language-and-education/
- Battiste, M. (2000). Maintaining Aboriginal identity, language, and culture in modern society. In M. Battiste (Ed.) *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision*. UBC Press.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich.
- Berlak, A. C. (2004). Confrontations and pedagogy: Cultural secrets, trauma, and emotion in antioppressive Pedagogies. In M. Boler (Ed.), *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence* (pp. 123-144). Peter Lang Publishing.
- Bhattacharya, K. (2016). The vulnerable academic: Personal narratives and strategic De/Colonizing of academic structures. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(5), 309–321.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800415615619>
- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of indigenous education*. Kivaki Press.
- Cote-Meek, S. (2014). *Colonized classrooms: Racism, trauma and resistance in post-secondary education*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Davidson, P. (2016, June 20). Education is the key to reconciliation. *The Hill Times*.  
<https://www.hilltimes.com/2016/06/20/education-is-the-key-to-reconciliation/70233>
- De Leeuw, S., Greenwood, M., & Lindsay, N. (2013). Troubling good intentions. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 3(3–4), 381–394. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2013.810694>
- DiAngelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 54–70.  
<http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ijcp/article/view/249/116>
- Dion, S. D. (2007). Disrupting molded images: Identities, responsibilities and relationships—teachers and indigenous subject material. *Teaching Education*, 18(4), 329–342.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210701687625>
- Dion, S. D. (2009). *Braiding histories: Learning from Aboriginal peoples' experiences & perspectives*. UBC Press.
- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case: Approaches to language and literacy research*. Teachers College Press.
- Fenwick, T., Edwards, R., & Sawchuk, P. (2011). *Emerging approaches to educational research: Tracing the sociomaterial*. Routledge.
- Game. (n.d.). In Oxford English dictionary online. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>
- Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(3), 218–227.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>
- Goulet, L. M., & Goulet, K. N. (2014). *Teaching each other: Nehinuw concepts and Indigenous pedagogies*. UBC Press.
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2004). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (2nd ed.). Pearson.
- Madden, B. (2017). Tracing spectres of whiteness: discourse and the construction of teaching subjects in urban Aboriginal education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 38(5), 642–658.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1127211>
- Mullaly, R. P. (2010). *Challenging oppression and confronting privilege: A critical social work approach*. Oxford University Press.
- Perillo, S. & Mulcahy, D. (2009). Performing curriculum change in school and teacher education: A practice-based, actor-network theory perspective. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 29(1), 41–52.
- Restoule, J. P., & Nardozi, A. (2019). Exploring teacher candidate resistance to Indigenous content in a teacher education program. In H. Tomlins-Jahnke, S. D. Styres, S. Lilley, D. Zinga (Eds.) *Indigenous Education: New Directions in Theory and Practice*, (pp. 311–337). University of Alberta Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis* (Vol. 30). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

- Schick, C., & St. Denis, V. (2005). Troubling national discourses in anti-racist curricular planning. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 28(3), 295–317. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4126472>
- St. Denis, V. (2011). Silencing aboriginal curricular content and perspectives through multiculturalism: “There are other children here”. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 33(4), 306–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2011.597638>
- St. Denis, V., & Schick, C. (2003). What makes anti-racist pedagogy in teacher education difficult? Three popular ideological assumptions. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 49(1), 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.11575/ajer.v49i1.54959>
- Stein, S. (2019). Beyond higher education as we know it: Gesturing towards decolonial horizons of possibility. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 38(2), 143–161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-018-9622-7>
- Townsend-Gault, C., & Kramer, J. (2013). *Native art of the northwest coast: A history of changing ideas*. UBC Press.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.

---

*Shannon Leddy* (Métis) is an Assistant Professor (Teaching) at the University of British Columbia. Her work focuses on contemporary Indigenous art and its potential for decolonizing and delivering Indigenous education without reproducing colonial stereotypes.

*Susan O'Neill* is a Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Her research interests focus on global perspectives on music education, mapping young peoples' music learning experiences, and intergenerational and multimodal learning.