Research Article

Reflections on Reconciliation from Non-Indigenous Teachers in Northern Post-Secondary Learning

Faith Whiting
Yukon University

Abstract: With a recognition that reconciliation within post-secondary education in Canada requires both *decolonization*—deconstructing structures and practices that privilege Eurocentric world views—and *Indigenization*—elevating Indigenous Knowledges and participation—this study explored how seven non-Indigenous post-secondary instructors in the Yukon are interpreting these concepts through their teaching practices. Applying a thematic analysis to semi-structured interviews revealed a number of pedagogies that flow first and foremost from the respondents' understandings of personal identity and positionality. The pedagogies described in this study include a decolonized spirit of learning, physical learning environment, the ability to create and hold space, welcoming the whole student, and collaboration/relationality. By connecting to a review of Indigenous scholarship, these pedagogies (and missing pieces) were further examined, with a look toward perceived challenges in this work and potential sites of action.

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Introduction

With a directive to inform all Canadians about the history and impacts of residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) defined reconciliation as "establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country" (2015, p. 6). Justice Murray Sinclair, former chair of the TRC, highlighted the role educational systems have played in creating the current rift in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. He also claimed education to be the pathway to reconciliation (Sinclair et al., 2024, p. 4). Among the Calls to Action put forward by the commission, Call to Action #62 implores post-secondary institutions (and those who fund them) to provide support for teachers to integrate Indigenous Knowledge and teaching methods in the classroom (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 331). What these supports are and how teachers carry out this work are a focus across the landscape of Canadian higher learning institutions.

Motivated by this work and recognizing that reconciliation within post-secondary education in Canada requires decolonization—deconstructing structures and practices that privilege Eurocentric world views—and Indigenization—elevating Indigenous Knowledges and participation—this research study explored how a group of non-Indigenous instructors at Yukon University, a small post-secondary institution in northern Canada, are encountering and interpreting these concepts through their teaching practices. By presenting non-Indigenous voice through this study, I recognize this privileged and dominant perspective and the problematic nature of presenting it alone. Indigenous voice is still marginalized in the contested spaces of post-secondary education. In 2016 Indigenous faculty made up only 1.4% of all university professor positions in Canada (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2018). Although the landscape is ever changing, the relatively low percentage of Indigenous faculty at the institution of study has meant that this inquiry could not confidentially collect and present a diverse perspective on the research questions from Indigenous faculty. The study persisted in capturing non-Indigenous voice, with the recognition that reconciliation requires everyone, and there is value in studying this perspective as well.

Place-based approaches to reconciliation offer a unique standpoint. The setting now referred to as the Yukon has been the home of Indigenous Peoples for at least 15,000 years (CYFN, 2022). Fourteen unique First Nations reside here, representing eight Athabascan or Tlingit language families. Indigenous people make up approximately 25% of the Yukon's population (Yukon Government, 2023). Prior to the nineteenth century, Indigenous people of this area moved with the seasons. The Klondike gold rush, the building of the Alaska Highway, and the implementation of residential schools (funded by the federal government and run by Christian churches) significantly altered Indigenous lifestyles and communities (CYFN, 2022).

The Yukon has a unique and celebrated history of First Nations self-determination and governance. In February 1973 the Yukon Native Brotherhood presented the document *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* to Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in Ottawa. This proposal outlined the vision Yukon First Nations Peoples had for settlement, and it helped to set the foundation for negotiating land claims in the Yukon. Issues in education and visions for change were articulated:

> The White student is not taught about the history of the Yukon before the Gold Rush. He is not taught the methods used by the Indians to control pollution, to manage resources and to protect the environment. The White student is not taught to respect the Indian Way of Life as a system that worked—with much fewer social problems than he faces today. Until this is corrected, the Indian student will be at a disadvantage in a classroom where most of the students are White. (Council for Yukon Indians, 1977, p. 21)

This description of the impacts of a colonized educational experience on Yukon First Nations learners, along with the directive for change, is a reminder more than fifty years later that this discourse is not new. Indigenous people have been advocating for decades for the value of Indigenous Knowledges and their right to occupy space and control in education.

The site of this study, Yukon University, was established as Yukon College in 1963, and it became Canada's first university "north of 60" in 2020. With thirteen campuses throughout the Yukon, a range of programming is offered that includes university access courses, degree programming, trades pathways, and professional learning. Collaborating with First Nations and advancing reconciliation are among the foundations of Yukon University's strategic plan (Yukon University, 2024a). While 26% of credit students identified as Indigenous in the 2022-23 academic year, statistics are not kept on how many Indigenous faculty and staff are employed (Institutional Research and Planning, personal communication, August 6, 2024). Yukon University's website states that, "In our commitment to decolonizing education, we infuse our programming, research, services and student life with Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, perspectives, and ways of knowing, being and doing" (Yukon University, 2024b).

Several faculty-based working groups have been coordinated at Yukon University to focus on Indigenization. The Indigenization Engagement team (comprised of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and faculty) was brought together in 2016 to discuss what Indigenization means at the institution and to provide recommendations for this work. As part of their final report, the group suggested, "Indigenization is not a process that has an ending but involves ongoing efforts that evolve over time" (Yukon University Indigenization Engagement Team, 2017, p. 7). It is a conversation, "emerging from listening to [Yukon] First Nations people on this journey" (Yukon University Indigenization Community of Practice, n.d.). This sentiment reinforces the relationship that reconciliation has with place, time, and context.

This research study stemmed from deep questions I have in my own teaching and learning practice. As a Yukon University faculty member and an uninvited settler residing on Indigenous lands, I am on a journey to understand my role in reconciliation. As an educator, I recognize my personal, collective, and global responsibilities to move "beyond performative allyship," and take up this work in a meaningful way (Lavallee, 2020, p. 123). Collaboration with my community is important to me. I have chosen to ground this research in the narratives of instructors because, although change must be enacted at all levels of post-secondary education, to me, the classroom is "the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (hooks, 1994, p. 12).

Since this study was conducted in 2022, there have been movements at Yukon University. A new reconciliation framework titled *Breaking the Dawn: Reimagining Reconciliation through Re-education* was put forward, with a vision to create "an opening for the entire Yukon University community to build a shared understanding of our role in advancing reconciliation as a post-secondary institution" (Yukon University, 2024c). One specific change in instructional support that I can attest to as a faculty member has been the development of the Elders on Campus program. The Elders program offers spiritual, cultural, and knowledge supports to faculty, staff, and students at the university. Recently, they have released guidelines on ways of being with the Elders that reminds us to show up with a good heart, disrupt harmful patterns, engage ethically, and practice reciprocity (Yukon University Elders on Campus, 2024). I have had the opportunity through this program to move through tokenization of representation, to co-designing learning, and it has been a deeply meaningful experience.

This article reports on the ideas and stories that a small sample of non-Indigenous Yukon University instructors shared through semi-structured interviews in the spring and summer of 2022. A number of pedagogies emerged through a thematic analysis of their responses. Stemming first from an understanding of identity and positionality, as non-Indigenous teachers they felt a decolonized spirit of learning, physical learning environment, the ability to create and hold space, welcoming the whole person in learning, and collaboration/relationality are key considerations and approaches to teaching within their practices. By connecting to a review of Indigenous-authored scholarship, these pedagogies were further examined. Challenges to reconciliation in teaching and learning are articulated, as are the realms of action.

Literature Review

Education as a Tool of Oppression

The colonization of new worlds by European settlers was fueled by a desire to control land, resources, and people (Battiste, 2013; Dhamoon, 2015; Fellner, 2018; Haig-Brown, 2010). The success of this venture relied on a perceived supremacy of knowledge used to assert power over the oppressed and reinforce their lower status (Battiste, 2005, 2013; Haig-Brown, 2010). The disruption, demotion, and replacement of Indigenous Knowledge through colonization has led to the loss of both knowledge and the process of its generation and dissemination (Morrison & Vaioleti, 2017). The continued dominant positioning of Eurocentric knowledge in the structures and ideals of formal education systems remains an important factor in the subordination of Indigenous Peoples worldwide (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Battiste, 2013), and indicates that colonization is not a singular historic event that happened in the past but remains very much today (Dhamoon, 2015; Fellner, 2018).

In Canada, a familiar implication of colonized education is the Indian Residential Schools system, which operated from 1831 to 1997, and aimed to assimilate Indigenous Peoples to European ways of knowing and being through the segregation from and erasure of Indigenous thought, language, and spirituality (Haig-Brown, 2010). Along with the devastating loss of language and cultural knowledge for Indigenous people, the present-day impacts of what Battiste (2005) refers to as cognitive imperialism and cognitive assimilation can be seen in trends showing that Indigenous learners continue to struggle with equitable access to engagement and achievement in formal education (Battiste, 2013; MacKinnon, 2013; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016; Morrison & Vaioleti, 2017).

Current Terminologies—Decolonization and Indigenization

In examining reconciliation in post-secondary education, two key terms have been central to the current discourse: decolonization and Indigenization. Decolonization has been defined as an undoing of colonial ways, while offering an advantageous position to Indigenous counter-narratives (Fellner, 2018). Pitawanakwat and Pedri-Spade (2022) indicate that it happens within post-

secondary institutions "when people commit to identifying and changing systems and processes rooted in colonial ideologies and white supremacy that continue to oppress Indigenous peoples and their knowledges" (p. 25). They suggest decolonization is the first step in moving towards Indigenizing the academy, and Indigenization is but one of several initiatives that fall under decolonization.

While some scholars emphasize the shared perspectives of decolonial theory with anti-oppressive and critical studies, Tuck and Yang (2012) assert that decolonization does not have a synonym (p. 3). Many scholars see an imperative to actively engage in the work of decolonization within our formal education systems (Battiste, 2005, 2013; Dhamoon, 2015; Fellner, 2018; Haig-Brown, 2010). Fellner (2018) proposes starting this process with a deep critique of the ways our curriculum has and continues to cause harm to Indigenous Peoples, as well as critical reflection on the racism and bias located in research, learning, and practice.

Indigenization has been described as "the inclusion of Indigenous thought, theory, teachings, people and pedagogy into spaces of learning" (Brulé & Koleszar-Green, 2018, p.111). Others claim it to be transformational, calling it a process that, "depends on the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and their respective knowledges and the creation of various spaces where Indigenous Peoples may enact their ways of knowing, axiologies, and ethics" (Pitawanakwat & Pedri-Spade, 2022, p. 15). Indigenization is an ongoing process that evolves over time and requires listening to and being in conversation with Yukon First Nations people (Yukon University Indigenization Community of Practice, 2017).

It is important to note the situational uniqueness of both decolonization and Indigenization. Grafton and Melancon (2022) remind us these terms are not static or constant, but rather their "meanings change depending on the Indigenous identity and/or colonial position of those participating in them" (p. 136). The interaction between the terms is also important. While the concepts must support each other, they operate in unique ways and are not universally accepted (Grafton & Melancon, 2022; Pitawanakwat & Pedri-Spade, 2022). Debate surrounding the terms cautions that their accepted narrative can be harmful for Indigenous people, given the ongoing nature of colonization and unrealistic expectations of what is possible (Lavallee, 2020). Alfred claims outright that the academy cannot by nature be Indigenized (see Dokhanchi, 2012). Instead, spaces can only be sought within the institution to push back and activate the evolution of Indigeneity.

Cross-Cultural Considerations

Ermine (2007) examines the need for guiding principles around cross-cultural engagement, but he acknowledges a lack of what he deems ethical space—a meeting place between cultures where detaching from bias and affirming human diversity would contribute to dialogue. Oberg, Blades, and Thom (2007) further advance a vision of this space as a generative place where an emphasis is not on either/or culture, but both, and where ease and creativity can be found in the tensions that arise. As these tensions arise, cultural humility and cultural safety are important considerations for cross-cultural meeting spaces (Mooney, 2021), as are colonial trauma and mistrust (Fellner, 2018).

Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall (2012) advocate for the need to bring together Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledges when approaching issues. Informed by knowledge from Mi'kmaq Elders, *Etuaptmumk* or two-eyed seeing holds that both world views have contributions to offer as neither can fully explain the whole (2012). By approaching issues with the best of both Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledges, we can see from both eyes. Elder Marshall holds that we all have an inherent responsibility to continuously seek other perspectives to enhance what we are seeing and understanding (FNEAA, 2023). In sharing this concept, he emphasizes an equity of knowledge, as Indigenous Knowledge has been left behind in our current systems, despite its proven record of maintaining ecological integrity—which he deems our principal responsibility in today's times (FNEAA, 2023). Applying principles of etuaptmumk teaches us how to coexist and live in harmony and balance with each other and the natural world (FNEAA, 2023).

The roles of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people differ in the creation of a positive post-colonial outlook in education (Battiste, 2013; Castellano, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Fellner, 2018; Pidgeon, 2016). Non-Indigenous people have an obligation to engage in their own processes of decolonization while ensuring they are enabling space for Indigenous initiatives (Castellano, 2000). Part of this work involves confronting racial superiority and the impacts and power dynamics of privilege (Battiste, 2013; Manglitz et al., 2014). Sharing in the responsibility of uncovering internalized biases and being aware of motivations is the role of non-Indigenous people. Fellner (2018) suggests non-Indigenous people carry a responsibility for transparency around their own learning journeys, normalizing mistakes and starting from a place of compassion and love when facing difficult truths. Brulé and Koleszar-Green (2018) encourage non-Indigenous people to see that there is an importance in recognizing when inaction comes from the fear of making mistakes or doing the wrong thing. They believe that acknowledging the continued impacts of colonialism is a responsibility and a commitment that must be made between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to honour and share the land and respect differences in world views (Brulé & Koleszar-Green, 2018).

I come to this research with the assumption that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have a role in the reconciliation of education. Battiste (2013) asserts that, although non-Indigenous people can never learn or vicariously realize an Indigenous perspective, an "Indigenist" agenda is possible, whereby those willing

to participate in a collaborative movement around sovereignty, self-determination, rights, and reconciliation, are welcome. Battiste also holds that Indigenist research does not require someone to be Indigenous, but the context for such inquiry must be from people and related to place.

Research Methodology

This qualitative case study aimed to learn about the experiences of non-Indigenous instructors with Indigenization and decolonization efforts in their classrooms, within the historical, social, and cultural boundaries of the Yukon and Yukon University. Case study methodology was applied since Indigenization has been described as a regionally unique process (MacDonald, 2016). The research was approved by the research ethics boards of both Yukon University and St. Francis Xavier University.

Invitations to participate in this study were initially sent to fifteen to twenty Yukon University academic faculty who had considered Indigenized or decolonized approaches to teaching and learning in at least one full-term academic course taught at Yukon University in the 2019-2021 academic years. Drawing on relationality and familiarity with the work of my fellow colleagues, I determined who invitations were sent to. In accordance with purposeful sampling, I hoped to listen to a group of participants from which the greatest amount could be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because Yukon University is a small institution with relatively few faculty members, to maintain respondents' confidentiality, identifying descriptors could not be made available at any point in the study.

From the initial round of invitations, eight participants were selected for interview, with attention paid to diversity in the representation of academic and program areas. One participant later withdrew, leading to an analysis of seven interviews.

Semi-structured interviews invited narrative responses to open-ended questions (Alsaawi, 2014). By welcoming narrative responses from instructors, it was believed that space would be provided for respondents to explore their unique relationship to the focus of inquiry. Relationality as an intentional research epistemology (Wilson, 2008) was hopefully upheld as these stories were shared with a colleague in a position of deep learning, who could better relate to what was being said than an interviewer who was out of touch with the context of study.

During the interviews, I asked participants questions like, "What evidence do you see of the impacts of colonization in your practice and in your classroom?" They were invited to recall experiences, by being asked, "Tell me about an experience you had Indigenizing or decolonizing a course/program," with guiding prompts such as, "What kinds of things did you do? How were you supported?" Interviews were recorded and transcribed in clean verbatim. Transcripts were coded in NVivo 12, using a combination of in vivo coding (which is using the words of participants in assigning codes), and interpretive coding (where judgments are made by the researcher in what was implied). A thematic framework emerged and was related back to the literature to deepen the findings.

Qualitative research is a natural place to house this inquiry as it allows for a fulsome exploration of subjectivity. An instrumental case study methodology was selected to respectfully position the inquiry in a time and place. The research questions arose from my own experience as a teacher in a northern context, and the methodology and purpose of the study was supported by the then associate vice-president Indigenous Engagement and Partnerships at Yukon University. The First Nations Initiatives (FNI) team at Yukon University, as members of the university community, kindly participated in reviewing and shaping the interview questions for the study.

Grounded in an interpretive or constructivist paradigm, the approach to this study acknowledges that reality is socially constructed, and the interpretations made through the findings are shaped by the experiences of the researcher (Merriam, 2016; Cresswell, 2018). For this reason, researcher positionality is an important methodological consideration. My identity as a non-Indigenous instructor had a profound impact on the development of this project, data collection, analysis, findings, and dissemination of knowledge.

Positionality

I have been an adult educator in the Yukon for nearly twenty years, teaching at the pre-college, college, and university levels. I have also spent time as an adult educator for a Yukon First Nation government. I am a fifth-generation Canadian of Scottish and English descent. My father's people were farmers from rural England and Ireland. My matrilineal ancestors were farmers who immigrated to Saskatchewan in the early 1800s as a result of the Highland Clearances in Scotland. They settled in rural southwestern Ontario, where I was raised, in a small community on the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg, Treaty 21 lands (Long Woods Purchase).

In my time living and teaching in the North, through meaningful cross-cultural relationships, teaching experiences, and learning from Elders, I have observed and felt profound differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous world views and knowledge systems. These experiences continue to reveal the persistent impacts of colonization, including the privilege I have been afforded and the disadvantageous positioning of Indigenous learners within our current Eurocentric systems.

As a faculty member at Yukon University, I have struggled at times with not knowing how to action reconciliation, or indeed, where to engage in an authentic, informed, and productive conversation. My world view is particular and limited. As Mooney notes, "It is, indeed, difficult to separate myself from Western values, culture and structures in order to see the world from another perspective" (2021, p. 235). As a non-Indigenous person, I bring my social conditioning and a biased perspective to this inquiry. As a non-Indigenous person with a duty to reconciliation, I have a responsibility to continue to find a place in the conversation, explore hard topics, and seek to understand the best way forward.

Limitations

As mentioned, the lack of representation of Indigenous voice in this study reflects the demographic realities of Yukon University's faculty and instructional community. Without the voice of Indigenous respondents, this article is incredibly limited and potentially problematic. The research provided a space of reflection and connection for non-Indigenous instructors, but it was not able to provide a space for hearing from and learning from local Indigenous people on these topics. This article, then, could be accused of taking up space and giving a platform to voices that might best be in a position of listening on these topics at this time.

The study was small. Data collection was limited to a small sample of interviews and although attempts were made to ensure participant selection represented a diversity of program and subject areas, many were simply not included. Increasing the scope of this research to involve more participants, include Indigenous perspectives, and include instructors from a wider array of subject and program areas would produce wider-ranging results. A related study might also show the voice of students.

Finally, the study was limited by its adherence to a colonial framework of research. Louie et al. (2017) paraphrase Smith's (2012) perspective in saying research is political and "has been used to the benefit of the dominant culture by modelling the core intellectual practices of colonization" (p. 20). Furthermore, privileging an academic framework and tone in communicating this story makes it inaccessible to some.

Results

On Indigenization and Decolonization

All of the interviewees grappled with articulating what Indigenization meant to them, with some believing the concept resisted definition altogether. Indigenization was ultimately expressed as: being self-determined and directed by Indigenous people and communities, having Indigenous Knowledge and world views at its core, and bringing Indigenous perspectives into the classroom through both content and pedagogy. Those interviewed believe that Indigenization requires Indigenous representation across the academy, and that non-Indigenous participants in this work must demonstrate authenticity, vulnerability, and an awareness of one's own identity and positionality.

For some instructors, Indigenization represents something deeply transformational, requiring fundamental shifts in education. The difference between fitting Indigenous perspectives into existing courses versus an entire re-imagining of education systems highlighted the spectrum of discussion within the concept. One instructor (Alek) suggested that to Indigenize, "you'd completely have to reimagine something … so fundamentally different," that you'd have to begin anew, and Indigenous people, Elders, scholars, or communities would drive the process.

To define decolonization, instructors felt that first, an understanding of colonization and its impacts was foundational. Many respondents spoke to the challenges associated with being "the products" of a colonized education system and dealing with the associated biases and assumptions they hold as a result of this socialization. All participants were able to speak to the continuing impacts of colonization in their classrooms, calling it "the norm," and describing,

> Whether it's how we develop our course outlines, learning outcomes, how we assess, how we view success, what is failure, how we engage students, define the hierarchy, it's all a world view and it's a colonized world view, so, how I come in and teach naturally, is probably, even though I don't want to admit it, a result of colonization. (Alek)

Instructors then articulated decolonization as a critical examination of the structures, processes, and "norms" we work within. Kiran described it as, "[not] lazily falling back on colonial structures, and making visible the underlying colonial logic of things, so that it's not going unexamined." Many of the instructors talked about the need to dismantle hierarchies across the institution, and especially those that exist in the classroom. Disrupting Freire's (1985) banking model of education, whereby teaching is a one-way flow of information from teacher (as

expert) to student (as vessel), was a theme, as was the importance of ongoing reflective and reflexive practice, continually examining one's practice, listening to important feedback, and aiming to see how issues of power and identity are exerting their influence.

Identity and Positionality

All of the respondents reflected on the importance of identity and positionality to their teaching practice. Understanding who we are and where we stand in relation to knowledge and each other (and why), given our identities and socialization, is seen as work instructors are responsible to engage in. Puja described the process of unpacking social locations, positionalities, biases, and assumptions as the entry point to being able to engage with acts of decolonization and Indigenization. "I think sometimes we don't even understand or know who we are and why we believe certain things," mused Alek. "If I could spend time working on myself and understanding this, ultimately, this would be the first step in decolonizing a course." Critical self-awareness and understanding who you are as a person and how this positions you as an instructor is crucial to being able to see what you are bringing to the classroom, how you are taking up space, and how you are privileging content.

Respondents acknowledged that their identity and positionality limited their perspectives and dictated how they could participate in Indigenization efforts. There was general agreement that in terms of incorporating Yukon First Nations ways of knowing, doing, and being, the role of a non-Indigenous person involved listening and supporting, rather than leadership. Respecting and adapting to different cultural environments and world views when working with First Nations Knowledge Keepers and communities as an "outsider" was described by one participant as a vulnerable process that involves making mistakes and accepting discomfort, as it takes time to build confidence and learn the teachings, histories, stories, and ways of the Nations you work with.

Articulated Pedagogies

A number of pedagogies (or ways of being in a teaching practice) emerged as themes through this study. These are outlined in Figure 1. Instructors did not tend to explicitly classify these as Indigenizing approaches or decolonizing approaches (or both), and without Indigenous voice and direction, I refrain from labelling anything as an Indigenizing approach. For the purposes of this study, I categorize these as pedagogical moves towards reconciliation. In Figure 1, the central positioning of identity and positionality suggests a connection between identity and pedagogy (or, more simply, the notion that *who* we are impacts *how* we teach).

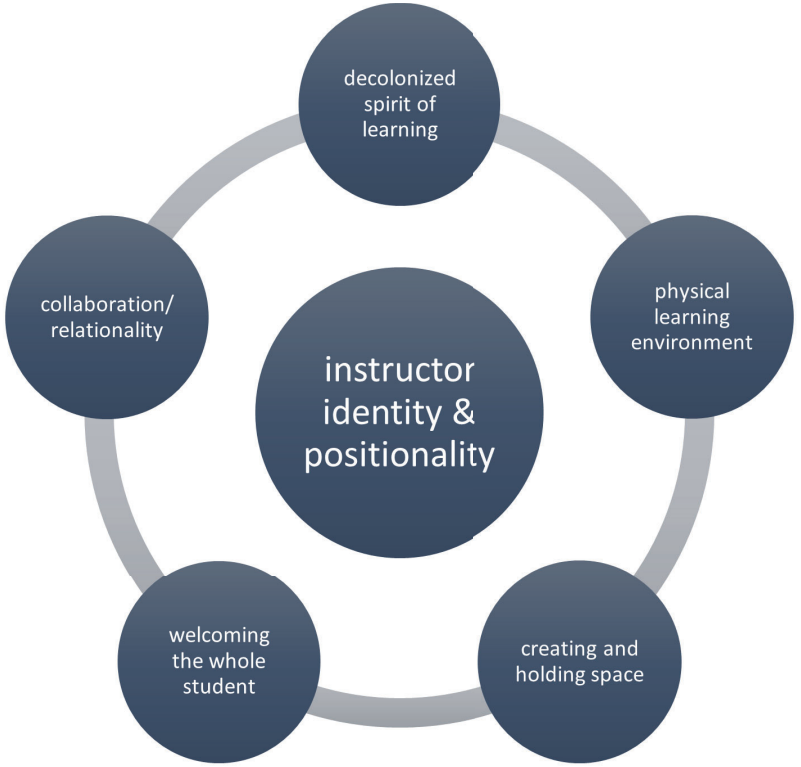

Figure 1. Pedagogical moves toward reconciliation from the perspective of non-Indigenous instructors. Source: Author

Decolonized Spirit of Learning

The hierarchical situation whereby the instructor holds authority over knowledge and unidirectionally transfers that knowledge to the student was referenced as a persistent colonial framework that negatively impacts instructors and students. Kiran described the deference to authority expressed by their students as concerning, describing an expectation that the instructor is the sole expert and director of learning. Sita described this from an internal perspective, indicating that instructors themselves carry this mindset, and feel like they need to "know everything about everything when they're at the front of the room." Both instructors related this mindset to the settler-colonial experience of education. It was noted that dismantling this hierarchy could be facilitated by sharing

power in the learning space through co-developing assignments and assessment with students, co-instructing courses, and encouraging student-directed learning.

> I have definitely tried to put the student far more in the centre of the learning. It's become less about me lecturing or standing at the front of the class talking. It's about building relationships, giving opportunities for students to talk, to share their experiences, and to interact with each other. I have become much more of just a facilitator. (Alek)

This act of flattening the hierarchy in the learning relationship is not an Indigenous pedagogy per se, and likely falls more under a decolonization framework, which is why it has been termed decolonized spirit of learning.

Physical Learning Environment

A number of different instructors spoke of the positive impacts of learning outside the traditional classroom, and specifically participating in experiential, land-based, and culturally-focused learning activities. While some facilitated this learning to build relational and intentional learning communities, others saw that welcoming traditional practices into learning spaces and paying attention to what and who are surrounding students are key components of a culturally supportive learning environment for Indigenous students.

The physical learning space was also referred to in terms of class sizes and the availability of learning spaces at the university. There was frustration expressed that traditional classrooms represent an extension of the settler-colonial context and are not conducive to natural conversation and speaking circles. Sita describes this frustration, "I see that now in the building structures, in our classrooms, in the way the furniture never quite goes the way you want it to, to make a circle, or to feel people are able to look at each other." There was agreement that the physical learning scapes greatly influenced both an ability to decolonize and Indigenize learning.

Creating and Holding Space

Creating and holding space in this teaching and learning context refers to welcoming the unexpected and unplanned-for emergent things to happen in the classroom, whether that is emotion, connection, trauma-related responses, uncomfortable conversations, or the elevation of other perspectives. Puja explained,

> I think the impacts of colonization are reflected sometimes in the students and their experiences. I think it's brought out in conversation, and I think it requires of instructors an ability to hold spaces for those impacts, for what education has perpetuated. When we start to unpack some of that in classes, it comes out in the words, in the experiences, in the emotions of students, and the impacts are very real. (Puja)

Even in the course of the interviews conducted for this research, emotion surfaced for some participants. Sita shared that, in the past "I would often look away or move on quickly if something was uncomfortable in class, but getting more comfortable being uncomfortable, I think, is what I want to keep practicing." Creating "culturally safe classrooms" and learning how to do this was also an idea voiced by one participant. The goal for creating this atmosphere is for all students to feel welcome to authentically be themselves and share their perspectives.

Instructors spoke of creating space personally and in the classroom to "learn the histories and learn the teachings and learn the language and traditions and ceremonies … the parts you're welcome to" (Marty). Sita used the term "witnessing" to describe important learning as a non-Indigenous instructor. They defined this as,

> Listening to Indigenous people and hearing stories—joyful ones and not joyful ones and going to events where people have space to share and sitting and witnessing—and not speaking … Hearing stories about residential schools, hearing stories about families who had joy and who have reclaimed lost language and culture and listening, I think, has helped a lot and I want to keep doing that. (Sita)

For non-Indigenous instructors, being aware of how one takes up space and knowing when to "get out of the way" is important to create the necessary space for Indigenous people to take the lead and for emergent learning to occur.

Welcoming the Whole Student

Respondents felt that welcoming the whole student is a relational pedagogy that puts the students at the centre of learning. It involves considering the student's life context outside of the classroom and acknowledging, honouring, and incorporating lived experience into coursework and learning spaces. Flexible entry, recognizing barriers, and accommodating the challenges that students face in programming is a part of seeing the whole student, according to Liz. Acknowledging the lived experiences of the students that come to the class is important for Sita. For Alek it is about being more student-centric and trying to understand where students are coming from and the challenges they bring.

Welcoming the whole student is about students not feeling like they have to separate their lives and themselves from the learning, but instead, this self-knowledge is welcome to inform and direct the learning.

Collaboration and Relationality

It was clear that this work must be inherently collaborative, and this involves the building of relationships. Instructors spoke of collaboration with respect to co-development with Indigenous people, communities, experts, colleagues, and students. Co-instructing of courses was another recurring theme.

> I've been co-teaching a lot in the last couple of years and for me, I actually think it's one of the ways forward—to have multiple world views demonstrated at a teaching level and made explicit to students that there's always multiple world views and multiple lenses on a particular knowledge area. (Puja)

Marty, Sita, and Alek also spoke of the value of co-teaching in bringing a diversity of world view, voice, and perspective to topics, as well as distributing power.

Equity of knowledges was expressed with respect to instruction as well, with the advocacy of pay equity attached to knowledge versus the colonially entrenched system of credentials. When discussing hiring Indigenous Knowledge Holders to teach courses, Marty explained the challenge, "If you look through who's paid what and how high it goes, it's very much formalized in the westernized world." Fairly compensating the sharing of Indigenous Knowledge by Knowledge Holders was also identified by Rene, who suggested that Elders be given faculty positions for their roles in sharing Indigenous Knowledges in classrooms.

Some instructors spoke of the "responsibility to connect with the community." Kiran mentioned "treating Indigenous organizations not as consultants but partners," continuously putting effort into building and maintaining relationships, which involves showing integrity by following through on commitments made to community partners. Connecting students to community through learning was another key site for collaboration.

Perceived Challenges with Indigenizing and Decolonizing Teaching and Learning

Understanding the Complexities of Indigenization

A number of interviewees spoke of the challenges they face in grappling with the parameters of Indigenization. Questions arose such as, how much one attempts to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into existing courses before reinventing the course? Are there limits to Indigenizing formal learning? How much do First Nations want formalized through the institution and what do they want to hold as their own? Some questioned whether the Eurocentric institution could ever be Indigenized (and that perhaps it is best to remember that this is an ongoing process and not an end goal, so Indigenizing might be a better verb). The spectrum from incorporating Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and pedagogies into learning, to reinventing courses, to reimagining a whole new post-secondary system, was overwhelming to some. There was a personal hesitancy on the part of all respondents to apply the term Indigenization to efforts in their practice, given their positionalities.

Some of the instructors struggled with understanding how to Indigenize and decolonize courses that were particularly focused on Western knowledge and based on specific concepts and materials. Liz wondered, are there certain courses that lend themselves more to decolonizing or Indigenizing actions? Rene wondered if perhaps the social science curriculum is better suited to these actions than some of the sciences, such as chemistry or biology.

Representation

The lack of Indigenous representation across the institution was identified as a challenge of primary importance. Rene highlighted this by saying, "It's hard for me to define Indigenization, but part of that is having Indigenous faculty, which means hiring Indigenous faculty at a rate that is competitive with the rest of Canada." Alek spoke of this challenge in saying,

> When you don't have many Indigenous colleagues or voices, when you sit in a meeting, how is it even possible that we can move in a different direction when currently we're very similar to those sitting around the table in terms of our backgrounds and approaches and world views and upbringings? We need a diversity of voices. (Alek)

A recurring pattern that instructors expressed discomfort with was non-Indigenous people within the institution speaking for Indigenous people on matters of Indigenization. One described this as paternalistic and colonial. Another described non-Indigenous faculty who lend their voices to a lot of Indigenization conversations as "icky and disingenuous." Liz mentioned,

> Even with the stuff that we're talking about at the university, in terms of taking these things to faculty councils. Those faculty councils are still, basically, for the most part, a whole bunch of non-Indigenous people and the bulk of them, a whole bunch of White people. (Liz)

Instructors spoke to the issue of the few Indigenous staff having to feel as though they were bearing the burden of Indigenization, acknowledging the exhaustion of being in this role and having their knowledges and perspectives marginalized in most spaces in the institution. One instructor noted this was also a challenge as non-Indigenous instructors want to receive meaningful feedback from Indigenous colleagues without contributing to this burden. Acknowledging the increased workload and pressure Indigenization might place on the minority of Indigenous employees at the university is imperative.

Authenticity: Tokenism and Co-opting

Cooper, Major, and Grafton (2018) define tokenism as symbolic gestures that are inauthentic and serve to appear as though they are directed towards reconciliation, although they do little to provoke change. The term brown-washing was used by Marty to describe non-Indigenous instructors who "want to keep doing exactly what they're doing, and just sprinkle Indigenous things in, like, "'We're going to have an Elder in and we're going to do this or we're going to do that,' and then we're going to say it's Indigenized." It was felt this perspective exists and lacks a deeper questioning of whether the core of what is being taught is from an Indigenous world view and is supporting culture in traditional ways. This sprinkling or peppering of Indigenous content without a deeper connection to Indigenous world views was mentioned by a number of participants as a tokenizing approach.

Liz described some of the challenges around the co-opting of knowledges while supporting an Indigenous student working on a project that involved an exploration of Indigenous Knowledges. Liz described discomfort in guiding the student, given her positionality and limited perspective as a non-Indigenous instructor. Although as an academic, Liz realized a comfort with the colonial reliance on published work to inform learning, questions arose as to the limitations and protocols that exist around accessing oral and community-based Indigenous Knowledges and figuring out how these knowledges can and should be shared outside of community.

Colonial Systems and Institutional-Level Challenges

Colonial systems and institutional hierarchies were seen as a barrier by some of the interviewees. "Everything has to be controlled by the colonial elites," Kiran commented. "When it comes to actually providing people with [resources], [they] don't trust [faculty] to do anything on their own." Alek expressed, "Actually, I feel like this institution does not do a great job of supporting this work. We all say that it is important, but the resources and supports are not provided to actually make it happen in a meaningful way." Being held to colonial (often numerical) definitions of success, facing the barriers of institutional hierarchies and processes, lack of authentic leadership, and working in isolation were mentioned as additional challenges at an institutional level.

Resources and Support

Financial support to involve Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members in learning was a desire expressed by Kiran. Others expressed wanting meaningful professional development to support the necessary individual and team-growth necessary for this work to happen. "If I can dream, it's about time," Puja said. "Time and financial support and space to think together, to grapple, to go beyond." The need to create positions to support faculty with Indigenizing and decolonizing teaching and learning was also identified by a few participants.

The importance of a collective, safe, and supportive approach to Indigenization and decolonization (as opposed to a top-down directive) was clearly supported by Rene:

> Forcing people to Indigenize their curriculum has a lot of drawbacks, because you're making people that don't understand Indigenous cultures and histories and ways of knowing, to put curriculum into their coursework that's supposed to be Indigenous or Indigenized. (Rene)

Some questioned whether the atmosphere and safety existed amongst colleagues and within the institution, to begin deep and meaningful transformations. Others expressed the feeling that this atmosphere does not exist and suggested effort be put into how it might be created. Sita emphasized the importance of finding supports and community among colleagues. They suggested creating space in faculty meetings or communities of practice where faculty could share and receive feedback on their ideas and reflections.

Discussion

The perspectives shared by the group of instructors in this study were related back to the literature of Indigenous scholars to seek connection and supports, and begin to expose gaps in understanding. This extended the themes of the study and started to reveal missing pieces and blind spots beyond the limited perspective of non-Indigenous instructors. The literature review alone did a great deal to emphasize the introductory and limited relationship of non-Indigenous instructors to the complex nature of Indigenous Knowledge and pedagogies.

Styres (2019) indicates that, "The only place from which any of us can write or speak with any degree of certainty is from the position of who we are in relation to what we know (p. 39). To truly consider these topics in a meaningful way, it is important to not only connect to Indigenous perspectives through scholarship, but to connect to Indigenous perspectives from the land where the questions are being asked

When considering the fundamental terminology utilized in this inquiry, some of the challenge the participants felt in articulating what is meant by Indigenization may have come from the assumption that the term has a singular definition. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) develop a more expansive definition. They propose the concept, instead, has three sub-themes: Indigenous inclusion (the increased representation of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff); reconciliation Indigenization (the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges and Indigeneity in the academy); and decolonial Indigenization (a fundamental shift and transformation of the academy based on balanced power relations). Decolonization can likewise be an esoteric term. It has been described as hopeful work. "For some teachers, decolonization is a refreshing jolt to an education system obsessed with assimilation," muses Chung (2019, p. 14). For others, "the word creates anxiety concerning our vague promises to Indigenous learners and even vaguer promises to ourselves" (p. 14).

Cooper et al. (2018) reinforce that reconciliation requires participation from settlers, newcomers, and Indigenous people. They advocate for a relational approach guided by authenticity and genuine conversation. Non-Indigenous people have an obligation to engage in their own processes of decolonization (Castellano, 2000). This personal decolonizing work, widely acknowledged by the instructors interviewed, requires vulnerability and transparency, and the ability to compassionately face difficult truths (Fellner, 2018). This work includes normalizing that these efforts will be uncomfortable. Seeing this work as "a collective responsibility," and "acting out of love to support each other" (Sita), are starting places of support, collaboration, and care in facing these challenging and deeply reflective movements.

Building on the Articulated Pedagogies

Iseke-Barnes (2008) agrees that decolonizing learning requires instructors to understand the systemic and ongoing nature of colonization. It requires a move away from seeing education as a transactional experience. By flattening hierarchies in the classroom and showing vulnerability in inviting student participation in shaping learning, authentic teaching spaces can be created. hooks (1994) calls this engaged pedagogy. In their work on relational learning and reconciliation, Cooper et al. (2018) validate the challenges for instructors in creating these decolonizing spaces, claiming that specific knowledge and experience is required by instructors to unlearn the status quo, create relational space, build relationships with community and authentic voices, provide space for Indigenous pedagogies and knowledge, facilitate learning, and assess it.

The notion of welcoming the whole student to learning is reinforced by Marshall (2023), who emphasizes that each of us possesses unique gifts that are needed here on earth, and we are responsible for realizing these for the good of the whole. Tanaka (2016) adds that we each have our own path of learning to travel and that uncovering "each person's work" is an individual venture in learning, supported by Indigenous rites of initiation and vision questing. Given this perspective on the development of self, and considering the whole student, the connections to community beyond self are evident in Kirkness and Barnhardt's (2016) work, which poses that Indigenous students want an education that respects them for who they are, provides relevancy to their world view, and helps them to exercise responsibility over their own lives while respecting capacity building and self-determination within their nations. The goal in post-secondary education then, is not for Indigenous learners to come out having assimilated to Eurocentric knowledge systems, but that they have gained increased perspective (through the development of two-eyed seeing), while honouring and developing their own Indigenous Knowledges. A learning environment that promotes a larger sense of belonging, trust, relevant program content, and pedagogy, matters (MacKinnon, 2013).

In Goulet and Goulet's (2014) model of effective teaching via Indigenous pedagogy, relationality extends to include the teacher's interpersonal relationship with the student, the relationships among students in the learning environment, connection to the process of learning, and connection to the content being shared. These relational categories interact to support Indigenous learners. The model stresses the importance of connection between community and learning, where the instructor must build the necessary relationships to bring in community-based expertise when they do not hold the positionality or ability to include Indigenous Knowledges (Cooper et al., 2018). This reinforcement of the overlapping notions of relationality and collaboration in teaching and learning also highlights the complexity of who/what the relationships are to, and who/what we are meant to collaborate with. The naming of these pedagogies in this study is the tip of the iceberg, hiding a deeper world of exploration around them.

Similarly, the emphasis on physical teaching and learning spaces is an acknowledgement of much more complex areas of consideration. Yes, the colonial construct of the classroom and an instructor placed at the front of the room is a significant limitation to decolonized and Indigenized learning. Taking learning beyond the walls of the classroom, to the community, and to the land, involves

a number of Indigenous pedagogies, each with deep roots and much to be understood, such as experiential learning, land-based learning, community-based learning, learning in circle, and storytelling, to name just a few.

Potential Missing Pieces for Non-Indigenous Instructors

Figure 2 attempts to build on the pedagogies articulated in this study, with a shift in wording for welcoming the whole *person* to the learning environment. Potential missing pieces for non-Indigenous instructors are noted alongside the model and not incorporated into it, to acknowledge significant limitations in perspective and positionality in this study. In starting to reveal some of these, the model becomes a picture of limited perspectives, emphasizing the imperative of further learning from Indigenous people, communities, and educators in expanding understanding.

This article cannot, by nature, begin to provide a picture of the incredibly deep and complex world of Indigenous pedagogies. Instead, it provides a picture of the problematic nature of limited perspective. The literature provides support for extensive thought on the addition of land as pedagogy (Kiskinwahamākēwina, 2020), the incorporation of spirituality and subjectivity into learning (Ermine, 1995; LaFever, 2016), welcoming the whole person (Fellner, 2018; FNESC, 2014), and specialized regional pedagogies such as language, ceremony, ritual, storywork, and arts (Tanaka, 2016). As a non-Indigenous person, this inquiry helped me see the vastness of the "blind spots" I have with respect to seeing and understanding a full range of Indigenous pedagogies. It has deepened an awareness of the dominant nature of Eurocentric knowledge and my need to walk alongside and support Indigenous colleagues and communities in positioning myself as a learner. It has humbled me.

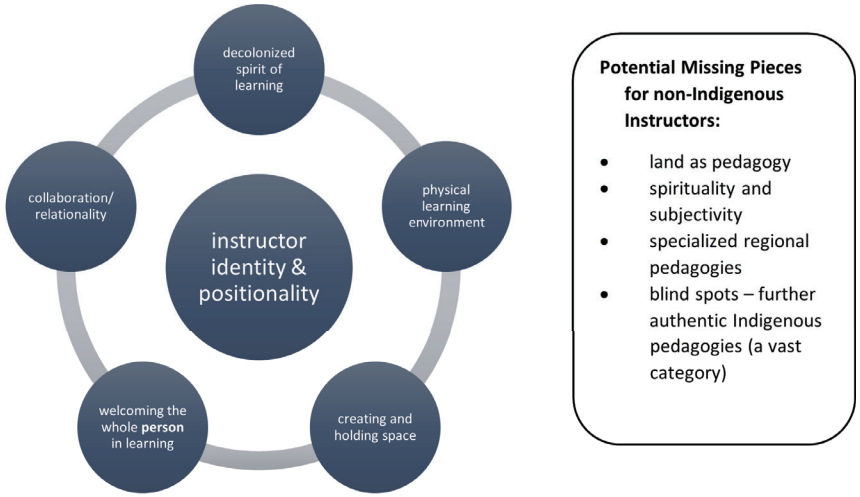

Figure 2. Pedagogical moves toward reconciliation (a beginning conversation). Source: Author

I see Pepion's seventeen ways of learning, supported by Little Bear (2009), as an example of distinct Indigenous pedagogies. Pepion lists the following: learning from visions, learning from the origin stories, learning from the Elders, rites of transfer, experiential learning, developmental learning, holistic concept, critical thinking, environmental thinking, protocols and taboos, extended family and community, learning from symbolism, effects of oppression and cultural conflict, spirituality, revitalization, language, and philosophy. In considering these, I reflect on our current systems of education and how some of these do not even include notions of the colonized perspective of a "teacher" in learning. I think back to a quote from a participant in this study, who said,

> One thing I don't feel like I integrate at all is an understanding of land—of physical land. Place, yes, but land, I just find that's one aspect of Indigenous world views that's over my head ... As much as I love being outside, it's not the same thing as being connected to the land in the way that I hear Indigenous people talking about it. (Kiran)

Kiskinwahamākēwina (2020) begins to reveal that land represents a relationship between people and place, and the essence of land-based pedagogy stems from the belief that "the land and all within has power" (p. 13). They indicate that enacting land-based pedagogy involves "collaboration and interaction with land, community, *kēhtē-ayak,* the old people, and traditional knowledge keepers" (2020, p. 14).

Spirituality and subjectivity are also concepts that reside mainly outside of our current post-secondary frameworks of teaching and learning. While subjective experiences and introspection are foundational to Indigenous epistemologies (Ermine, 1995), Western thought has tended to focus on external exploration and explanation. LaFever (2016) advocates for the addition of the spiritual component to both pedagogical and curricular approaches. For example, proposing honouring as a learning outcome would involve the acts of considering, meditating, becoming aware of, listening, observing, and so on. Self-actualization, and connecting learning to family and community, expand beyond self-interest (2016).

Including regionally specific pedagogies such as language and ceremony in learning is an integral part of place-based Indigenous Knowledge. Stories, mythology, ceremonies, land, and language hold important curriculum and pedagogy for Indigenous learners (Ermine, 1995). Incorporating deep listening, sharing circles, storytelling, performance, and dance to celebrate the historical and lived experience of Indigenous people is a necessary component of learning (Louie et al., 2012). Although non-Indigenous people have a responsibility to provide

space and support for this resurgence in the academy, it is inappropriate for them to take on the content development and the delivery of this learning.

The shift to welcoming the whole person in learning from welcoming the whole student emphasizes that *both* students and instructors are much more than these roles. Each may also be a partner, a child, a parent, a community member, an employee, a Knowledge Keeper, and so on. Recognizing and honouring the complexities beyond the student/teacher roles requires authenticity, relationality, and an ethic of care. The respondents in this study can be admired for their student-centred approach to learning, but Fellner (2018) implores instructors to be self-compassionate as learners themselves. By encompassing this whole person, or whole self, from both a learner and instructor perspective, our pedagogies further interweave, for it requires a decolonized spirit and an awareness of identity and positionality to begin to see ourselves and each other wholistically. By welcoming the whole person in learning, we are also encouraged through the First Peoples Principles of Learning, which indicate, "Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors" (2014, p. 1). Perhaps our whole person learning could consider how each of these pieces is supported in the classroom.

Sites of Action

Participants in the study spoke of work that needs to be done at the level of self, community, and institution. These sites of action are shown in Figure 3 as overlapping. There is unique work to be done at all levels, and yet the interactive, collaborative, and relational work is also integral. At the individual level, self-reflective and reflexive practice can support growth for non-Indigenous instructors. An awareness of identity and positionality is critical, as is a spirit of vulnerability and a willingness to make mistakes. For non-Indigenous educators, there is a need for "constant self-questioning, including openly admitting their own lack of knowledge, biases, racisms, and complicity in colonial ideologies and practices" (Davis et al., 2018, p. 22). The Yukon University Elders tell us, "Transforming ourselves is a prerequisite to transforming our institution" (2024, p. 10). Spending time with Indigenous people and perspectives is also a key site of learning at the level of self (Mooney, 2021, p. 235).

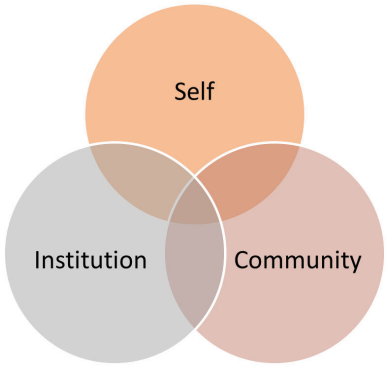

Figure 3. Reconciliation will involve work at the individual, community, and institutional levels.

Communities of practice and collaboration built around this learning will give instructors a collective space to deepen through relation. Instructor collaboration is hinged upon faculty feeling like the institution is a safe and welcoming space, and that there are opportunities and supports available for them to develop professionally and make mistakes. Finding these safe spaces and communities of practice will help facilitate dialogue and foster a culture of collaboration (Davis et al., 2018, p. 24). As we come together in instructor collectives, supporting and celebrating our Indigenous colleagues and creating welcoming space for Indigenous Knowledge, resistance, and scholarship will be important. Respecting the unique burden placed on our Indigenous colleagues in their roles is also key.

At the institutional level, increasing the number of Indigenous faculty will provide more critical depth of Indigenous Knowledge in learning spaces (Brulé & Koleszar-Green, 2018). To do this, Indigenous people must also feel welcome by the institution and remain empowered in their self-determination and cultural integrity while there (Pidgeon, 2016). Towards an equality of knowledges, Ball (2004) suggests we redefine concepts of teaching credential and work towards engaging Indigenous community members in co-instruction and partnership. Initiatives that involve Indigenous communities in conceptualization, delivery, application, and evaluation should be elevated by leadership. Decolonization will require continuous and critical conversation about relationships of power and hierarchy within the institution, providing support, training, and resources for the work, building and maintaining relationships, and fostering authentic dialogue and action.

Implications: Reimagining, Renaissance, and Representation

Fellner (2018) provides us with medicines of love, good relationships, Indigenous Knowledges, living a good life, responsibility, relationality, a sense of belonging, and land to draw upon in Indigenizing and decolonizing, so that we can better embody this work. They suggest that drawing upon these medicines as guiding principles positions us to approach this work with humility. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) also provide guidance in terms of suggesting post-secondary systems focus on respect for identity and cultural integrity, learning that is relevant to world view, reciprocity, and responsibility through participation.

As an instructor on this path, I connect with my colleagues in their feeling that there are real gaps in institutional efforts towards Indigenization with respect to teaching and learning. Many of these efforts do not adequately address the deeper, more interpersonal level of transformation required for decolonizing and Indigenizing (Mooney, 2021). This reflects the current situation, as we are still attempting to understand the knowledge and abilities educators should possess in order to engage in this work. As a non-Indigenous educator, Mooney (2021) emphasizes that post-secondary teaching is dominated by non-Indigenous people who "are not only unfamiliar with, but likely ignorant and mis-informed about Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies," and being left to navigate this without support is inadequate and harmful (p. 232).

Representation in terms of Indigenous educators and leaders in the academy becomes glaringly imperative. The growth of the Indigenous Renaissance offers hope and is steeped in irony. Given the history of educational trauma for Indigenous people and the pervasive domination of Eurocentrism in education, suggesting that Indigenous learners must be assimilated to Eurocentric systems of learning and credential in order to be invited to challenge and dismantle the platform is an inadequate response. The revolution must somehow break free from assimilation, but power continues to find comfort in the status quo.

The work of reconciliation is complex, challenging, painful, hopeful, and filled with emotion and vulnerability. It involves deep and complex trauma and cross-cultural challenges. It involves self-work. Learning how to create safe and ethical space around us will take time and cross-cultural thought and communication. We have to figure out the ethical space, before we enter it. Loving and caring for ourselves and each other, while developing a deeper knowledge of self and other will be foundational. Perhaps the first step will be to embrace the heart in this learning, and move beyond the focus of intellect.

Acknowledgements

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