

Auto Ethnography: Journey in Decolonizing and Indigenizing my Teaching and Curriculum

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Introduction and Purpose

To begin I would like to acknowledge and give honour to the Secwepemc—the ancestral peoples who have lived here for thousands of years—upon whose traditional and unceded land Thompson Rivers University is located. The Secwepemc maintain a spiritual and practical relationship to the land, water, air, animals, plants and all things needed for life on Mother Earth. It is with that in mind that we owe this debt of gratitude. (ALBAA Research Team, 2010, p.1)

I have been a part of the educational system for nineteen years now. I have completed from kindergarten to grade twelve, and then completed six years of postsecondary schooling resulting in two degrees: A Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education. I am a life-long learner and just begun my journey as an educator. Upon entering the Bachelor of Education one of the first topics covered was the release of the New BC Curriculum. It was made clear to us that we were required to incorporate Aboriginal ways of knowing and pedagogies across the curriculum in our teaching in a meaningful way. This is part of the nationwide efforts to reconcile and a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls for Action (TRCR, 2015), specifically to the statement “Education got us into this mess, education should take us out of it (Sinclair, 2015). This has led to teachers across Canada to engage in the process of Indigenization. Previous to the experiences with Indigenous curriculum, the Bachelor of Education provided me with, I had remained ignorant to much of Indigenous history, culture, language, and the people who inhabited the land around me. I knew very little about Aboriginal world views and pedagogies. It this important education was absent from my upbringing and experience with the public education system.

In my first year of the Bachelor of Education program, I was given an assignment to create a children's book or educational center that incorporated Aboriginal worldviews and pedagogies. This is where my journey toward decolonization truly started. The children's book that I created for that class was the catalyst that helped me dive deeper into this self reflective process. By working with a team including my supervisor and Indigenous educators and advisors, I have been learning about incorporating Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies into my teaching and learning. This has encouraged me along the process of understanding decolonization and Indigenizing my teaching to become an effective educator. The assignment lead me to create a story called *Tail of Tails*, which was based on an Ojibway story about how the beaver got a flat tail. This process was an eye opening experience into the world of Indigenous knowledges and worldviews. This would have been impossible without the many people I consulted with to ensure the book followed Aboriginal pedagogies and content. It went under many revisions to ensure the ending of the story reflected Aboriginal worldviews as I was a non-Indigenous person writing about Indigenous content. This was not a road I anticipated having to navigate in my life, but I was thankful for the opportunity as it gave me the chance to create relationships and work alongside many Indigenous storytellers and minds. It brought me the opportunity to learn local Secwepemc language and worldviews I would not have been able to experience otherwise.

The primary purpose of this research project was to engage in an exploration which would prompt a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture, progress in my journey to decolonizing education, openness to other cultures and worldviews, and ultimately to become a better educator. The insights from this auto ethnographic study

will assist other teachers and teacher candidates in their own journey to decolonize and indigenize education. It will provide an example of how to incorporate indigenous language and worldviews in elementary classrooms.

Statement of Problem and Background Information

I stumbled upon this research by accident. If I had not entered the Bachelor of Education program when I did, I would not be where I am today. It took a language and literacy class and two invested professors to get me to this place. I come from a middle-class family, and I am a white settler; my specific ethnicities are German, Swiss and British. Due to this background, I grew up living a very privileged and sheltered life. I lived in small towns largely occupied by Caucasian European descendants. As a white settler, it took me a while to understand the meaning of that term and the importance behind it. As I was born here, it felt strange to think that I did not belong on this land and it was because of my ancestors that terrible things had to come to the people who were Indigenous to this land. Before the B Ed program, I tried to ignore these feelings of guilt as I felt there was nothing I could do to change the past. The knowledge of colonization only felt safe acknowledging how it affected other countries in history books. Upon reflection, I did not want to acknowledge how my presence on this land contributed to the ongoing colonization and my choice to remain ignorant was making the issue worse. It was not until university in my second degree, that I felt as a teacher I would be able to help change the attitudes I grew up with and actually help with a solution rather than contribute to the problem.

I was a child of a military family, so I did get to experience three different provinces; therefore, I experienced learning from three different school systems and

curriculums, none of which taught me about the dark legacy of colonialism, and specifically the destroying effect of residential schools in the lives of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. It was not until I entered the province of British Columbia that I really experienced any sort of Indigenous education.

This autoethnography, gives me the opportunity to reflect deeply upon the gaps that are now so apparent. As I reflect on my elementary school experiences, I recall a day in grade three, having an Elder come to our class to teach us about dream catchers. I recall we made one in grade five. I also recall staying the night at a museum in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia, where I experienced my first talking-circle. The reason that these memories stand out to me is because there were very few moments in my education in which Indigenous worldviews or knowledge was brought in to the curriculum. These are the type of “one-off activities” (p. 104). Shauneen talks about in her article *Decolonizing Our Practice – Indigenizing our Teaching*: “They remember low levels of inclusion: “we made dream catchers, heard a storyteller, or saw that movie...” These activities were usually “one-off” activities without a context of pre-teaching that would have provided greater depth of understanding” (p. 104). It was these attempts that were ways of including Indigenous content without acknowledging it, without deeply engaging with it. Instead of being a learning opportunity, it becomes no more than a fun, exotic class activity.

In high school, I took what was marketed as a “Native Studies Course”. From the title of the course one would assume that it would include Indigenous perspectives and worldviews. This was not the case. As a class, we briefly learned about the culture and traditions of the Mohawk, Cree, and Ojibwa peoples, however the class quickly strayed to

making videos about environment and what it means to be “Canadian”. We also became the class that assisted with school fundraisers, such as making posters for the 30 Hour Famine. Very little of what happened in class was related to Indigenous perspectives and content. The purpose of this class was such a missed opportunity to cover a wealth of knowledge about the area in which I was living.

Perhaps the most frustrating educational experience was completing a minor in Canadian history at Thompson Rivers University and not learning about the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Most of the history learned in school is marketed as “Canadian” history, however, what is not reflected in most textbooks and resources that this history is more European history than Canadian history. It is a white-washed history that tells very little of the ancestors that were on this land before European settlers arrived and colonized it. I am ashamed to acknowledge that I graduated from my Bachelor of Arts with a major in ignorance. I knew very little about what had actually occurred on the land that I was living; the land that had been taken from the Secwepemc peoples. My entire educational journey from elementary to university had molded me into the "perfect stranger" by my community and education system. Clarke (2005) writes about this concept in her article *Indigenizing Environmental Education*:

I was enacting what Dion (2007; 2009) calls the "perfect stranger" stance wherein non-Indigenous Canadians unknowingly claim a deep ignorance, preferring to know nothing about Indigenous peoples so they can remain innocent, without causing harm towards Indigenous people...However, my new awareness has also made it clear that by not addressing Indigenous issues while on expeditions, I was perpetuating the very ignorance that most settler Canadians have and, therefore, helped maintain or perpetuate the injustices that most Indigenous people still face today (Newbery, 2012)... (p.5-6)

I think my visceral reaction is part frustration that I was not taught a truer history of Canada and part anger that there are people who know about these injustices

and still choose to do nothing about the maintenance of the typical non-Indigenous Canadian “perfect stranger” position. I also experience deep 7 embarrassment that it has taken me 30 years to begin to understand this issue for myself as a Canadian. (p.6-7)

It is this embarrassment that I also feel about my schooling. Instead of facing the hard, uncomfortable emotions and reflections that come with acknowledging the truths of what the colonizers did to the Indigenous peoples, it is easier to remain ignorant and use the ignorance as a crutch to make people feel better about their actions. I am guilty of being a part of the collective who chose to remain ignorant for a long time. Throughout this process I became angry with myself for not taking an initiative earlier to educate myself. How am I supposed to call myself an educated individual when I chose to remain ignorant to such a huge issue?

Overall, the experiences that lead me to this part of my education were not positive as they only encouraged my ignorance. It is only through the past two years that I have been working to rid myself of a colonial mentality. It is my responsibility as an educator and citizen that I must answer the call of the Truth and Reconciliation Act to my fullest capabilities. This paper and my experiences are some of my current attempts to answer this call to action. As stated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report,

the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as “cultural genocide.” (TRC, p.1, 2015)

The commission was mandated to:

reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools, in a manner that fully documents the individual and collective harms perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples, and honours the resilience and courage of former students, their families, and communities. (TRC, 2015)

Thankfully due to the TRC there was a major renovation to the British Columbia curriculum. The response to the TRCs Calls to Action are weaved through the new BC curriculum in various subjects. For example, there is an expectation for children to “Show awareness of how story in First People's cultures connects people to family and community” (BC Curriculum, 2018) and “Develop awareness of how story in First Peoples cultures connect people to land.” (BC Curriculum, 2018). These curricular competencies continue through elementary, expanding to understand the importance of story and oral traditions on Aboriginal worldviews, beliefs and values. These connections are not limited to language arts or social studies but also to connect Aboriginal perspectives to concepts in math and in science. Now as the government has mandated these curriculum changes it is up to future and current educators to implement the change and do justice to the call to action by making their classrooms “holistic, reflexive, reflective, experimental and relational in learning” (FNESC, 2008). If educators do not act, these statements will remain as good intentions, and no more than written words. Before embodying Indigenous curriculum, educators need to engage with the Canadian dark history of its relationship with Aboriginal people, educate themselves, accept their responsibility, and decolonize their mentality. It is only through this process of self-transformation that they can then proceed to transform education. This autoethnography is a report on my own journey.

Methods

Methodological Approach

Journaling constituted the main source of data for this project and was completed including the four dimensions of Aboriginal medicine wheel: spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional (see Figures 1 and 2). These journals were created weekly from late October 2018 to the beginning of May 2019. I used the two figures below to help guide my reflections:

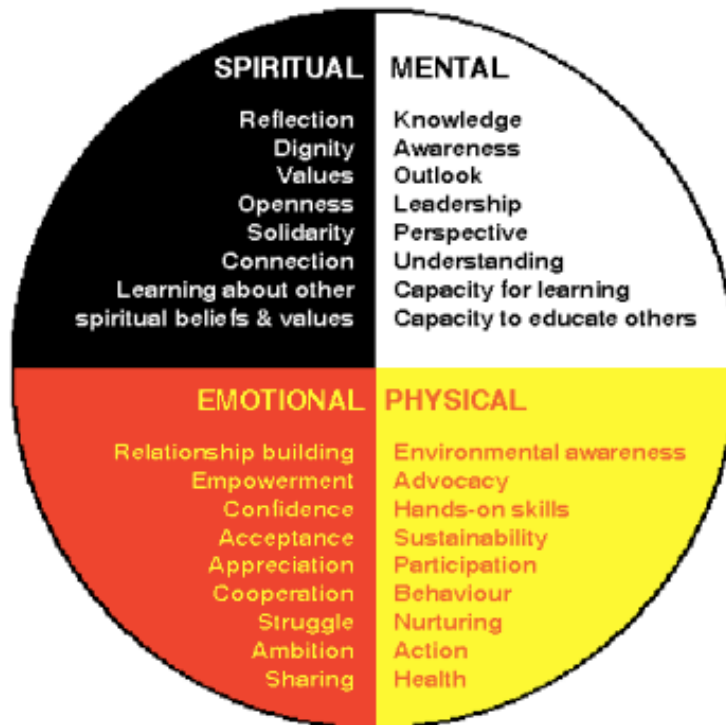
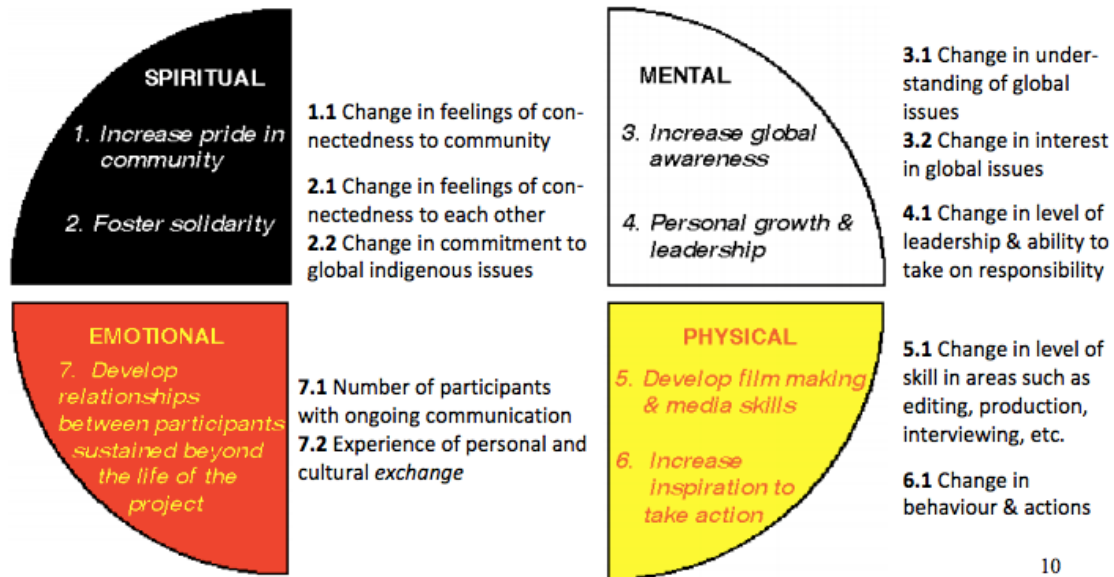


Figure 1: Medicine Wheel Evaluation (Atlantic Council for International Cooperation, 2007, p. 6)



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Figure 2 : Medicine Wheel Evaluation Explained (ACIC, 2007, p.10)

The main insights from this auto ethnographic journey were synthesized through these narratives within dominant themes. The themes have been identified through careful analysis of reflection notes and artifacts such as books, journal entries, and educational resources used during my practicum. Another method that was used to aid the process of decolonization was the unit plans I developed during my long practicum, which was completed at a catholic school in a grade 7 from January 4 – March 18, 2019. I attempted to include Indigenous content and pedagogy into each unit. The units I was assigned to do during my project were:

- Novel Study: I Am David (a story about a young boy who escapes from a concentration camp in Bulgaria during World War II)
- Social Studies: Ancient Egypt
- Math: Probability
- Science: Climate Change

- Art: Free Choice (Canadian Indigenous Artists)
- French: Directions
- Physical Education: Basketball
- Health/Careers: Food Guide and Sleep Cycles (originally planned a lesson on racism and discrimination)
- ADST: The Design Process

The thematic constraints in a few of these lessons paired with the rigidity of the school I was assigned for my practicum class (an Independent Catholic School) made it challenging sometimes to incorporate as much Indigenous content as initially intended. In later sections, I will elaborate more on how Aboriginal worldviews and content were incorporated into these units and some of the challenges experienced.

Another integral part of this autoethnography, was the meetings with my faculty mentors. Although, due to schedules, we were not able to meet as frequently as previously planned. There were a total of eight meetings: four leading up to the practicum, two during the ten week practicum, and two after the practicum. These meetings were a time of reflection, resource discovery as well as scaffolding my journey. Finally, there was a single meeting with four peers to discuss my experiences and reflections on the process as a whole.

Experiences

Practicum

As per the Education program at Thompson Rivers University, there is a compulsory ten week practicum. The practicum I completed was in a grade seven classroom at an independent Catholic school rather than a public school like most of my

peers. This had some effect in my research process as there was a clear value clash that was a theme across the journals. An example of this was on January 30th, 2019, I noted: “When I asked Mrs. M about reading an Indigenous story to the class and connecting it to *I Am David*, she warned me about time constraints and advised me to skip it.”

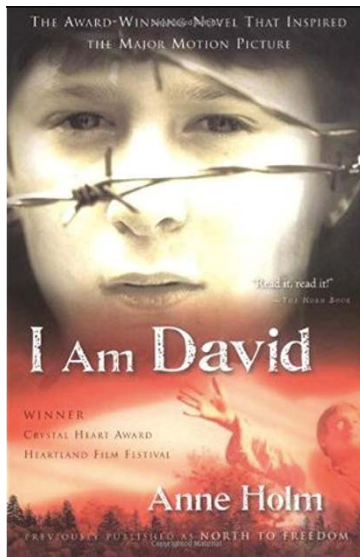


Figure 3: *I Am David Novel* (Ann Holm, 1963)

It is clear by this that incorporating and connecting Indigenous content is not the primary concern of this classroom or school. Despite being encouraged to skip the indigenous lesson I decided to incorporate it, so I ended up teaching the lesson. The students responded positively to the lesson. The lesson started with us sitting in a sharing circle as I read *Shin-Chi's Canoe*. *Shin-Chi's Canoe* is a story about two children's experience at a residential school and the reality of the hardships children who attended residential schools faced such as being forced to conform to traditions, a language, a religion, and more that is unfamiliar to them.

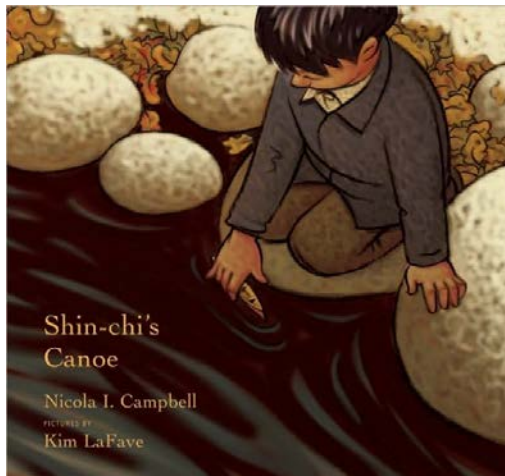


Figure 4: *Shin-chi's Canoe* (Nicola Campbell, 2008)

As a group we discussed the feelings one would experience in relation to the book and residential school. Then in small groups, the students discussed how these feelings connected to how the main character of the the novel, *I Am David* felt and the emotions he experienced to being freed from the concentration camp (the boy held a wonderment of the world around him, but often felt feelings of fear of being caught by what the boy called “them” referring to the officers at the concentration camp). We also discussed the theme of freedom in both books and the concept of a group feeling superior to another. We also discussed how while *I am David* is set in a pivotal time of European history, there were similar crutlites happening in Canada during the residential schools period. This lesson was but a start in getting the students to be able to begin to understand and process the abuse that the Indigenous peoples of Canada had to undergo. One prominent thing I noted when developing the lessons for my novel study was that there were no Indigenous books for the students to choose from. I was given a choice to choose between *Tuck Everlasting* and *I Am David* to teach. The other two novels that were to be studied that year were *The Hatchet* and *The Giver*. These are all books centered around white male protagonists. There was little diversity that the students were able to read

about, and selections did not include books that would tell stories about Aboriginal people or that would have them as protagonists.

This lesson was a prime example of some of the scaffolding that occurred when working with my faculty mentors Gloria Ramirez and Roxane Letterlough. It was through their joint efforts that we developed this lesson when I approached them about having difficulties incorporating Indigenous content into the unit. Another method I used in Indigenizing this particular unit was having my students treat their literature discussions like talking circles to ensure the respect of each other and the different opinions that were shared. Through the implementation of talking circles, I was embodying First Peoples Principles of Learning: learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors, learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place, learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions, learning involves generational roles and responsibilities, learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge, learning is embedded in memory, history, and story, learning involves patience and time, learning requires exploration of one's identity, learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or certain situations (FNESC, 2015). In addition to this, the students participated in weekly journal writing, which I modelled after my own style of journaling. A process of holistic reflection that allowed them to get in touch with their different quadrants; through using a medicine wheel. This idea was inspired by Peter Fredrick's (1991) article *The Medicine Wheel: Emotions and Connections in the Classroom*:

to introduce students to the Medicine Wheel, and to suggest that they keep the four dimensions in mind as they read a text, confront a problem, or are introduced to a new concept or skill. Follow up by using the Medicine Wheel to structure the discussion. One can enter the Wheel in any quadrant and then move to the others. For example, when beginning the discussion of a *text-any* "text"-we could ask students to be concrete in dealing with the physicality of the reading, visual or material object, or experience (p. 204).

Frederick suggests that by starting with the physical connections, students will become more engaged with the process. I found this really helped my students compose their journals. It gave them a structure in which they were able to analyze how they were feeling and reflect deeper on thoughts and emotions.

In addition to incorporating circle talks into the classroom, I also worked to incorporate storytelling into the classroom. As noted by Fredrick (1991), "Telling stories not only affirms students' experiences and voices, but also validates *different* student voices" (p. 205), as well as that these processes, "teaches students *how* they learn while actually in the process of learning" (p. 206). Storytelling is an important part of connecting with each other as well as a part of learning for students. I gave my students the opportunity to do their final projects for their language arts as an oral story. I also modeled it in the classroom as much as possible. For example, in science I shared a few Indigenous stories including the story, *Salmon Boy*, which is a Haida story that teaches the importance of the salmon. This was an engaging experience as it hooked the students' interest about the lesson.

On March 12th, 2019 I took the opportunity to share the story book I had been collaborating with Gloria Ramirez and Roxane Letterlough as well as other Indigenous educators and advisors.



Figure 5: Tale of Tails (Howard & Wilson, 2019)

Tale of Tales is a story based off of an Ojibwe tale of how the beaver got a flat tale with Secwepemc words incorporated into the picture book. The story centers around the main character Sqlu7úwi who is a proud beaver. The other animals grow tired of his boastfulness and decide to act out against on Sqlu7úwi by stomping on his beautiful tail. He must overcome this challenge and to learn the exciting possibilities of his new tail. The students responded well to the book. They were excited that I shared a piece of my learning and journey with them. We discussed the use of the language in the book and the meanings they took away from the book. One of the important ones was the idea of Sqlu7úwi “becoming happy with his tail” (student C, March, 12, 2019) or overcoming the

obstacle on his own and showing resilience. The book was an excellent way to introduce Secwepemc language into the classroom. It was an easy and effective resource to introduce the students to the language. It was a great conversational piece for the students to look at. Stories were definitely the easiest way for me to bring Aboriginal worldviews and language into the classroom. When I first started this project, I recall feeling overwhelmed with the task. I initially felt very alone in doing this, before I realized the power behind bringing resources like this one into the classroom. I felt comfortable sharing the story with the students, and it was an excellent method to incorporate indigenous knowledge (e.g., language) and worldviews (e.g., teaching through stories) into the classroom.

One of the most shocking moments I experienced in this research process was when I was introducing the art unit to the class. The unit required students to research a Canadian Aboriginal artist and use their style to create a work of their own. They were also to write a paragraph explaining where the inspiration came from and a short biography on the artist. In the process of introducing this unit, I had on student ask me the following question: “What is Aboriginal?” (Student P, February, 14, 2019) This question shocked me; it was asked by a seventh grader, a student who had been schooled for 8 years, living in Kamloops, in Secwepemc territory, a place with constant presence of Aboriginal people. I had walked into the class that day expecting the students to be familiar with the term. I assumed that by then all of them knew about Aboriginal people. It is through moments like this when I come to understand more why there was the call to action in 2015. The large gaps in knowledge like this, where I had to sit down with a class who were supposedly learning this curriculum for eight years and explain the term

Aboriginal and who the Aboriginal peoples of Canada were. While I am sure this student had heard the terminology in the past, he was vastly unaware of the meaning and importance of this word. He did not understand the peoples or cultures that this term represented. This student was unaware that he was learning and living upon Secwepemc peoples lands and the importance of that.

WestCAST

As another part of my research, I attended and presented at a conference at the University of Calgary, in the early stages of this project. This was a conference for teacher candidates to share and learn from one another. One of the areas I instantly noticed was how many seminars were on the topic of Indigenization. I personally attended three of them for the two days I attended, and it was inspiring to see how many people were taking responsibility and answering the call to action from the TRC. Many areas of the curriculum in Alberta as well as British Columbia were being changed to make them more Indigenous. One example of this came from Thompson Rivers University as well: Working with the Department of Fisheries, local Elders, and educators to make the unit on the salmon life cycle and the salmon Indigenous. It is something as simple as that unit that was so inherently “Westernized” that is massily distributed every year that should be Indigenized. Many seminars referred to the importance of taking action and the idea of place-based learning. Place-based learning is an education style that connects curriculum to the local environment, allowing students to learn about their community and physical surroundings. As noted by Duffin (2005), “It is characterized by interdisciplinary learning, team teaching, hands-on learning experiences that often center on problem-solving

projects, learner-centered education that adapts to students' individual skills and abilities, and the exploration of the local community and natural surroundings.” (p. 1) This style of learning is important as it provides students with the opportunity to learn about local Indigenous cultures. It exposes students to the people, cultures, and landscapes in their community. Place-based learning also helps connect students to the physical land around them and the uses of local plants. It was uplifting to acknowledge that this initiative is being taken seriously and there are other educators out there fighting to help reconcile and take responsibility.

Key Findings

Themes

This journey was not always an easy path to go through. There was a lot of times when it became overwhelming and uncomfortable; however, there were many amazing times I had with my peers, professors and students, which made it worth it. I will present the major findings using each medicine wheel quadrant, which guided my journaling process. I will look at the themes that emerged in myself, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Spiritually

This area of the medicine wheel was the hardest section for me to reflect on. There is a lot of confusion relating to this area, as I did not start out as an innately spiritual or religious person. It took me awhile to understand the holistic concept of spirituality and the importance of it to the process of decolonization. In a discussion with my faculty mentor on this area she told me, “Being spiritual is feeling more inner connectedness. It is the idea of wishing loved ones and animals well.” (January 29, 2019). Even after this

conversation, I still struggled to connect to this holistic idea. In a following journal, upon reflecting about my spiritual connectedness I noted that I grew up with a disconnect from any sort of faith or spirituality, which aided in my struggle to understand. (February 8, 2019). I could understand Cajete (2000) ideology: “All things are considered living and spiritual, related and interrelated, and critical to life and living” (as cited Hogue, 2016, para. 2). This I could comprehend through my previous knowledge of ecosystems and life cycles, but spirituality ran deeper than this concept. To follow Fredrick’s (1991) example in applying spirituality to the curriculum it came in the reflective period and he encouraged students “to focus on the single moment in their narrative that had the most emotional (or spiritual, or physical) power for them.” (p.205) Looking for a moment of realization. This was how I encouraged my students to connect spiritually when looking at their novel study journals. I often wondered if my students struggled with this concept less than I did, as they held a faith already. I pondered in a later journal (March 1, 2019) if growing up with a faith would create an easier pathway to understanding this concept. However, from reading the journal entries I received from the students, I did not come to a conclusive answer to my pondering.

What I came to interpret as my spiritual advancement is the process of opening myself up, understanding my wrong doings in the past. Opening myself to learning about another culture’s spiritual beliefs and values. My attempts in understanding beliefs and values that were not a part of me to begin with, but working to incorporate them into my life and classroom helped me to become more open and connected with my students. It is this idea of connectedness that is an important step of understanding the concept of a holistic spirituality. The values and lessons I learned throughout Roxane Letterlough’s

class such as listening to the seven teachings also aided helping me on my spiritual journey through understanding the lessons learned from Mother Earth and all those who inhabit her. It was important in my practicum that I took the time I needed to reflect and listen to the needs of my students in order to have a healthy classroom. Getting my class to connect with nature (though difficult due to weather conditions, cold conditions put a stop to some of the outdoor activities I had planned) was also essential. For example in science learning about climate change is one thing, experiencing it and examining it through one's own lens is a completely different level of connection. These were some of my attempts at connecting spiritually personally and with my class. One of the moments that stood out for me was simply taking a moment in nature and listening. This was one of the excersies that we did as a class in Roxane's outdoor education course (April 15, 2019) at Skadam Flats. As this is an area I struggled with, it is something I will have to continue to work on and understand as I continue my journey towards decolonization and Indigenization.

Physical

The growth in this area came heavily through learning to incorporate Indigenous content and pedagogies into my classroom, as well as participating in the Aboriginal Culture and Learning Class, along with the Outdoor Education Class that was taught by the same professor. Through these classes, I was able to be a part of many different Indigenous practices. I participated in bead looming, salve making, plant walks, storytelling, and creating pine needle baskets. There was rich knowledge packed into these classes as we discussed many tough topics such as individual experiences with the

60's Scoop (when the Canadian government took young Aboriginal children away from their parents and placed them in other homes or the foster system), the loss of culture, land and language in certain areas, the importance of the Truth and Reconciliation Act, and the struggles Aboriginal students face as a result of colonization and residential schools. We were also taught ways in which to adapt the classroom to help the Aboriginal and other students succeed such as providing an opportunity for oral assignments and outdoor education. The assignments centered on understanding the needs of Indigenous students and the difficulties they may experience. This type of participation made me feel less the outsider intruder that I had been experiencing before. These activities were a collaborative, fun, knowledge sharing, such as oral story telling, Aboriginal DancePl3y, and infusing Aboriginal content into the classroom, that helped everyone in the class connect to each other and to Aboriginal peoples.

I brought experiences like these into my practicum classroom, particularly through my climate change unit in science. In the unit we covered concepts like the effect climate change has on the salmon population and how this affects the Indigenous peoples living in the area, who rely on the salmon along with the importance of the salmon to the local Indigenous populations.

One important thing I took away from these courses for all students was the importance of creating a relationship with the students. Now this is not a new concept; however, what I was unfamiliar with was providing students with who they are. Giving them the opportunity to explore their own backgrounds and where they come from is important to understanding each other. This establishes an important relationship and

one of trust between the student and the educator. Relationality is a central part of Indigenous world views. Wilson (2008) comments:

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos; it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge . . . [hence] you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research. (p. 177)

As Wilson states, relationality goes beyond just interpersonal connections. Indigenous worldviews are about interconnectedness and the relationships that exist on Mother Earth. In my practicum I strove to connect with my students, have my students connect with each other and would have liked to go further into depth on developing that same connectedness to the Earth. The unit of Climate change I believe helped the students notice the Earth, but we did not connect to nature or animals enough to achieve the same type of relationship. Often in Eurocentric views, connecting to our environment and other living things is neglected. There is a heavy push for interpersonal relationships, but the world around us is often ignored. This is this type of worldview that I wish I had stressed more when talking about climate change with the grade 7 class in my long practicum. It would have helped connect them to the current issues surrounding climate change in a more meaningful and effective way.

Mental

The mental component was very important in this process. It was important for me to gain knowledge in order to be able to begin the process of recognizing my colonial ways of thinking, decolonize my mentality, and Indigenize my teaching. It is also about developing and acknowledging my own awareness and perspectives. I feel as though I

have completed this research by only scratching the surface of what I should be aware of culturally and as a white settler. I have but begun to look at one group of Aboriginal peoples. I have only started to acknowledge the injustices that were brought to this land. This process that I began through this research is just the beginning of a lifelong process that I must continue in a systematic and intentional manner. Many times, during practicum, I acknowledged that I would take the route of less resistance. I was guilty of this before in my education, and I was guilty of it during my practicum. For example, instead of looking for ways to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into my social studies unit, I accepted teaching Ancient Egypt in the traditional way that was taught before me. I had hit a busy time in the school year, and I was feeling overwhelmed and convinced myself that I did not need to do anything about it. Reflecting back after the program, looking at my journals, I am ashamed that I did not try harder to Indigenize that unit and other areas during my teaching. For example, I realize that I did not include much Secwepemc language into my classroom. When I began to teach a full load of teaching, I briefly introduced some language (months and numbers), however, it did not run through the full length of my practicum, and I am not sure how much my students took away from the experience. It was well received, but I feel that it lacked the authenticity it needed. If I had introduced more language concepts, perhaps my students would have been exposed to a more authentic Indigenization learning experience. Teaching is very busy and stressful, but it is important to constantly be looking for ways to improve subjects. As Shauneen stated “Indigenizing education is about re-centering Indigenous knowledge ways in the core of our institutional practices” (Pete, Schneider, & O’Reilly, p. 103). While it is easy to rely on old established ways, by doing this we are not fulfilling our

duty as educators or as citizens. Part of decolonizing and Indigenizing is to de-center the westernized styles of thinking. This way students can go through the educational system and not graduate with the ignorance I once did. I was upset that I was not able to teach the original social studies unit I had intended for my long practicum. I believe that a unit on racism and prejudices would have been far more relevant and impactful than looking at the New Canadian Food Guide. Part of the decolonization process is acknowledging and correcting the racisms that exist. This can be a difficult process and connects the emotional and mental realms of the medicine wheel as it comes with awareness as well as can be a very emotional subject. Which brings me to my next and last quadrant of the wheel.

Emotional

I experienced a range of emotions while completing this research. There were many emotional stories, which led to sadness and feelings of guilt. There were many moments in which I felt uncomfortable as well as times of frustration for my lack of knowledge. There were often high emotions, when guest speakers entered the classroom to discuss their experiences. For example, we had an Indigenous woman come into the Aboriginal Culture and Learning class to speak to us about how she was affected by what is commonly known as the 60's Scoop. Before that class, I was unaware of what the 60's Scoop was and how the Canadian government took millions of Aboriginal children from their families and placed them in Caucasian homes. Stories like this and of the effects of residential schools were shocking and very hard to digest. Especially when it happened on the very lands you are living on. There is guilt in acknowledging that piece in itself. The "perfect stranger" (Clarke, 2005, p.5) would argue that they did not steal these lands,

so it should not be their responsibility. It is easy to attempt to avoid the guilt by thinking in this manner. Part of the act of decolonizing oneself is acknowledging this guilt and confronting it. Reconciling these actions of the past to prevent further damage and acknowledging to whom these lands belong to are essential first steps towards reconciliation. It is easy to learn the true history of Canada; it is hard to acknowledge that you are a part of that system that is perpetuating the problem. With this comes many feelings of discomfort.

Relationships are also a huge part of the emotional dimension. Without the relationships I established, I would not have been able to make this journey. Indigenizing my teaching is about asserting the significance and application of Indigenous knowledge within the subjects I teach. Throughout this process both in decolonizing myself and creating an educational resource there have been many conversations and stories that have helped me through this process. They have been the foundation to the start this journey and to the continued journey of decolonizing myself and bringing Indigenous worldviews into my teaching. There were many points in this process when I did not have the answers or felt like I was overstepping cultural boundaries. My peers, when discussing my research with them, revealed that they also experienced these emotions. I believe it is a natural part of the decolonization process. To many of us it is new territory we are navigating. We are expected to know as new educators how to Indigenize education; therefore, it is import to forge relationships with those that can help navigate this important by sometimes overwhelming and confusing task in order to transform education.

Future Endeavours

It is not as hard to Indigenize the classroom when you set intentional goals; it is also just as easy to ignore it and go about one's career with minimal acknowledgement of this important responsibility. However, it is the moral responsibility of every educator to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in their classroom for the benefit of their students and of the Canadian society. Pete et al., puts it eloquently as to why this process is so important:

I have come to understand that these students have been structurally denied the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal people because of assumptions that their teachers made about what they as white students would need to know to be successful. I recognize that I must include Indigenous ways of knowing in my curriculum choices in order to correct the absence of these ways of knowing for my students. Without an awareness of and a competency in planning for their inclusion, my students will not be able to effectively incorporate Indigenous content in their own professional practice (Pete, Schneider, & O'Reilly, 2013, p. 105).

It is within my responsibilities as an educator to ensure my students do not grow up as ignorant as I did. There is no reason in which the students should not be learning the true history of Canada and about the peoples who reside here. Place-based learning is essential to connect community and school. Many grow up in the community and do not know whose land they are living on. The simple act of acknowledging where your learning is taking place and being thankful for being allowed to opportunity to learn and grow on such lands carries a huge importance to it as we are taking responsibility in acknowledging that we are settlers benefiting from these lands. The following quote by Giroux (2007) was one of the first things I stumbled across when beginning the process of researching this topic, and I felt it summed up the process appropriately; "Why are we calling this "indigenizing" when really we're just trying to do what's right? In other words, isn't teaching about Indigenous histories simply teaching a more complete history? Isn't making sure that we use examples that Indigenous students can relate to

just good teaching?” (Giroux, 2017, para. 15). It is just a part of being a good teacher, providing a well-rounded education for students to help them become aware and prosperous citizens of the world. In order to become the best educator, I can be, I must incorporate these worldviews into my teaching for the sake of my students' education. My journey does not end with this research paper. It will be a process that I will continue for the rest of my life as an educator and global citizen. I do not think it will ever be a process that I can fully complete as there will also be more to learn and more one can do. The important part is that teachers and students alike put forth their best understandings to continue to learn and grow.

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