

Indigenizing the Academy: Confronting “Contentious Ground”

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Abstract: I have spent 17 years in the academy, first as a student and now as an educator – almost two decades. Over the years, I have often reflected on my learning and teaching experiences, my interactions with professors and other students, and what has worked and not worked for me as a Saulteaux/Anishinabe, an Indigenous person, in this post-secondary world. Why Indigenize the academy? What does it mean to Indigenize the academy? How can the academy be Indigenized? This article is the result of my humble attempt to answer these questions.

I continue to be somewhat discouraged by the challenges and barriers that Indigenous students and faculty encounter in the academy, but I am encouraged by the call for systemic, epistemological and pedagogical change from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, by the research and literature on this topic, and by the engaging course, curriculum and program development that uses Indigenous knowledge as its foundation. From experience, from listening to and being in dialogue with Indigenous students and faculty, and by being immersed in emerging research and literature on this process, I have learned that ‘Indigenization’ requires leadership that is strong and enduring, courage and determination as those who pursue it may be on “contentious ground” (Alfred, 2004, p. 92) that requires intentional and strategic confrontation.

The landscape for Aboriginal students in post-secondary education

Aboriginal peoples of Canada, like society in general, are experiencing significant changes; these changes directly affect the dynamic and quality of relationships at every level. According to the 2006 Canadian Census, Aboriginal peoples made up approximately 3.8% of the Canadian population as approximately 1 172 790 million people identified themselves as either First Nations, Métis or Inuit. The Aboriginal population is increasing at twice the Canadian average, and is expected to increase by 56% between 1991 and 2016. In a more recent Statistics Canada statistic report, the Aboriginal population could become 4.1% of Canada’s population by 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2005).

In terms of post-secondary education, First Nations and Inuit enrolment rates have slowly increased between 1987-88 (15,572 funded students) and 1998-99 (over 27,157 funded students) (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), 2000); however, more recent statistics indicate student enrolment decline: in the 2002-03 academic year, 25,075 students were enrolled, then in 2008 approximately 23,000 students were funded on an annual basis (INAC). However, between 2001 and 2006, because of federal post-secondary under-funding, approximately 105,500 First Nations students who are eligible to attend post-secondary education were on waiting lists. Overall, it appears that the number of post-secondary students has been declining in recent years. The Auditor General of Canada’s 2004 Report indicates that approximately 27% of the First Nations population between 15 and 44 years of age hold a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree, compared with 46% of the Canadian population within the same age group (as cited in AFN, 2009). Furthermore, the Canadian Federation of Students (2012) report that “only 8 percent Aboriginal persons hold a university degree compared to 23% of the total population” (n.p.). As a result of statistics like these and the dramatic disparity in the quality of living between segments of the general population and the Aboriginal population, identification of barriers and initiatives to improve Aboriginal educational success, and consequently quality of living, have emerged.

Increasingly, based on research, organizations are examining the needs of Aboriginal students. Malatest (2002) identified the following post-secondary challenges for Aboriginal students:

- Lack of funding for specific First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) students
- Specific support services for key learner groups, particularly women (high numbers), men (low numbers) and mature learners (high numbers)
- Lack of Aboriginal instructors and staff
- Lack of diversification of subjects at the post-secondary level
- Lack of community support at the community level to address cultural and social barriers (cited in Alberta Advanced Education, Aboriginal Sub-Committee, 2006, p. 11)

In supporting Aboriginal students in post-secondary education, Malatest purports that “value-based viewpoints” of Aboriginal people need to be reflected. This approach goes beyond a recruitment and retention issues to identifying the individual (i.e. policy makers) and organizational values from which policies are made.

Again, based on research and (FNMI) consultation organizations are seeking and implementing solutions with the goal of positively impacting student achievement and overall well-being. In 2005, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) proposed the *First Nations Education Action Plan* that encouraged:

- “Education that embodies and support the strengthening of a First Nation’s identity through an emphasis on language, cultural and traditional knowledge, and the effective reincorporation of First Nation elders and women in educating younger generation” (p. 3).
- “First Nations have opportunities to design and develop appropriate institutions to deliver essential professional and administrative support to their schools and communities in areas such as curriculum development, specialized services [and] assessment” (p. 6).
- “Full involvement of First Nations people in the decision-making process as related to First Nations education” (p. 5).
- “Enhanced relationships ... between First Nations and provincial/territorial ministries, school boards, and schools to support First Nations participation in governance and to develop culturally appropriate programming, teacher recruitment and retention strategies and methods for tracking First Nations student progress and rates of success in the provincial/territorial systems” (p. 8).

Alberta Advanced Education Aboriginal Subcommittee report, *A Learning Alberta, Setting the Direction, Partnerships in Action: First Nations, Metis and Inuit Learning Access and Success* (2006), Alberta Learning’s *First Nations, Metis, Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2002), and Alberta’s Commission on Learning final report, *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds: Report and Recommendations* (2003), recommended similar policy actions and recommendations for governments, learning providers, communities, industry and the public in relation to post-secondary education of Aboriginal students. The Alberta Advanced Education Aboriginal Subcommittee report included recommendations from the *Minister’s 2005 Review and Forum of Alberta’s Advanced Learning System: “A Learning Alberta: Framing the Challenge”* that included the appointment, recruitment, and inclusion of Aboriginal peoples and leaders in advance education institutions. In addition, the following were proposed: With FNMI consultation, the development and adoption of a separate FNMI policy framework and implementation of resources to post-secondary learning; and, the building of leadership capacity of Aboriginal peoples ‘for’ and ‘in’ the post-secondary context (as cited in cited in Alberta Advanced Education, Aboriginal Sub-

Committee, 2006, p. 30). Finally, Alberta Advanced Education in the document, *A Learning Alberta: Final Report of the Steering Committee* encouraged the development of “a range of strategies to ensure teacher preparation” (p. 13) acknowledges and supports Aboriginal students.

A pragmatic and systematic process for post-secondary institutional change is outlined in the document *Aboriginal Post-secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan: 2020 Vision for the Future* (2013). This Framework was developed by a comprehensive working group that included British Columbia’s Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Partners, including the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, the Métis Nation BC, the First Nations Public Service, BC Colleges, BC Association of Universities and Institutes, and the Research Universities’ Council of British Columbia. The aim in developing the Framework was to positively impact the social, cultural and economic well-being of Aboriginal peoples, and the vision is that “Aboriginal learners succeed in an integrated, relevant, and effective British Columbia post-secondary education system that enhances their participation in the social, cultural and economic life of their communities, the province, and global society” (p. 13). In working towards this vision, “Culturally responsive programs, information and services developed in collaboration with Aboriginal communities and organizations” (p. 13) are encouraged and the following goals for post-secondary institutions are outlined:

Goal 1: Systemic change means that the public post-secondary education system is relevant, responsive, respectful, and respectful to Aboriginal learners and communities

Goal 2: Community-based delivery of programs is supported through partnerships between public post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal institutions and communities

Goal 3: Financial barriers to accessing and completing post-secondary education and training are reduced for Aboriginal learners

Goal 4: Aboriginal learners transition seamlessly from K-12 to post-secondary education

Goal 5: Continuous improvement is based on research, data-tracking, and sharing of leading practices (p. 3)

To aid the implementation of this process, the goals are then broken down to objectives, actions, and short-term results from which success can be measured.

With substantive research and literature support, the message of securing authentic and meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in the decision-making process and in organizational development is clear, and that gaining Aboriginal representation and perspective is conducive to Aboriginal student and faculty efficacy and success. Another message that is clear is that Aboriginal peoples want systemic, second-order change, the kind of change that is suggested in decolonized and indigenized education.

Much of the research on Aboriginal post-secondary student experience not only identifies the systemic issues that many Aboriginal students encounter in post-secondary institutions, but the recommendations that are provided overtly or covertly describe a radical, fundamental, paradigm shift in the organizational landscape. It is apparent that educational organizations have to ask some difficult questions when

considering the authentic and meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal peoples. Frawley, Nolan, and White elaborate:

Given the statistical evidence, it would be hard to deny that there has been significant growth in the participation of Indigenous students over the past two decades. However, we must constantly ask whether the learning journeys of those students have been quality experiences undertaken in culturally supportive learning environments, and whether Indigenous students and staff today truly feel part of the academy. For many Indigenous people, universities have remained ‘white man’s institutions’, places where of necessity they have engaged in learning that has given them a qualification that is recognised in the outside world but has done little to enhance their value as Indigenous people. University curricula, governance and leadership have traditionally been attuned to the dominant Western paradigm with no acknowledged place for Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous pedagogy and Indigenous forms of governance and leadership. (2009, p. 1)

How can universities become inclusive of “Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous pedagogy and Indigenous forms of governance and leadership” for the purpose of positively affecting not only the experiences of Aboriginal student and faculty but the whole learning community?

The inclusion of Indigenous students and faculty in postsecondary institutions has occurred in degrees and the hope is this change will also fundamentally influence value systems – from isolated programming to more encompassing structural and affective change initiatives. In any event, it appears that the recruiting and supporting Indigenous students is complex and has been laden with barriers that stem from tradition, bureaucracy, and an unwillingness or incapability to embrace diversity and change. Michel Foucault stated, ‘There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge’ (1977, p. 27). Leadership within educational institutions lead with an established ‘field of knowledge’ that is evident in every aspect of the organisation. Consequently, for significant change to happen throughout an organisation, the values and belief systems that define the organisational culture must be identified and examined then either affirmed or challenged (Ottmann & White, 2010).

Decolonizing education, Indigenizing the academy

As we reflect upon what it means to “Indigenize the academy”, we are beginning from the presumption that the academy is worth Indigenizing because something productive will happen as a consequence. Perhaps as teachers we can facilitate ... “education as a practice of freedom”. Perhaps we might engage in an educational dynamic with students that is liberatory, not only for the oppressed but also for the oppressors. Perhaps as scholars we can conduct research that has a beneficial impact on humanity in general, as well as on our Indigenous peoples. Perhaps the scholarship we produce might be influential not only among our ivory tower peers, but also within the dominant society. Perhaps our activism and persistence within the academy might also redefine the institution from an agent of colonialism to a center of decolonization. Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice believes that Indigenizing the academy means “to make the academy both responsive and responsible to First Nations goals of self-determination and wellbeing”. Taiaiake Alfred states that “the university is a contentious ground,” and that should make Native

scholars seriously consider “their view on the role they are playing and on the battles they are fighting. (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004, p. 5)

As this quote posits, if an educational institution is considering Indigenization, it must first ask whether the challenge is worth the arduous journey. As this journey may involve questioning then perhaps challenging an established ‘mindset’ – basic assumptions, values and belief systems – of an organization; a necessary process if transformation of this magnitude is to occur. In essence this can be described as the opening of a closed system – a system that has been entrenched in longstanding traditions, and one that has experienced very little structural change – or, more dramatically, a metamorphosis. This whole change process needs leadership that is strong, courageous, rebellious, visionary, and leadership that can communicate hope and the individual and collective strength that lies beyond the battle.

Indigenizing the academy begins with asking pertinent, perplexing, and relevant questions, and it is very important to ask the right questions. McConaghy (2000, p. 1) wrote, “Indigenous education in Australia is both a social institution of colonial governance and an academic discipline. At both these sites, competing traditions of knowing Indigenous education are vying for legitimacy”. She goes on to query, “How is it that certain claims to knowledge are able to secure epistemic authority in particular times, in particular ways and for particular purposes? What are the processes by which old knowledge-claims are rejected and new gain legitimacy? How do elements of the old persist in the new? Importantly, how is it that certain colonial formations have remained resilient within Indigenous education” (p. 1). These are difficult questions. They question the power dynamic within an institution – who holds it, why, and should it still be? McConaghy later posits, “Rowse is correct to suggest that issues of representation and authority are much more complex than can be solved by a simple reference to more Indigenous voice and more Indigenous control” (p. 259). If the academy is to move past these issues, the question asked could be: How is Indigenous thought – philosophy, ontology, and epistemology – informing our policy and curriculum and how is it guiding our actions?

A critical question that needs to be asked is: what does indigenizing the academy mean? Taiaiake Alfred (2004, p. 88) wrote:

To me, it means that we are working to change universities so that they become places where the values, principles, and modes of organization and behaviour of our people are respected in, and hopefully even integrated into, the larger system of structures and processes that make up the university itself. In pursuing this objective, whether as students attempting to integrate traditional views and bring authentic community voices to our work, or as faculty members attempting to abide by a traditional ethic in the conduct of our relations in fulfilling our professional responsibilities, we as Indigenous people immediately come into confrontation with the fact that universities are intolerant of and resistant to any meaningful “Indigenizing.”

Alfred contends that in the process of Indigenization, colonialism needs to be understood then ‘defeated’ which he states contributes to the “denial of our freedom to be Indigenous in a meaningful way, and the unjust occupation of the physical, social, and political spaces that we need in order to survive as Indigenous peoples” (p. 89).

Clark (2004, p. 218) describes the concept of Indigenizing the academy:

When comprehended as a dynamic course of action, to think about indigenizing the academy is to imagine the academy as a location from which Indigenous Peoples appropriate research, writing, and other non- (and sometimes anti-) Indigenous educational resources to seek justice for past and enduring crimes, to combat unyielding colonization, to safeguard treaty rights, and to advance general well-being among Indigenous communities. In order to bring about the necessary and radical sorts of transformations encoded in the phrase “indigenizing the academy”...Indigenous academics and our non-Indigenous allies labor to reconfigure both the colonial structure of the academy and the colonizing frames of mind affecting our consciousness. The argument emerging here is that the authority for Indigenous studies must be located prominently among Indigenous institutions and rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

This radical and systematic change process will inevitably lead to the disciplining of the disciplines “and to subject Indigenous studies to the concrete needs of Indigenous Peoples” (p. 219).

In his review of literature on this topic, Clark discovered the following three areas of concern: 1. “To decolonize what currently is widely accepted as knowledge about “Indians” is crucial” (p. 219); 2. “The need to theorize, conceptualize, and represent Indigenous sovereignty so that [Indigenous] people may live well into the foreseeable future; 3. The necessity “of producing Indigenous knowledges *for* Indigenous Peoples rather than primarily as subjects for non-Indigenous curiosity” (p. 219). Clark further comments, “To indigenize the academy probably means that we must not only expect but demand a radical redistribution of social and educational resources in the direction of Indigenous students and the needs of Indigenous communities” (p. 222). He explains that Indigenization in this sense includes “decolonizing methodologies, theorizing sovereignty, and producing knowledge,” and consideration of “reallocations of intellectual resources ranging from who is admitted into and advances in (and through) graduate programs, what gets published and rewarded, and who colleges and universities hire and promote” (p. 223). Clark’s vision of an Indigenized academy is one that “nourishes and promotes communities of Indigenous scholars and our non-Indigenous allies,” (p. 223). The redistribution and reallocation of resources leads post-secondary institutions to question and evaluate what they value, since ‘we resource what we value’, and to learn where Indigenous peoples (and all they encompass) stand.

If a shift in resources (and in some cases this may be significant) is required to begin and sustain change of this kind, what does Indigenizing the academy come down to? Clark believes that “Indigenizing the academy is not only, or perhaps even primarily, the rather simple (but difficult) matter of exchanging ideas. Visualizing an indigenized academy is not utopist, the stuff of unrealistic dreaming; rather, visualizing an indigenized academy free of institutional anti-Indianisms most likely is a matter of no-nonsense, matter-of-fact politics” (p. 223). And, politics is fundamentally about power, this including the struggle that determines who will have the privilege of commanding it for a period of time.

Why would it be important to Indigenize the academy? Perhaps, “The academy, if indigenized, might offer important resources for restoring well-being to our nations” (Clark, 2004, p. 230). Perhaps, Indigenizing the academy would help strengthen not only our institutions but Canadian society as well. Kuokkanen (2003) supports this notion: “while knowledge is much needed and a prerequisite for any human relationship, it is inadequate to change deep-seated hostility and fundamental attitudes, many of which are clearly prejudiced” (p. 270) and public education may be used “as a means to eradicate such attitudes as well as to ‘move beyond policies that are the failed relics of colonialism’ – something that,

according to [Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples report], would benefit all Canadians” (p. 271). Furthermore, Simpson (2011) contends, "Canada must engage in a decolonization project and a re-education project that would enable its government and its citizens to engage with Indigenous peoples in a just and honourable way in the future," (as cited in Scully, 2012, p. 155). Scully posits that gaining knowledge and establishing relationships with Indigenous people contributes to decolonization, reinhabitation, and reconciliation. Indigenizing the academy is an effort to deepen understanding and relationships that lead to reconciliation. It means working together to remove the barriers that lead to oppression and impede genuine and meaningful interaction at an individual and collective level.

Indigenous Knowledge

An Indigenized academy understands the value of Indigenous knowledges and the richness and depth that these perspectives can bring into the constitution of the organization. “Indigenous knowledges are a means to empower diverse bodies that make up the academy. They are a means to open up possibilities for those who come after us, to centre their own concerns” (Kuokkanen, 2003, p. 234). Kuokkanen (pp. 281-282) believes that the weaving of Indigenous philosophies into the cultural fabric of an organization has many benefits:

The “original practical ecological philosophies of the world”-- Indigenous epistemes and philosophies – can not only teach us how to learn, but they also function as a powerful mobilizing discourse for the entire world, not only Indigenous peoples. Perhaps this is what Luther Standing Bear had in mind over a hundred years ago: that "white people" learning about Indigenous philosophies and epistemes would not only benefit Indigenous peoples (in that they would be understood better)...Drawing on ancient notions of hospitality of nomadic peoples, Parker Palmer suggests that “[g]ood teaching is an act of hospitality,” (1998, 50).

The concept of hospitality is key in this statement. When ideas and people come together, Kuokkanen stresses that the gathering, the meeting, the act of hospitality “cannot ever be a one-way street” (p. 282), and that there is responsibility for every person involved in the interaction and exchange to act with respect, integrity, and openness. “It has also been suggested that universities are the most appropriate places to develop mutual respect and "an understanding and appreciation of 'the other'" (Axtell 1998, 72)” (Kuokkanen, p. 283). Kuokkanen believes that Indigenous people have a very important role in this process because they hold, have access to, and are bringing Indigenous knowledge and practice to established institutions – they are essentially presenting a gift:

[I]t is the role of Indigenous people to assist others to pay more attention and become more familiar with ideas, premises, and concepts characterizing Indigenous thought. This does not need to imply a merging of the different epistemes, as some scholars have suggested, but rather becoming more aware of each other and reciprocating with one another in the spirit of openness, not only of limited give-and-take (that is, restricted reciprocity).(n16) Thus the role of Indigenous people would be, among other things, to guide others in listening, in learning to listen, and in becoming a guest instead of automatically assuming the role of the host (or a host-guest) (Kuokkanen, 2003, p. 282).

Kuokkanen encourages the honouring of Indigenous and of all people, and the maintenance and valuing of identity in the midst of intellectual union.

Decolonization

Because Indigenizing the academy involves understanding all that colonialism encompasses and being conscious of the long-lasting and systemic impacts of colonialism, Indigenization involves the process of decolonization – a moving away from practices that violate at the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual levels. Wilson (2007) believes, “Decolonization is about changing lives and, in connection with research, conducting studies in different ways that directly benefit Indigenous peoples, instead of once again subjecting them to a research project that has “extract[ed] and claim[ed] ownership” of Indigenous ways of knowing only to “reject the people” responsible for those ways of knowing,” (p. 117). Decolonization also needs to begin in the classroom, with teachers.

Teachers, instructors, and professors have tremendous influence in the classroom and, over time, they have the potential to impact the thought processes, values, and belief systems of a great number of students. Consequently, they have the opportunity to act as decolonization change agents in our educational institutions. Wilson (2007) posits, “[Educators] are charged with the job to “transmit, critique and interpret” knowledge deemed important for a society’s members to know. In this respect, the teacher can be seen as an “intellectual” or cultural worker” (p. 115). Because teachers have this capacity, this power, at an individual, organization and societal level, their interpretations and perceptions of the past and current landscape matter as these interpretations and perceptions determine the quality of relationships and help to determine our future.

Teachers, Instructors, and Professors

Decolonization of teaching practices begins with educators asking: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? What are my responsibilities? These ‘identity’ existential questions begin a ‘mining activity’ and a deeply introspective journey for the teacher. They help the teacher learn his or her story, and it is through in-depth understanding of this process that a teacher can meaningfully and passionately transfer learning to his or her student(s). It is important to support and implement teacher personal and professional learning of this kind since organizational change begins with individuals; and, ultimately individually or as a whole, teachers, instructors, and professors will either further the cause of decolonization and Indigenization of the academy or impede it. In a larger context, whole learning communities can engage in this process as a collective and they can ask: As an organization, who are we, where did we come from, where are we going, and what are our responsibilities?

What does decolonization of teaching encompass? Wilson (2007) explains, “A decolonizing education for white teachers involves “bringing forward” the storied history presently subsumed within their teaching but in relation to post-colonial or counter-stories for the purpose of provoking a different story that can open and shift their horizon” (p. 119). Wilson (2007) notes the importance of story in this process:

Teachers need opportunities to reclaim their own stories or “landscapes” so as to recognize their “standpoints.” However, reclamation becomes a truncated process of reification if touchstones are not recognized as formative, are allowed to re-subside into the unconscious, and fail to be counterpoised with stories that challenge them with an alternative perspective. Within a decolonizing education for white teachers, “counter-stories” fulfill this role while a “story of confrontation” represents a teacher’s decolonizing of his or her storied history (p. 122).

The counter-story is an essential part of this approach. It is the counter-story that opens the door for new learning and growth, for seeing time (the past, present, and future) through a new lens or a much clearer lens, for grasping a multi-dimensional concept of perspectives, for developing empathy. Wilson (2007) elaborates, "A counter-story is not simply an alternative version of a story; it is a story told from the point of view of the colonized, and thus "post-colonial" in the sense that Ashcroft et al. intended, but with "colonized" understood, as Smith clarified, as speaking from a privileged position" (p. 124). The challenge in this approach is that "Teaching ... has to deal not so much with *lack* of knowledge as with *resistances* to knowledge" (Wilson, p. 124). This is a dramatic epistemological and pedagogical change, and for this reason decolonization of knowledge requires much thought and care in its implementation.

Exercises like the counter-story begin a journey – self-discovery, which then may open the door to learning about others (knowing self, knowing others), which may lead to transformation of being and doing for the individual and institutional, resulting in authentic relationships, then the addressing of injustices:

A central, indispensable part of responsibility in this context is to accept and be guided by the fact that as "knowing other peoples and cultures" is about increasing knowledge and understanding or changing attitudes, it is also equally about addressing systemic power inequalities and hegemony in the academy as well as in larger society that prevent hospitality between Indigenous and dominant Western epistemes. Put another way, the academy can and must start doing its homework by rethinking its relationship as well as epistemological and ontological assumptions, structures, and prejudices toward Indigenous peoples and their epistemes. The challenge to the academic imagination is to rethink Indigenous peoples and, consequently, the gift of their epistemes "not only as repositories of cultural nostalgia but also as part of the geopolitical present" (Spivak 1999, 402). (Kuokkanen, 2003, p. 285).

In reviewing literature on Indigenizing the academy, certain themes emerge. Indigenization involves reflection which may lead to first- and second-order individual and collective change, and it promotes reciprocity on many levels and quality relationships.

Embedding Change

Creativity, innovation, and sensitivity are needed when creating policy, models, program, curriculum, and courses that promote Indigenization. Indigenous peoples (scholars, teachers, leaders, elders, etc.) are a critical in this process. Increasingly there are exemplar practices of decolonized education in the academy. Kuokkanen (2003) discourages the traditional special or "area studies" that places the learning of Indigenous content in the margins, but rather "the transformation of academic institutions requires a permeation and subversion of the existing structures rather than a creation of parallel structures; a conceptual rather than merely content-based inclusion of non-Western intellectual traditions" (Kuokkanen, p. 274). This approach requires the support and 'buy-in' of the entire educational community.

Place-based education is supported as an educational practice that supports decolonization because it brings awareness and promotes critical dialogue about the impact of colonization and the relationships within humanity – with time, each other, creation, the cosmos, and the Creator. This deeply reflective and engaging process is best described in the Indigenous philosophy of 'All my Relations' which encapsulates

the inextricable interconnection of 'all things'. Greenwood comments that "place consciousness provides a frame of reference from which one can identify, and potentially resist, the colonizing practices of schooling as a function of the larger culture and its political economy" (2009, p. 1). "Place-conscious education, however, can potentially challenge learners to consider where they are, how they got there, and to examine the tensions between different cultural groups' inhabitation across time," (Greenwood, 2009, p. 4). According to Greenwood, place-based education should include, but not be limited to: "a) acknowledging and listening to Indigenous people and their stories of connection to land and place; b) learning how colonization and settlement impacted and impacts Indigenous people and cultures; c) tracking the living link between colonization and today's economic globalization, ..." (p. 3). Decolonization, reinhabitation, reconciliation, and healing are the goals of place-based education (Scully, 2012). Scully writes, "Place-based education is a powerful and strategic pedagogical practice that can promote greater cross-cultural understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, move further towards social and ecological justice, and act as a site of resurgence for Indigenous sovereignty and epistemologies" (p. 156). In every case, as it is with place-based education, teaching, and learning should be intentional if it is to generate and inspire meaning.

Indigenous philosophy can provide the epistemological and pedagogical foundation, the anchor, in a decolonized approach to education. Dumbrell and Green (2008) have utilized the philosophy embedded within the Medicine Wheel to guide learning in this realm:

East: Engage in Critical Historical Analysis

Here we must understand the past: who has been included and excluded from the space we occupy, who is defined as Other, and who has the power to so define. This entails understanding the process of colonization discussed earlier and including Other knowledges, and building a multi-centric academy... "the goal of inclusive schooling is not to displace Eurocentrism, but to de-centre it and make room for other marginalized knowledges that should be equally validated and taken up in schools as legitimate ways of knowing" (Dei et al., 2002, p.27). (p. 498).

South: Explore Difference and Other Knowledge

Here we need to have 'courageous conversations' that address the responsibility of White people to restore that which has been taken away by their colonizing processes. Here the academy must learn ways to include and explore Other knowledges in a respectful and honourable manner. This state requires moving beyond a critique of Eurocentrism and addressing restoration (p. 499).

West: Make Space for Other Knowledge and Establish Academic Standards

Moving west we put ideas into action, establish academic standards for the new learning, and implement programs... The action needed is radical; those from the dominant location need to move over and make space for Other ways of knowing. Making space includes inviting expert members of Other groups to teach in the academy. By 'expert' we mean expertise as defined by those groups themselves, not as defined by the academy. This means having people teach even if they do not have a doctoral degrees... this standard does not signal the ability to understand or teach Indigenous knowledge nor does it signify the ability to evaluate student's learning in this

area... we suggest that a PhD is not the only criteria within academia that should count towards who is recognized as a Professor with knowledge that has value (p. 500).

North: Evaluation and Revision

...we evaluate our progress and re-establish the vision needed to continue our journey. Here we celebrate success, learn from mistakes, and prepare for another new beginning and the journey ahead (p. 501).

“[A] shift in academic thinking and restructuring of post-secondary educational institutions” is suggested by Dumbrill and Green (2008) in order to experience the transformational effect of implementing an Indigenous model such as this.

Decolonizing Classrooms

As mentioned educators are cultural brokers that negotiate “the interests of their people through the content they teach, their teaching methods, and the ways in which they balance between divergent goals such as cultural reclamation and economic advancement (Stairs, 1995)” (Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau, & Hodson, 2009, p. 358). Educators can use the following guidelines to evaluate how well they bridge or “broker” Aboriginal and Western epistemologies:

- Material Culture refers to the content of courses;
- Social Culture refers to the relationship between classroom interactions and the interactions and relationships that take place within the Aboriginal community;
- Cognitive Culture refers to the differences in worldviews, value systems, spiritual understandings, and practical knowledge between Aboriginal and Western societies;
- Linguistic Culture extends beyond language to the role of language in the community, such as the ways in which language is used (mainly orally in Aboriginal communities) and how it is used to maintain culture across generations (Leavitt, 1995 as cited in Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau, & Hodson, 2009, pp.358-359).

The authors explain, “This four-part conception of culture is useful as it marks a shift from a narrow cultural inclusion approach, focused on content, to a cultural base conceptualization that incorporates all aspects of culture into the education of Aboriginal peoples” (p. 359). It is important to utilize each cultural category to varying degrees, depending on the objective of the lesson, course, or program.

Much thought has to be put into the development and content of courses about Indigenous peoples (their history, current realities, philosophies, practices, and traditions). St. Clair and Kishimoto (2010) warn that courses that are identified as diverse and multicultural may not confront “the challenging issues including White privilege, institutional racism, social position, and oppression. This model of multiculturalism also puts forward the common stance of colourblindness as a response to racism that we continue to struggle against,” (p. 18). St. Clair and Kishimoto promote racial issues courses that focus on the following:

- *Understanding*: A course must examine the historically and socially constructed concepts and meanings of race, racism, ethnicity, and oppression.

- *Education*: A course must explore the patterns of racial oppression, racial domination, and hate crimes; the impact of racial classification; as well as the heritage, culture, and contributions of under-represented and oppressed people of color.
- *Awareness*: A course must raise consciousness of the daily and institutional realities of racial discrimination, as well as racial privileges experienced by different racial groups. In addition, a course must explore how members of racially oppressed groups maintain a sense of identity in the face of persistent and systemic racial oppression.
- *Student Growth*: A course must provide a significant arena for critical dialogue and self-reflection on the role of racial power relations in students' lives (p. 19).

With this approach, it is important for educators to develop “critical analytical skills needed to deconstruct how racism may be invisible yet is still prevalent in our societal systems, including our educational institutions,” (p. 20). These courses are designed (i.e. contents and delivery) to encourage students to learn more than facts, but have them critically think of the issues, barriers and the circumstances that have led to current realities. Rather than just dwelling on the issues, it is important to have students develop solutions to the challenges that are uncovered.

Decolonized learning moves from an “emphasis on cultural diversity” that “too often descends, in a multicultural spiral, to a superficial reading of differences that makes power relations invisible and keeps dominant cultural norms in place” (Razack, 1998 as cited in Kuokkanen, 2003, p. 278). Decolonized education that supports the indigenization of the academy “is not so much about new information as it is about disrupting the hegemonic ways of seeing through which subjects make themselves dominant,” (1998, 10). One way of doing this is to acknowledge Indigenous people in our universities on every level. Kuokkanen posits, “[T]here is need for the institutional legitimization and respect for Indigenous knowledge (Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991, p. 8). Achieving this state of respect remains impossible as long as there is not adequate knowledge and information about Indigenous communities and knowledge,” (2003, p. 279).

Why decolonize learning in our learning institutions? Because it has the potential to strengthen relationships, our learning organizations, and therefore society. Because it communicates to Indigenous students that they, and their ancestors, are valued. Because it can help improve the academic and overall well-being of not only Indigenous but non-Indigenous students as well. Kuokkanen (2003) quotes a non-Indigenous faculty member:

In my experience, when Indigenous perspectives are genuinely included in the curriculum and the classroom, the epistemic and pedagogical changes involved are huge. I believe that is why so many otherwise forward-looking faculty resist it or don't manage to "get around" to it--because of implicit recognition that their epistemic and pedagogical power will be eroded (pp. 271-272).

As one can see, it is difficult for the academy to experience such change; leaders and educators within the organization have to be open to the letting go of espoused practices and positions of power to make way for new possibilities. This transformational metamorphic process requires humility and trust.

Transformational praxis, from knowledge to practice: an experience

Collaborative research and partnerships bring 'like-minded' people together, people who can motivate and affect change through the innovative and compelling work they produce. I have had the privilege of participating in research and being included in partnerships, in synergistic unions that has produced inspiring and affirming work. The following is a short description of research that has changed the way I engage in research, how I perceive and how I exist in the academy. A more detailed account can be found the special edition of Ngoojook (2010), a journal devoted to stories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars whose goal is to Indigenize the academy.

Globally, Indigenous people continue to feel the effects of colonization (i.e. increased poverty, marginalization, abuse in many forms, and educational challenges). Because colonization was executed in uniform methods on an international level, similarities in the Indigenous experience exist and for this reason these similarities, which go beyond the sharing of tragic colonial experience to collective threads of philosophical perspectives, bring Indigenous people together in discourse and relationship (Ottmann, 2010). The *Institutional Leadership Paradigm: Transforming practices, structures and conditions in Indigenous Higher Education (ILP)* participatory action research project was one such vehicle of union, and through international, collaborative research efforts such as the ILP Project, meaningful findings and conclusions could be reached and positive change can occur; change that not only benefits Aboriginal students, but all of society. This research encouraged the partner-participants to seek in-depth understanding of the 'field of knowledge' that relates to the culture, the structures, and the conditions of their organizations, and to become change agents as they worked at broadening the perspectives on knowledge within their higher education institutions in meaningful, manageable and measurable ways (Ottmann & White, 2010).

The international and institutional Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participation and partnership for this research project were impressive and significant. There were five Australian and three international institutions represented. Altogether, fourteen people were directly involved as co-researchers, this not including the associates, in making this study a reality.

The primary research question was: What institutional leadership practices, structures, and conditions lead to change and improvement in teaching and learning for Indigenous students? The project aims for the project team and partner-participants were twofold: to strengthen institutional leadership capacity to develop and deliver culturally appropriate and relevant teaching and learning programs for Indigenous students within the participant institutes; and, to encourage academics, students, and administrators to change and transform institutional leadership practices, structures, and conditions so they can more effectively advance excellence in teaching and learning for Indigenous students, generate new knowledge, and serve the community. In essence, the goal was to work towards more inclusivity by ensuring that there is meaningful and relevant support for Indigenous students and faculty so they can experience greater success. As the project progressed, the research participants in this project found support and resources for shaking the foundations of the academy in positive ways as they attempted to decolonize and *Indigenize* it, for the benefit of all students (Ottmann & White, 2010).

Building a transformative process involves a series of stages; identifying shared philosophy and values; establishing conditions; planning for change; implementing the change process; and, assessing and evaluating change. These stages were replicated in the ILP Project, in a broad sense. The activities that took place within participant institutions were informed by the values identified collectively by the participants as essential in supporting Indigenous participation in higher education. Influential leadership (Duignan, 2006) at an institutional level requires organisations to model leadership by living their values. The ILP values statement (below) can assist any Higher Education institution serving Indigenous students and staff to achieve change. It does this by enabling others to access the set of values (the ILP) this project delineated as central for transforming practices, structures, and conditions. It can be a starting point for other educational institutions in negotiating their own sets of values. Care was taken to ensure that the project processes by which these values were established mirrored those being promoted through the ILP and proved to be a powerful tool for use by participants within their own institutions.

This experienced and knowledgeable group identified these values as critical in establishing and sustaining institutional leadership for Indigenous outcomes and for organisational change. They include:

- *openness*, through a demonstrated belief that Indigenous education is everybody's business, not just Indigenous student services,
- *enduring leadership*, through a long-term commitment to an Indigenous employment strategy,
- *transformation*, by extending the learning of the individual into their respective communities,
- *cultural integrity*, through approaches to learning and teaching imbued with Indigenous traditions,
- *empowerment*, including and involving the students' families, as well as the students themselves,
- *partnerships*, bringing communities into the university,
- *inclusion*, providing higher education in communities.

(ILP Working Group, December, 2007)

The action planning process (as outlined in the special journal, Ngoonjook, 2010) was also a useful strategy for coordinating the activities of the diverse group of people within different institutions undertaking different action plans. The action planning approach draws on standard action planning cycles familiar in action research. Project participants were asked to plan activities using a uniform format which was designed to support them in thinking through of their local actions to foster change within their institutions. This action plan proved beneficial in helping the participants achieve their goals.

It was recognised early in the study that Indigenous faculty must *straddle two worlds* and, therefore, carry the responsibility of both worlds – their Indigenous world and the world of the academy. As a result, their roles were often more complex and hectic than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The Indigenous community expectations that First Nations/ Indigenous academics have because of their expertise and professional experience often are numerous, and these responsibilities, cultural or otherwise, must be balanced against and, in many cases, may need to supersede faculty commitments. For this reason, it is often difficult for Indigenous faculty to seriously consider and act on change initiatives, or even to engage in battle for a just cause.

In being part of the collaborative ILP research project, I have benefited in many ways. First, I have learned what other institutions have done to encourage and support Indigenous students and faculty, and I also learned about the transforming practices, structures and conditions in Indigenous higher education that have made a positive difference for Indigenous students and faculty. In addition, I have learned that systematic change initiatives require collaborative partnerships based on relationships that are respectful

and authentic; and, that change at a deep level requires time, commitment and leadership that is transformational and ‘enduring’. Leadership that is enduring requires a person to be persistent, prepared for challenges, and committed to the ‘long haul’.

The ILP project also had me considering the institutional change from a “decolonized” and “indigenized” perspective – a much deeper and perhaps more contentious investigation of change and transformation. The Institutional Leadership Paradigm action research project was a movement towards what Taiiaki Alfred (2004, p. 92) describes as Indigenising the *contentious ground* of the academy. The relational and intellectual support (i.e. ideas, practices, programs, encouragement) that the ILP project team and participants gained from each other throughout the three years provided the solidarity and strength to pursue and initiate institutional change based on the idea that *the academy is worth Indigenising* from its inception (e.g. BIITE), from the inside out (e.g. ACU), or from the borderlands (e.g. University of Victoria) and that change on these levels is beneficial for all of humanity.

A number of concluding themes emerged from the analysis of institutional change processes and activities. For example, there remains a continuing need for change in universities to enable Indigenous staff and students to thrive. What is currently happening in universities is not consistent with Indigenous values. When Indigenous academics and students step into some of these organisations they have an intuitive feeling that something is not right and needs to change. More often than not, rather than endure and embrace the culture of the institution, a lot of Indigenous people, staff, and students, tend to opt out and this should not be allowed to continue. Strategic support for both Indigenous students and faculty members is required. Barriers to their engagement need to be identified and they need to be addressed. Indigenous peoples are very community-oriented. They call for conditions where their involvement and support can occur within university structures at all levels. Indigenous people expect to engage in education within a culturally safe working place that gives them the opportunity to share their knowledge. When this does not happen, it is the institution that misses out on the valuable cultural knowledge and practices that could strengthen it. In the long run, a critical mass of Indigenous people within the institution may be needed to create sustainable and deep seated change – change that not only supports Indigenous students and faculty, but that strengthens the overall fabric of the institution.

Conclusion

Being a warrior of the truth is not, however, about mediating between worldviews as much as challenging the dominant colonial discourse. It is about raising awareness of Indigenous histories and place-based existences as part of a continuing struggle against shape-shifting colonial powers (Corntassel, 2013, n.p.).

Because of the intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual challenges that can be experienced in the complex and ‘cultivating’ process of Indigenizing the academy, and because it may entail “discomforting moments of Indigenous truth-telling that challenge the colonial status quo” (Corntassel, n.p.) a warrior mentality and “warrior scholarship” (Alfred, 2004) is essential. The primary goal for people who engage in Indigenizing the academy is change – sustainable change that leads to stronger, healthier individuals, to inclusive communities, to the public acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples (their histories, philosophies, traditions, and practices), and ultimately to a respectful invitation to participate in their rightful place at every table.

This article has provided information on First Nations, Metis, and Inuit student and faculty experience in the post-secondary context – the academy. As was described, Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments and communities are insisting that change occur within our learning institutions because of the on-going dismal (albeit slowly improving) Aboriginal post-secondary student achievement statistics and overall negative experiences that contribute to Indigenous people opting out of the academy. As was argued throughout this paper, Indigenizing the academy, which includes embedding decolonizing practices throughout the organization, is a responsive and hopeful response to this challenge. Increasingly, educators within the academy can draw from exemplary teaching and learning strategies, course, curriculum, program development, and from literature and research that supports this change process. Overall, this transformational, monumental but momentous, metamorphic shift cannot be done by individuals working alone, but by ‘like-minded’ people, people driven by a cause, who may need to think (intently focused on a vision,) and act as courageous warriors (strong, confident, disciplined) , and as mavericks (risk-taker, innovator, bold).

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