

# UNLEARNING COLONIAL IDENTITIES WHILE ENGAGING IN RELATIONALITY: SETTLER TEACHERS' EDUCATION-AS-RECONCILIATION

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## Résumé de l'article

Bien avant que des appels à l'action soient formulés dans le cadre de la CVR, nous avons débuté une collaboration en tant que partenaires pédagogiques, une enseignante d'origine anichinabée et l'autre, « blanche colonisatrice ». Nous avons effectué des recherches et enseigné la réconciliation comme pratique enseignante à cinq cohortes de futurs enseignants « colonisateurs ». En s'intéressant aux théories portant sur le colonialisme, sur la décolonisation et à des études autochtones, nous présentons les obstacles et les défis relatifs à la formation d'enseignants « colonisateurs », tels que les legs hérités du colonialisme dans le milieu scolaire, les préjugés culturels et le racisme systémique dans les programmes ainsi que l'ignorance permanente comme droit des enseignants. De plus, nous nous attardons aux difficultés en lien avec les méthodes utilisées pour créer des relations respectueuses avec les communautés et étudiants autochtones. Finalement, nous abordons nos espoirs d'aider les nouveaux enseignants à s'engager à supporter les enfants et les jeunes d'origine autochtone au sein de leur pratique professionnelle.

# UNLEARNING COLONIAL IDENTITIES WHILE ENGAGING IN RELATIONALITY: SETTLER TEACHERS' EDUCATION-AS-RECONCILIATION

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**ABSTRACT.** Before the TRC's Calls to Action, we were a collaborative teacher-education partnership of Anishinaabekwe and White settler researching and teaching reconciliation as pedagogical practice with five cohorts of settler teacher-candidates. Engaging theories of settler-colonialism, decolonization and Indigenous studies, we outline the obstacles and struggles in settler teacher education, such as exposing the legacies of colonialism in education, cultural harms and systemic racism in curriculum, and ongoing ignorance as entitlement by teachers. In addition, we focus on the complexities of methods for improving respectful relationality with Indigenous students and community as well as our hopes in helping new teachers commit their professional practice to focus on supporting Indigenous children and youth.

**DÉSAPPRENDRE LES IDENTITÉS COLONIALES EN S'ENGAGEANT DANS UNE RELATION : LA FORMATION DES FUTURS ENSEIGNANTS « COLONISATEURS » COMME MODE DE RÉCONCILIATION**

**RÉSUMÉ.** Bien avant que des appels à l'action soient formulés dans le cadre de la CVR, nous avons débuté une collaboration en tant que partenaires pédagogiques, une enseignante d'origine anichinabée et l'autre, « blanche colonisatrice ». Nous avons effectué des recherches et enseigné la réconciliation comme pratique enseignante à cinq cohortes de futurs enseignants « colonisateurs ». En s'intéressant aux théories portant sur le colonialisme, sur la décolonisation et à des études autochtones, nous présentons les obstacles et les défis relatifs à la formation d'enseignants « colonisateurs », tels que les legs hérités du colonialisme dans le milieu scolaire, les préjugés culturels et le racisme systémique dans les programmes ainsi que l'ignorance permanente comme droit des enseignants. De plus, nous nous attardons aux difficultés en lien avec les méthodes utilisées pour créer des relations respectueuses avec les communautés et étudiants autochtones. Finalement, nous abordons nos espoirs d'aider les nouveaux enseignants à s'engager à supporter les enfants et les jeunes d'origine autochtone au sein de leur pratique professionnelle.

Indigenous<sup>1</sup> scholars and education researchers have established the urgent importance of honouring Indigenous cultures, histories, perspectives, and knowledges in all levels of education, including teacher education (Battiste, 2013; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanaugh, & Teddy, 2009; Dion, 2009, 2007; Donald, 2012, 2009). More teacher education researchers (Kanu, 2011, 2005; Strong-Wilson, 2007; Tupper, 2014, 2013) are urging Canadian faculties of education to heed and demonstrate real efforts with the specific education calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC, 2015b) Final Report. The TRC has stipulated that transformed education systems are needed to address the academic success of Indigenous students first, while also moving mainstream or "settlerstream" (Korteweg & Bissell, 2015, p. 15) Canada towards reconciliation by addressing the mass "cultivated ignorance" (Godlewksa, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010, p. 419) of generations of school children. Settler teachers and, by extension, teacher educators thus occupy an important place in the TRC's calls to action for education (TRC, 2015a). They need to carry the core responsibility of implementing reform efforts to develop curriculum that represents accurate historical truths, respect Indigenous knowledge (IK) systems and perspectives, as well as promote holistic Indigenous pedagogies for greater understandings and well-being for all students in K-12 education (Association of Canadian Deans of Education [ACDE], 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b; Ontario's Social Studies, Grs. 1-6, and History / Geography, Grs. 7-8, Revised Curriculum, 2018).

Years before the TRC's calls to action (2015a) and after completing a longitudinal study into one school board's Aboriginal Education programming (Korteweg, 2010), Tesa Fiddler and Lisa Korteweg came together as an Indigenous-settler teacher education partnership. Fiddler – an Anishinaabekwe, teacher-educator, and Indigenous education specialist – and Korteweg – a Euro-White settler, teacher-researcher and university professor – decided to collaborate and co-teach a specialized Honours BEd course, entitled *Indigenizing Perspectives and Practices in Education* (IPPE). Since 2011, we have been actively inquiring into the multi-pronged challenges of unsettling or disrupting non-Indigenous / settler teacher candidates' (TCs) ignorance of Indigenous peoples and embedded Canadian settler-colonialism (Dion, 2009; Regan, 2010; Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2013; Tupper, 2013) while modelling a holistic, respectful, culturally responsive or Indigenous-focused pedagogy with Indigenous community. We researched and re-designed this BEd course over six years to understand how teacher education programs could address settler reconciliation while aiming to improve education for Indigenous students and their families. A challenging process, we had to disrupt and expose our TCs' ignorance as settler-colonial complacencies, rather than permit them to assume a professional teacher identity that cloaks ongoing colonialism (Marom, 2018). Explicitly decolonizing their nascent teacher identities was the way forward towards a new ethical relational stance (Donald, 2009) with Indigenous peoples and by learning to honour IK

and perspectives (Battiste, 2013; Bissell & Korteweg, 2016; Kanu, 2011), in a pedagogical approach that we term education-as-reconciliation. In this article, we provide an overview of our partnership, the IPPE course design, and the many dilemmas we encountered with educating settler teacher candidates on their responsibilities to enact reconciliation in their teaching.

## INDIGENOUS-SETTLER PARTNERSHIP IN DECOLONIZING TEACHER EDUCATION

The IPPE BEd course was borne out of our deep conversations about the difficulties, absurdities, and ongoing tragedies of Indigenous students' experience in provincial and urban school systems while we collaborated closely on the Ontario Ministry of Education's Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project in Thunder Bay (Korteweg, 2010). Lisa was the lead researcher (or principle investigator) while Tesa was a research assistant in the graduate team, but closer to a co-researcher in her role and capacity. As a partnership, we represent two distinct personal and scholarly journeys in parallel. We are situated in different cultural locations and institutional positions as teachers, scholars, and teacher-researchers. But, we came together to demonstrate to ourselves and teachers how an collaborative partnership of Indigenous-settler could connect while juxtaposing our identities in such a way that our differences — cultural, racial, socio-economic, educational, knowledge systems — were highlighted without subjugation, erasure, dominance or denial.

Lisa does not represent all Euro-Western perspectives in education just as Tesa does not represent all Indigenous perspectives. However, in our partnership, Tesa is the best authority of what non-Indigenous TCs need to know about IK systems, cultures, and FNMI families in order to teach Indigenous students in a culturally safe and responsive manner. Lisa is a strong role-model on what a decolonizing settler-teacher pathway could exemplify. By sharing her teacher autobiography, Lisa would regularly disclose stories of her own ignorance, settler mistakes, and White complacency failures, in order to teach a critical humility of settler decolonizing by honouring the teachings of IK holders, community members, and Elders. Tesa is an excellent role-model in implementing culturally safe teaching practices with Indigenous students such as holistic caring, genuine relationship building and community invitational approaches in classrooms. Together, we continuously demonstrated to our TCs how to encourage, listen for, and engage Indigenous student voice and stories of inherent IK strengths of Land,<sup>2</sup> language, culture, community (2L2C).

We were compelled to focus our teacher education efforts on the non-Indigenous or White settler problem (Epp, 2008) and directly address teacher strategic ignorance (Tupper, 2013, 2014), avoidance of uncomfortable critical discourses (Marom, 2017), and confront White Canadian teachers' "perfect stranger" stance (Dion, 2007 p. 330; Higgins, Madden, & Korteweg, 2015)

in our pedagogies, curriculum, and course organization. Working to disrupt settler-teacher perceptions explicitly in course texts, group discussions, and through embodied-experiential activities in Indigenous-focused contexts, we were prepared for discomfort, tensions, and complexities as we revealed “truth” accounts of Indigenous children’s current lives and school experiences. Anticipating that these settler-colonial “truths” might alienate our TCs from actively relating to Indigenous students, we worked to remain equally supportive and committed to demonstrating that settler-teachers can change their perspectives, enact positive influence, build stronger genuine relationships with Indigenous families / communities, and improve learning conditions for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students in classrooms as education-as-reconciliation.

Citing the core challenge of the TRC as the “broad lack of understanding of the unjust and violent circumstances from which modern Canada emerged,” (Sinclair, 2015, para. 14), Justice Sinclair made it clear that education will be fundamental to reconciliation. Settler awareness of Canada’s oppressive and racist treatment against Indigenous peoples is an unlearning process of settler-decolonizing, enacted through in-person experiences and interactions with Indigenous students in Indigenous community spaces. Our model of education-as-reconciliation was a generative process demonstrated by our own Indigenous-settler interactions during our co-teaching and while continuously referring to our relationships with Indigenous students and their families / communities.

Rooted in a commitment to restitution of Indigenous rights, reclamation of IK and self-determination, we connect with a research lineage in critical education focused on the relationship between curriculum, racism, colonialism, and mainstream or whitemainstream dominance (Grande, 2008; Kanu, 2005; St. Denis, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Tupper & Cappello, 2008; Willinsky, 1998). The study of our IPPE course is also attentive to Indigenous critiques on how decolonization and reconciliation efforts need to be Indigenous-focused and politically enacted rather than passively stated to assuage governmental interests or perpetuate a seemingly nice, polite Canadian status quo (Belcourt, 2017; Betasamsoake Simpson, 2014; Gaudry, 2016; Lee & King, 2017; Todd, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). These Indigenous scholars contend that reconciliation means non-Indigenous Canadians must be held accountable by addressing ongoing settler-colonial dominance and oppression as well as supporting Indigenous self-determination in institutions such as education.

Through our Indigenous-settler teacher-educator partnership, we continuously dialogued about the reiterative design, teaching, and development of this BE course over a 6-year span (2011-2017) of five cohorts. While intentionally engaging in conversation to process our weekly observations of the IPPE classes, we also gained insights into our own hopes and concerns for decolonizing Canadian teacher education. Specifically, our analysis focuses on how settler TC

reluctances-resistances to education-as-reconciliation were often epistemological contestations to avoid challenging the national narrative of (White) Canadian identity as peaceful, fair and good (Saul, 2008). Additionally, some of the TCs were committed to a teacher professional identity based on a mythos of Canadian neutrality in order to avoid any disruptions to a Eurocentric settler status quo in curriculum and pedagogy (Battiste, 2013; Marom, 2018; Tupper, 2014). Such manifestations of settler TC resistance-reluctance were the ongoing primary challenge of the IPPE course through all its offerings. Hope, however, was revealed to us regularly as an increasing number of the TCs described a growing commitment to Indigenous students / families as the focus of their “best” teaching experiences, along with an ability to perceive and appreciate the vital contributions of Indigenous peoples in all aspects of society.

### THE IPPE COURSE

The Honours specialized course (IPPE) was a time intensive experience of 108 contact hours, along with 36-40 hours of service learning or informal teaching placements in Indigenous contexts: a total of six times the contact hours of normal BEd courses in the professional teacher certification year's program. The course design and delivery were anchored in a recognition that BEd students' ignorance of Canadian-Indigenous history and current misunderstandings of Indigenous cultures, knowledge systems, and languages all had to be addressed as the focal points of the IPPE curriculum. In order to shift TCs out of an epistemological complacency, we experimented with approaches and modified activities that would emphasize the strengths and richness of Indigenous cultures and contributions, rather than forefront the truths of colonial devastation and tragedies upon Indigenous communities—past and ongoing (Kovach, 2009; Tuck, 2009). Designing a course curriculum that would evoke multiple disruptions and complexities as TCs confronted their own settler-colonialism was relatively easy. However, the concurrent pedagogical challenges of how we would unsettle our TCs' implicit biases and normalized racism against Indigenous peoples in order to break through their hesitations, reticence, or active resistances and compel them towards actions were both exhausting and energizing as they fueled our teacher-researcher partnership.

We designed focal point assignments that would immerse the settler TCs in:

- 1) cultural experiences in Indigenous community settings or Indigenous dominant spaces for learning (settler) cultural humility (Lund & Lee, 2015),
- 2) outdoor classes that were purposefully sequenced to demonstrate Land as first teacher (Chambers, 2006; Styres, 2011) or land-as-pedagogy (Simpson, 2014; Wildcat, McDonald, Irlbacher-Fox & Coulthard, 2014),

- 3) service learning in Indigenous education contexts or Indigenous-focused classrooms (36-40 hours), and
- 4) regular *sharing circles* in our classes that allowed the TCs to process affective or emotionally-charged responses while witnessing instructors' and peers' articulations of epistemological shifts, critical moments of personal awareness, and reflexive applications to their daily lives.

As a core focus of the course curriculum, we made conscious efforts to rely on and have our TCs engage with first-person voices or representations by Indigenous writers, leaders, role models, artists, scholars, knowledge holders or keepers, families, and Elders. We read young adult novels by Indigenous authors, such as *My Name is Seepeetza* by Sterling (1992) – Sterling's IRS survivor account as a fictionalized autobiography – and the *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007), another fictionalized autobiography of Indigenous youth identity conflicts between White settlerstream school and Indigenous family / community. We also assigned multiple videos or documentaries, including the PSAC video-*Justice for Aboriginal Peoples: It's Time*, as a powerful 5-minute encapsulation of Canada's history of more than 500 years of colonization upon Indigenous peoples; and the CBC documentary series, *8th Fire*. In addition, we compiled a large repository of articles, videos, teaching practices, and lesson plans on a digital course platform that included 500 resources and 21 topics to expand TC awareness on all matters Indigenous or, at the very least, to preclude the inexcusable yet oft-repeated rationale that many teachers hold: they cannot teach this material or content since they never learned it during their own K-16 educations or they cannot source appropriate resources. We continuously worked against this entrenched settler-colonial mentality by emphasizing indigenized strengths, resiliencies, and first-person representations of communities, culture, language, and Land (Kovach, 2009; Simpson, 2014; Tuck, 2009). Overall, we focused our teaching to help shift the TCs out of epistemological complacencies, to grapple with decolonizing their assumptions or inherent biases against Indigenous peoples, while opening them up to the possibilities of better relations and cultural safety for Indigenous students, whose numbers are only increasing in Canadian classrooms.

By creating contexts of embodied, experiential relationality in Indigenous community settings and opening supportive spaces, we wanted to provoke a next phase, after settler disruptions, to shift our TCs' pedagogies towards an Indigenous focus: to practice respectful interactions with Indigenous students, families and (local) communities to start genuine relationships, to honour the resilience and strengths of FNMI peoples, and to enrich classrooms and curriculum first for Indigenous students' cultural safety (Bishop et al., 2009; Bishop, 2003; Ly & Crowshoe, 2015; Nakata, 2011; Toulouse, 2013, 2008). Recognizing that decolonization is an emotionally charged and critically chal-

lenging process, especially during the formative time of competing professional identities and clashes of political discourses on what can be viewed as a “good” (social justice) teacher (Marom, 2017), we aimed to provide as many concrete immersive experiences for the TCs in Indigenous community events and with Indigenous students. We wanted to persuade by demonstrating richly engaging and rewarding Indigenous-focused experiences or indigenizing pedagogical practices for action and praxis in the IPPE course (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; McCarty & Wyman, 2009). Our clear mission was the overall goal of improving Indigenous children’s lives in schools who continue to face serious alienation, systemic racism and oppressive unjust conditions, a much more painful and dire situation than any emotional toll on settler TCs grappling with their roles and responsibilities to decolonize their teaching as moral imperative for reconciliation.

A constant through-line or theme in all assignments and classes was to consistently ask the TCs to define their emerging teacher identity as a question of “who are you as a teacher of Indigenous students and how will you provide a culturally safe, inclusive, and pride-instilling environment for Indigenous students in your teaching?” This theme or call to action in our co-teaching of IPPE took a toll of emotional labour as we had to regularly monitor the TCs’ feelings, their White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) or confidence levels (Milne, 2016), as well as attend to their affective processing of intense feelings such as guilt, embarrassment or frustration (Brophy, 2017; Korteweg & Root, 2016; Tanaka, 2015). We had to maintain an ongoing effort to re-engage our TCs in believing that as teachers of Indigenous children *first*, they needed to help transform the Indigenous-Canadian relationship and promote education-as-reconciliation that would answer the TRC’s calls to action. Seeking a balance of provoking real points of discomfort in revealing truths of history between Indigenous and Canadian, while providing a safe enough affective environment in the university classroom was challenging. And in this era of the (post-)TRC, when Canadian teaching is evidently political in its impacts and consequences on Indigenous children’s lives, we believe it is our responsibility as teacher-educators to help TCs understand that any teaching is political in its effects and consequences on the Indigenous-Canadian relationship. While debunking and shattering their naive settler myths of Canada as a fair, equal nation that celebrates all children (Burman, 2016; St. Denis, 2011), we had to inveigle settler TCs to commit to actions of settler identity-as-reconciliation, focused on high quality, rightful, and accessible education for Indigenous students / communities.



## **A RECONCILIATION METHODOLOGY OF CHALLENGING SETTLER STICKY POINTS AND SLIPPERY SLOPES**

To examine the complexity and range of responses that we received, observed, and studied from a total of 120 preservice or TC participants during the teaching of the IPPE course (2011-2017), we collected data from weekly reflections, sharing circle debriefings, discussion board postings, formal assignments, service learning-as-teaching logs, and Indigenous community immersion entries, alongside our own conversations, field notes, and storying while debriefing (Kovach, 2009) and storywork (Archibald, 2008) of TC interactions, observations and classroom events. We then transcribed and uploaded this data into a qualitative software program to code for themes of reoccurring statements or stories by the TCs across the five cohorts. As we reviewed each year's cohort data, there was a clear pattern of overlapping highs and lows in the decolonizing narratives or settler unlearning processes. Over the five cohorts we observed regularities of TC narratives or pivotal moments of "touchstone stories" (Strong-Wilson, 2007, p. 116), those experiences that shaped their perceptions of and relationships with Indigenous peoples. There were also patterns in the ways that the TCs engaged in a self-examination of their own previously unquestioned "molded images" (Dion, 2007, p. 331), or representations that perpetuated ignorance, cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2013) and settler-colonialism. These TC engagement patterns during the IPPE course emerged out of the data as a landscape of key conceptual shift points for the settler TCs where they were impeded, tipped or decidedly moved towards a greater reconciliatory stance in their teaching and teacher identity formation.

We conceptualize these shifting points as similar to den Heyer's (2009) sticky points, those difficult moments or uncomfortable points of contention that emerge or stick out when divergent narratives or values clash, resulting in a cultural interface of complexities (Nakata, 2011) when complacent White settler normativity is unsettled (Regan, 2010), interrupted, or exposed. The complexity occurs when the TCs realize that there is a conflict of teacher narratives where *who* they want to become as settler / Canadian teachers clashes with responsibilities and commitments they should enact with Indigenous students, communities, and Indigenous content. As we observed the data, the metaphor of stickiness seemed to best capture how the TCs' responses were ideologically complex, as they struggled to reconcile themselves with the myths of well-meaning, fair, or "proper" settler teachers and the accurate truths of settler-colonialism. These sticky points of disruption revealed how willing or resistant the TCs were to opening themselves up to teaching-as-reconciliation through re-learning and contending with Canada's real history of colonization against Indigenous peoples, engaging with decolonizing their own teacher identities, or expanding their active, genuine engagement with Indigenous students and families. We were also working against the slippery slopes of settler-colonialism, trying to entice our TCs to stay the course and

see the rich values of Indigenous-focused curriculum and pedagogy, along with the rewards of building genuine relationships with Indigenous students and communities. We knew our TCs were continuously pulled towards the slippery slopes of “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10), those inherent strategies of trying to reclaim a position of neutrality, and/or denying unearned privileges in an education system based on anti-Indigenous racism. The majority of our teaching became the monitoring and redirection of our TCs away from these moves to innocence towards a more holistic, relationship-focused pedagogy of education-as-reconciliation. Our purpose became the study of locating significant or sticking points of settler-decolonizing; moments of disruption where TCs could be nudged towards transformational shifts, culturally responsive actions, and relational practices of engagement. We highlight a sampling of TC anonymized quotes, to represent these settler-teacher sticky points and to demonstrate that there are variations in TC responses to education-as-reconciliation.

*Sticky point 1: Why do we have to take this course when Indigenous education really has nothing to do with me (as a Euro-White settler-Canadian)?*

We knew that the overwhelming majority of settler TCs would not have had any prior meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples, education or content; hence, the mass settler ignorance that demonstrated itself when resistances (Donald, 2012; Kanu, 2011; Tupper, 2013) to the course took on many forms. Some TCs unabashedly stated in first class introductions that they did not actively choose or want to take our course, but were forced to as the last course option available. Others confessed that they were anxious and uncertain about what our course would do for them because they had never studied any Indigenous content in their teachable subjects. Still others asserted how out of place they felt in the IPPE course as they had never met any Indigenous peoples or been exposed to any Indigenous content given their upbringings in southern Ontario.

The settler assumption for many of the TCs in the first month was thus that the IPPE course had little personal relevance, unless you were from a town with a significant or visible Indigenous population, or you were a specialist in Indigenous studies. These assumptions and (lack of) motivation to enroll in our specialization course did not change during the 5-cohort cycle of the IPPE course delivery. Even after the TRC’s (2015b) Final report, along with high media attention to Indigenous social movements – such as Idle No More – and issues – such as the Ontario Coroner’s inquest into the seven First Nations student deaths in Thunder Bay, and the MMIWG national inquiry – the TC enrolment and university support for the IPPE course were already waning.

***Sticky point 2: How are we, as non-Indigenous teachers, supposed to teach their traditions and their culture?***

As instructors of teacher education courses on Indigenous-focused content and pedagogies, we heard a lot of common resistances about “them,” an objectification of Indigenous peoples in the first few weeks of our course. Persistent questions of disrespectful ignorance included: Who are they? What do we call “them”? How do we avoid making a mistake or doing things *improperly*? What are their spiritual beliefs? What is their culture? Could we just bring in an Elder so that we can all absorb their ancient wisdom and let them teach this content correctly? Luckily, many of our TCs were startled out of this colonial mindset when Tesa led the first class with smudging, circle teachings outside on the Land, and story-telling of her own life and educational experiences, generously shared with humour and gentle wisdom. This holistic initiation immediately immersed the cohorts in Anishinaabe ways of knowing and grounded the course with the purpose of teaching Indigenous children first, decentering settler perspectives as the mainstream, while moving towards and acknowledging a pedagogy-for-reconciliation.

In the first month of the course, many TCs expect us to tell them that Indigenous cultural teaching is a checklist of the top ten teaching strategies — do not make eye contact, bring a tobacco offering, use oral learning strategies, make activities all hands-on — assuming that there is *one* First Nation culture that applies to all communities (a pan-Indigenous and inappropriate approach). There is a strong expectation that we will hand our TCs a teachers’ guide as a formula or curriculum-as-thing to then apply in their own classroom teaching absent Indigenous relationships, connections to communities, or engagement of families (see Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013). Our TCs also repeatedly returned to the Eurocentric strategy of critical thinking as debate to try to determine what is culturally appropriate for “those people” when in the prevailing pedagogy, Canadian teachers are supposed to be nice, fair, or polite (apolitical) professionals who teach to appreciate a multicultural mosaic classroom and avoid contention or political conflict by celebrating all cultures to make everyone comfortable (Burman, 2016; Dion, 2009; Marom, 2016; St. Denis, 2011).

During the first term of each course offering, we found ourselves having multiple private conversations with different TCs about their insecurity to develop genuine relationships with Indigenous students or, conversely, an overtly instrumental view of their teaching in Indigenous education. We soon realized how these two affective states seem to be two polar ends of settler-teachers’ vacillation between a stance of fear as a “perfect stranger” (Dion, 2009) to a stance of strange confidence that they know enough of a subject to escape any accountability or controversy in their settler teaching. This vacillation manifests in multiple ways. Some TCs suggest that they do not know enough to address Indigenous students’ distinct needs. Others are

complacent regarding the need to teach in a responsive, relational way with Indigenous students, different than for “all my [mainstream] students.” In addition, TCs would present as over-confident subject-expert teachers with little lived cultural humility (Lund & Lee, 2015) saying things such as, “I took this Native Studies or Ojibwe language course in university, so, I have enough credits to teach this subject so I think I could take that job...” For many of these overtly confident or instrumental TCs, their response to assuming a decolonizing identity as a teacher of Indigenous students became stickier or more conflicted as they realized their outsider positionality and rare experience in relating to Indigenous peoples:

I grew up in Thunder Bay...the population of Natives [sic] here is very high and there is a reserve next to the city. I am considering working in a northern Native reserve after I graduate because there's lots of work up there and I'm having success in my placements. But I am a little nervous to go up north because I have heard many stories about “nightmare” experiences of teachers who can't wait to leave. I hope that this course will prepare me to integrate more easily into a First Nation community and to handle the challenges. (Cohort 1 reflection, September 2011)

We were aware that the IPPE course could be used as an instrumental means for some settler-teachers to gain an economic advantage in the glutted teacher market of Ontario schools. This slippery slope of giving settler TCs a specialized, value-added course could become the TCs' advantage in an increasingly competitive field, especially when school boards have not explicitly reserved Indigenous education or subject positions for FNMI teachers. This was an ongoing ethical dilemma in our IPPE teaching as we worried that we were continuing to reproduce White privilege or add more White entitlement into the field of Indigenous education.

***Sticky point 3: “This Indigenous history is so bleak and terrible, how am I supposed to teach this?!”***

Many TCs can be overwhelmed by the truths of both the IRS system as well as current conditions for Indigenous students in all levels and jurisdictions of Canadian education. We found that quite a few of our TCs would exhibit “white fragility” (DiAngelo, 2011), disengage or express resistance when they realized that these complex issues of decolonization and reconciliation along with the overwhelmingly tragic colonial history of Canada could not be easily distilled into “nice” fair lesson plans or explained to friends / family over a dinner. Our TCs would often express their preference for a history curriculum where “we just celebrate everyone's cultures as a multicultural history of Canada” (TC written reflections and class statements). Many wanted to revert back to a whitewashed, celebratory narrative of Canada as European immigrant history, erroneously lumping Indigenous peoples into a multicultural mosaic myth (Burman, 2016; St. Denis, 2011). In this double move of erasure and displacement, the TCs would avoid a truthful telling of Canadian history as

violent conflicts, government inflicted tragedies or cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples (Daschuk, 2010; Dion, 2009; Gaudry, 2016).

Centring historical truths as the foundation of the IPPE curriculum, especially at this moment of the TRC and Canada 150, meant that the TCs would experience multiple and complex affective states. **These states presented as epistemological resistances and shocked awareness through learning the “real” story of Canada’s treatment of Indigenous peoples over its 150-year history of cultural genocide by multiple governments.** By the end of the course, our goal for the TCs was to become active agents of education-as-reconciliation who both help shift our collective contemporary history-in-the-making and teach a new nation-to-nation (N2N) or Indigenous Nations-to-Canada narrative.

The most extraordinary learning experiences of the Indigenous history of Canada were organized by Tesa for each cohort. Tesa invited Elders/IRS survivors who agreed to present in our classes, due to their trust in and friendship with Tesa. Each Elder-survivor told stories of first living well with their families on the Land, speaking their language, and strong intergenerational relations with grandparents and extended family. Then, they recounted the surreal trip away from their families, the tragic shock of the IRS entrance, followed by years of pain and abuse. There was nothing more powerful for learning the full truths of Canada’s history than these first-person stories by real IRS survivors. As our TCs reflected on this sharing, they were amazed by the rich history of language, kinship, and Land, while crushed to learn of the trauma of First Nation children forcibly removed from family love and community connection.

We knew that the teaching of Canada’s IRS history through survivors’ stories in person in our classes would elicit grave and difficult emotions for our TCs to contend with on both personally and professionally. “I am afraid to address these [IRS] issues and histories directly with Indigenous students because I don’t think I can keep my emotional composure and I’m worried about the emotional impact it would have on them.” (Cohort 2, weekly reflection, November 2012)

***Sticky point 4: “If you know how to do outdoor or place-based education, then you already get Aboriginal Education, right?”***

Any decolonizing settler-teacher education curriculum has to begin with Land because the primary act of colonization is stealing Indigenous land while instilling a neo-colonial ideology that legitimizes the occupation of Land by settlers, away from the rightful Indigenous homeland caretakers. During the 6-year period that we taught IPPE, there were multiple Land-based controversies that came to crisis points in Northern Ontario and received mass media attention: the jailing of the Kitchemaykoosib Inniniwug Chief and council for obstructing the mineral exploration drilling on their lands; the Attawapiskat shelter crisis

and Chief Teresa Spence's hunger strike; the Ring of Fire chromite project development (Matawa Tribal Council communities); and Grassy Narrows' ongoing mercury poisoning crisis (Korteweg & Root, 2016). Our course could have just been a series of case studies of current Land-based controversies impacting Indigenous communities in northern Ontario and unravelling all the settler-colonial implications as educational moments (Korteweg & Russell, 2012).

In connection to these controversies, we focused on the sticking point of Land – rather than reproduce settler attachments to wilderness or special places. We needed the TCs to confront and replace the dominant Eurocentric conception of wilderness with the truth of Indigenous peoples' homelands and Land protection. The IPPE course curriculum continuously emphasized Land as first teacher (Styres, 2011): Land as knowledge source and pedagogy, where the elements, ancestors, more-than-human animals, spirits, language, and stories are all interconnected with the people, over millennia or time immemorial as a system of relations and knowledge that continue living to this day (Battiste, 2013; Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2011). In the IPPE cohort, we had a good number of nature-sensitive, environmentally-focused TCs who would arrive with firmly established place-based identities that valued summer camps, wilderness canoe trips, and communion with special places (Korteweg & Oakley, 2014; Newbery, 2012) but who had not yet considered any real or respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples. These TCs were sometimes shocked to contend with their settler privilege of wilderness access or special place-based communion at the expense of Indigenous peoples' sovereignty on their own territories (Korteweg & Oakley, 2014; Newbery, 2012). This issue hit particularly hard for many of the TCs with a specialization in Outdoor education. Most of these TCs had attended residential summer camps throughout their childhoods but had not yet faced any issues of cultural misappropriation:

Growing up, I went to camp every summer. At my camp, we were all given tribal names (Cree, Mohawk, etc.) to distinguish the different age groups. We also participated in various Indigenous-based activities such as sleeping in teepees, participating in a *pow-wow*, and doing overnight canoe trips with old style gear like *wanigans* and *tump* lines. I have learned to appreciate Indigenous culture because of my summer camp. (Year 3, Winter term reflection, 2014)

Again, the TCs exhibited *sticky* responses to topics that challenged their assumed values or identity investments such as summer camps. Many of our TCs believed they had unique nature connections through summer camps and special wild places or wilderness trips that had re-affirmed their socio-economic class position and privileges to commune with nature. Their responses at these sticky points could be the threshold for either increasing their awareness of Indigenous perspectives of Land or decreasing their willingness to confront their own participation in cultural appropriation.

I feel so confused and kind of angry. We have been talking about colonization in class and it was suggested that when summer camps use Indigenous practices and artifacts, they are actually perpetuating colonialism. My experiences at camp have been so important in shaping who I am today. How can this special place that taught me so much about our natural environment also be teaching us all a way of seeing the world that does not respect Indigenous people? (Cohort 2, weekly reflection, October 2012)

To counteract this settler alienation of feeling displaced from their place-based identity, we followed an Anishinaabe approach of engaging with Land as pedagogy or first teacher (Styres, 2011), where the environment, ancestors, elements, language, IK, and stories all work together to help people re/member, learn, and share holistic respect with the Land (see Simpson, 2014). Each year, we participated in Indigenous-led, Land-based events such as the Fall Harvest, classroom visits with knowledge holders, harvesting or crafting birch bark, and the immersive overnight IPPE retreat at an Anishinaabe encampment. The retreat was mandatory each September to immerse all the TCs into a collective experience of Anishinaabe ways of knowing such as story-telling around the fire, medicine walks, handicrafts such as beading, singing with the hand-drum to emphasize reconciliation as *maamawe* – we are all in this together.

***Sticky point 5: “I’m just as un-privileged as Indigenous peoples”: Grappling with White privilege and systemic racism***

To address the systemic anti-Indigenous racism that most of our TCs had never faced, Tesa would not attend the specific class when Lisa would directly teach topics of White power / privilege, White fragility, and Eurocentric cognitive imperialism in curriculum (Battiste, 2013; Battiste et al., 2002). It was always important for Tesa to miss these risky and difficult sessions when Lisa would disrupt convenient complacency about White teacher-identity and reproduction of neo-colonialism in teaching.

Lisa takes responsibility for the weight and burden of instructing and processing with the TCs what settler-decolonization can be re-imagined as and what it should look like as transformative praxis (McCarty & Wyman, 2009). With Tesa’s guidance, Lisa would lead the TCs through critical self-examinations and deconstructions of the systemic and institutionalized racism that has benefitted all White Canadians, including White teachers.

After last week’s class [with Lisa] I have been thinking a lot about my own White privilege. I realize I never have to worry about people following me when I am shopping because they think I might steal; and how I can afford to make small mistakes (like swearing for example) without people judging me harshly; and no one ever says that I am a “credit to my people” because I am in university. In short, people tend to expect the best, rather than the worst from me because of the colour of my skin. Recognizing the extent of my own privilege also makes me understand just how many barriers First Nations students must experience each day. (Cohort 4, weekly reflection, January 2015)

We knew that our TCs were not adapting easily to these new understandings of contentious knowledge outside our university classroom. We regularly heard stories and fielded questions for advice on what to do with room-mates, family members and friends who were ignorant and/or racist in their views against Indigenous peoples. As one TC related:

I told my boyfriend about the Elder's presentation about his experiences at Residential School. He had never heard of Residential Schools or survivors. He was really shocked like me, and had a hard time believing that it was really that bad. I have to admit that my boyfriend is racist against Aboriginal people, even though he knew nothing about any of the things I have been learning in class. I've tried to talk to him a few times about this but he doesn't seem that responsive. I just don't know what to do or how to talk to him. (Cohort 2, weekly reflection, October 2013)

Controversies and TCs' bad feelings also arose when we would broach key topics such as being very clear that Indigenous children belonged first with their families, communities and Indigenous teachers as well as detailing and repudiating the stereotypes that White saviour foster parents or well-intentioned settler-teachers were the answer. We had TCs whose families were White foster parents to Indigenous children and felt personally attacked when we traced the harmful effects of the 60s Scoop and the ongoing exorbitant rates of Indigenous children apprehensions and placements in foster care. These TCs, though few in number, became very defensive and were unable to differentiate the systemic conditions of settler-colonialism and racism in/through curriculum and teaching along with other institutions such as child welfare, health, and justice. We wanted them to understand that the personal (teaching) is political in its effects and consequences; however, we did not want them to be emotionally paralyzed to the point that they retreated as insecure, disengaged, or individually insulted. While a few TCs found the distinction between institutionalized racism and systemic violence against Indigenous people difficult to face, there were significant openings and a hopeful willingness by many to grapple with their own personal complicities in these systemic conditions. As one TC stated:

I will never see Aboriginal people the same way again after hearing Indigenous students' stories — this personal storytelling format was a powerful learning experience for me. I grew up right beside Indigenous people in Thunder Bay, for my whole life, but didn't know enough so I easily accepted stereotypes. (Cohort 3, weekly reflection, November 2014)

## THE HOPE FOR SETTLER TEACHER EDUCATION-AS-RECONCILIATION

Our ongoing research and iterative design in IPPE kept aiming to convince and commit the greatest number of non-Indigenous TCs to graduate from our course as decolonizing settler-teachers, striving for daily reconciliation. The goal was to develop teachers who meaningfully act against reproducing the harms of colonialism (see Aviation, 2012), while embracing more Indigenous-respectful



pedagogies and developing relationships with Indigenous students. Every fall, as we restarted the course, we were quickly reminded of how deeply entrenched settler-colonialism is in education by the repetition of colonial stock responses or persistent sticky points by multiple cohorts of TCs. While our classroom was a real site of settler-colonial contestation, it was also an enriched, experiential process of engaging in education-as-reconciliation with Indigenous community. The vast majority of the TCs were decolonizing their own settler-colonialism through multiple immersive experiences in the city's Indigenous community events and shifting towards a stance of openness to reconciliation as a process of (re)learning and building relationality. The TCs had the choice of any Indigenous community organized event where they were welcomed and invited to participate, regardless if it was a celebration, a ceremony or a protest. The goal of the cultural immersion assignment was to formally nudge our non-Indigenous TCs to pay attention to the Indigenous community in Thunder Bay, to be physically present, to listen and learn experientially as a minority, and to participate in Indigenous dominant spaces of IK. These experiences were some of the most powerful for our TCs' shifts of stance towards cultural humility, embodied holistic learning, and empathetic development.

For example, all our TCs had to grapple with the realities of more than 500 years of colonization against Indigenous peoples while others directly witnessed personalized accounts of the ongoing violence, hurt, and trauma in the community at exhibits, demonstrations, or vigils:

I attended the "Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women's Vigil" as part of my cultural immersion hours. I was shocked, disturbed, and very saddened by this event. I had absolutely no idea about how many Aboriginal women are missing or murdered in Canada. The police seem to do very little about these cases. I think about the families of all these women; there must be so much pain. (Cohort 3, cultural immersion form, October 2013)

TCs were not just exposed to the pain and suffering of Indigenous peoples during these community events but also to the dynamic and rich IK that continues and contributes to environmental sensibilities, community sustainability, and ancestral-spiritual connections with the Land and all creatures. Our TCs quickly realized how little they knew or had learned of these important, vital contributions that Indigenous peoples engage in every day and were humbled in the process of experiencing IK first hand.

On the Medicine Walk, I was amazed at how much knowledge this Elder held. He pointed out countless plants and their possible medicinal uses. He also shared his outlook on relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, stating that we are all equal and have abilities to learn and contribute to the world together. I was so humbled. (Cohort 5, cultural immersion form, October 2016)

## CONCLUSION

Teacher-educators cannot disrupt settler-colonial identities and perspectives of TCs without a tandem set of embodied experiences where they actively structure authentic, meaningful contexts that shift TCs towards engaging in genuine interactions with Indigenous communities. Teacher education-as-reconciliation does not serve Indigenous children and families / communities if it repels or defeats new teachers from engaging in the real transformative work of relationship-building and relational teaching. In our teacher education discussions and analysis, we continue to vacillate on the question of how to entice and shift settler teachers towards deeper engagement and positive work with Indigenous children, families, and communities while being honest and direct about the ongoing pain, violence, and injustices that remain in Canadian society and embedded in education systems. Any teacher education course that presumes to address education-as-reconciliation or Indigenous ways of knowing in curriculum will only be tenable in how it focuses on and promotes Indigenous children's rights and needs to cultural safety, individual wellbeing, and educational goals and competencies as defined by their families and communities. In an effective model, settler teachers are able to push through those difficult sticky points of confronting their own colonialism in order to become more personally committed and compelled to participate in, complain loudly about, and help transform their schools into improved, equitable education systems for Indigenous students. We know this is more than possible as our TCs demonstrated on a regular basis:

On my teaching placement, I presented to my Native Beliefs and Values class (Gr. 10) – almost all Aboriginal students – about the historical agreements such as the Royal Proclamation and the Treaties which give Indigenous people their distinct rights including education, and I contrasted this with realities of what was going to happen with [Prime Minister] Harper's proposed new First Nations Education Act. By building trust and relationships, I opened up the opportunity for the students to share their beliefs, bring in personal and family stories, and share with each other. The students then took the lead in deciding to write the MP a letter, and to invite him to the class so they could share their concerns. (Cohort 4, placement reflection, January 2015)

With our settler-TCs, reconciliation is about helping them recognize holistic and global values of teaching and learning for all children, shifting their own nascent and emerging teacher-identities towards a critical role to engage in reconciliation when schools are mired in an ambiguous search of Canada's next 150<sup>th</sup> narrative, framed by ongoing inheritances of the IRS but hopeful for an Indigenous strong future. Teacher education-as-reconciliation needs to be focused on the restitution and actualization of those vital and core principles of education in teaching that Indigenous communities have clearly stated in many policy statements and foundational documents – demonstrating respect and caring for each other; instilling and encouraging curiosity, inquiry and creativity; providing and modeling tools and methods of thinking; communicat-

ing and collaborating with one another; and honouring multiple perspectives, ways of being and divergent systems of knowledge. Finally, teacher education-as-reconciliation needs to shift settler teachers towards reconciliatory actions in schools that transform what have long been institutions of empire, power, and colonialism towards institutions of greater equity, stronger relationships, and committed justice with Indigenous peoples. There is no time to waste.

## NOTES

1. In this article, we use the term, Indigenous, to be inclusive of the many peoples and knowledge systems of the First Peoples of Canada as well as to use a term with global and United Nations recognition (e.g., UNDRIP). We also use First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) to be more distinct and representative of the three constitutionally recognized Indigenous peoples of Canada (see Vowel, 2016).
2. Following the examples of Styres (2011), Korteweg and Oakley (2014), and Tuck and McKenzie (2015), “Land” is capitalized in this article to recognize the collective community of all animate and inanimate beings, of which humans are a part. Often “Land” is used in Indigenous epistemologies to describe the complex, interrelated, more-than-human connections of humans with the natural world, including plants, animals, rocks, lakes, elements, and ancestral and spiritual presences.

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