

INDIGENEITY, POSITIONALITY, AND ETHICAL SPACE: NAVIGATING THE IN-BETWEEN OF INDIGENOUS AND SETTLER ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

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Academia has been dominated by European/settler ways of knowing while denying the existence and validity of Indigenous epistemologies, science, and philosophies. Post-secondary structures were not built to be inclusive spaces, they were built without Indigenous voices or considerations and often housed individuals and departments who have perpetuated research harms towards Indigenous peoples. These spaces have been and remain a place of privilege where few Indigenous knowledge holders manage to become established. In this article, calls for action to transform academia into an inclusive space through ongoing conversations on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report and the widespread theme of taking on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) conversations will be examined. Without conversations around tools and ideas about practical steps to take in our daily work navigating academic spaces, we maintain colonial structures by being complicit and avoid the question of where the Indigenous voices are found in these spaces.

My Positionality

Hadiksm Gaax di waayu, Jessie King di waayu. My name is Jessie King and my traditional name given to me in 2008 is Swimming Raven. This name was given to me by the head of my family at the time, bestowed upon me by family members from Gitxaala where I trace my matriline. I am both Ts'mysen on my Mother's side and mixed-Irish and Scottish settler on my Father's side. I honour both of these identities, as co-existing, and I walk each day sharing this positionality out of respect and acknowledgement of what inherent privileges, power, and positioning this gives me in my life. I grew up with privilege, I maintain a level of privilege simply because of who I am, where I come from, and what experiences I carry with me. I did not grow up in spaces where I endured the racism and discrimination many of my family members and friends did. I did grow up not knowing of colonial history or hearing the language of my Dzi'is (Grandmother), I am doing that learning now. It is a challenging conversation to have but essential to share as this is the first gift you can give someone. It is also with a mindfulness of how I read research, journals, and books with Indigenous content – I want to know who the author is. This is who I am.

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King, J. (2023). Indigeneity, positionality, and ethical space: Navigating the in-between of Indigenous and settler academic discourse. *Papers on Postsecondary Learning and Teaching*, 6, 36-48.

Introduction

As more attention is drawn to conversations around reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and settlers in Canada, there is a growing hunger for knowledge around the pain, suffering and colonial trauma experienced collectively by Indigenous Peoples (Wente, 2021). The original relationship began between Indigenous Peoples and the Federal Government acting on behalf of the British Crown. While important to remember this original relationship we also need to see how all peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous are impacted by our shared history. This knowledge will inform how we come to know one another, which until this time has been largely focused on the trauma inflicted upon Indigenous peoples through colonization. This hunger for our stories of pain run parallel to denialist arguments demanding proof of the pain and trauma that came with assimilative efforts to remove, reduce, and eliminate Indigenous peoples throughout the short history of Canada. We know this due to the propensity for research projects excavating colonial histories for answers to how it has shaped Indigenous experiences of despair, disparity, and inequity. This cultural violence is perpetuated and maintained by oppressive legislation embedded within colonial institutions; structures of academia are an ever-present example of this (Mitchell et al. 2018).

Stories of trauma and colonial violence in academia illustrates how Indigenous Peoples have had to endure the mass societal hunger for their pain. Within this, we still see a lack of awareness around Indigenous ways of knowing, culture, and history. These fictional tales of Indigenous peoples as savages or primitive peoples predominate within academic institutions (Mitchell et al., 2018). In addition, the ongoing efforts for voice and inclusion of Indigenous stories is complicated by the cost incurred by Indigenous peoples to relive and recite experiences of trauma and violent assimilation, even more so for Indigenous academics walking in these liminal spaces. Academic structures take pride in their efforts promoting diversity and inclusivity, while simultaneously placing Indigenous academics in a position of unique and immense pressure to perform, partake, and offer their voice to university priorities (Newton, 2021). As Indigenous academics, we not only live our lives as Indigenous, but we are often expected to speak for all Indigenous peoples' experiences with little thought to mindful requests of our time and little regard for protocols. Part of this hunger for stories of pain and trauma is the rogue wave of decolonization checkboxes and the desire to activate decolonization, despite not knowing entirely what it means (Tuck & Yang, 2012). First though, we must understand that Indigenous Peoples and their communities do not owe us (academia) anything. Not their time, teaching, or reliving of the collective trauma they have endured. Academia is not owed this information for the simple reason that we have access to resources in the form of reports, articles, books, and videos to inform ourselves. I say this with the gentle tone my Dzi'is, my Grandmother, used during the lessons she offered me. If we do ask for the time of Indigenous Peoples, consider asking what they would like their time to be used for - what teachings do they want to bring? How can you honour them. This article is a reflection of insights I have gathered as an academic with both Ts'mysen (Indigenous) and Irish/Scottish (Settler) identities. Decolonize your requests by unpacking what decolonization means, and what it can look like within academia.

Decolonization work is the intersection of many ideas and people converging to critically question our propensity to design our surroundings according to settler narratives while not seeing other knowledges as valid (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Igniting a new conversation in the academy requires courage to pause and ask ourselves why we inhabit academic spaces if not to

be exposed to multiple forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. It requires the courage to not only speak up and to question the space we take up, but also the courage to commit to lifelong learning and being in relationship. While we like to tout individual accomplishments on what has been done, there is also something to be said for accomplishments achieved through relationships. As an Indigenous person walking these spaces within academia I see the discomfort and hesitance around reaching out a hand to explore new relationships. I see it when I ask about where the community members are at committee tables, research proposals, and meetings discussing Indigenous experiences with academia, research, and health, spaces I have participated in at a professional level. In this post-TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) era, much of our work will begin with dismantling systems that insulate us from exploring barriers, structures, and power dynamics that lead us to feel discomfort. To feel discomfort is the beginning of understanding the need for change. Perhaps we need to begin by asking what each of us does when we feel discomfort.

Do we run away and ignore?

Do we acknowledge the discomfort?

Do we open our hearts and minds to new ways of reducing the discomfort?

Theoretical Framework

As educators we are tasked with delivering courses, supporting students, all while creating our own research program. Indigenous academics carry an additional layer of personal experience embedded within the teachings we deliver in the context of Indigenous/Aboriginal/Native/First Nations Studies; it is essential to list each of these respective disciplines. For this article, I rely on elements of storytelling, narrative, and auto-ethnography to formulate an autoethnographic narrative inquiry. Autoethnography was an essential approach for me in presenting a certain level of vulnerability in sharing story (Eisenbach, 2016). How do I tell this story, how much information do I provide, and what are the consequences of sharing in this way? (Eisenbach, 2016). There are many theoretical positions within narrative inquiry that allow for a diversity of understandings and approaches to be accommodated at once (Brett, 2017). I also rely on the space of relational accountability and responsibility instilled in me being raised as Ts'mysen and Irish/Scottish settler. Growing up, I was Ts'mysen despite not speaking my language. I spent a lot of time with my Dzi'is, my Grandmother, Sarah. I watched her observe the world, taking information inside of her being and in her quiet demeanor, reacting to and teaching us kids with love, patience, and kindness. She taught me to look inward and share those learnings with others if I felt there might be a sensation of solidarity or common experience. I rely on this method of storytelling or narrative voice in my teaching as well. Storytelling is healing while also allowing me to reach others in a way more than any book or writing from nowhere.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) offer the challenge to look in any handbook on our academic shelves to see that chapters are mostly written in third-person, passive voice. This voice portrays a message that is written from no place and seemingly by no one. Even now we see this in research papers in academia, where convention asks us to move away from writing that is personal or passionate in trade for dry and sanitized essays based on proposition.

This approach is essential because it is speaking truth to a personal experience. Indigenous peoples have often been spoken for and “most theories about Indigenous people’s education assumed that ethnic minority people did not succeed in school because they were ‘culturally deprived’ (Agbo, 2004, p. 2). While not explicit, I feel this belief in my work, I see students internalize this belief. As a junior Indigenous academic, academia is a challenging position but also one rife with opportunities to expand on self-reflection in both teaching and relationality with learners and colleagues. Unlike many schools of thought or departments within the university, First Nations Studies is relational first. When you are Indigenous it is both relational and lived/living experience held by yourself, your family, and those close to your heart. We talk about colonial history, trauma, resilience, and transformation in attempt to decolonize, indigenize, and every other ‘ize’ you can think of. So, it is essential we take those moments to reflect and heal while we do this busy work of educating on truth. Truth before reconciliation.

Methods

Using elements of narrative autoethnography in this article, my intent is to share a storytelling reflection on not only the experience but the tools I have gathered along the way. Tools that support my teaching on a parallel journey with personal healing. As human beings we learn through story and in narrative storywork we can both create and find meaning in our lives (Trahar, 2009). Thus, engaging with narrative autoethnography allows me to reflect on both the content I deliver and the process involved in delivery while supporting Indigenous and non-Indigenous students when they walk this path of understanding manifestations of colonial history in contemporary spaces. I present this article as an auto-ethnography with elements of narrative as a way of unpacking the experience of being both Indigenous and an academic. Illustrating this experience for others heading into academia is my intent. In writing this paper, I tried to create a story I wish I had access to before entering academia in order to prepare myself. Much like Dyson (2007) I have felt the need to justify “the telling of my story” and the requirement to fit within rigorous academic practice.

Insights

Following the example by Michael Dyson, I present insights in this article depicting my teaching journey as an Indigenous academic. These insights organized as themes are intended to share my understanding of teaching in post-secondary institutions while possessing Indigenous and Settler identities. Sharing these insights in a narrative has allowed me to explore common themes in my teaching practice that have formed my pedagogy insulated by decolonization, re-taking space, and honouring Indigeneity. The insights shared here are my experiences within the academy alone. While I do not speak for others, it is my hope that these insights will ignite further conversations on teaching practice and healing for transformative spaces in academia.

Respect for each other and nature, the understanding of community and the need for authenticity or authentic voice are common values held among North American and other Indigenous peoples... Communal purpose, respect, and authenticity have regularly been absent from research conducted on Indigenous peoples globally. (Redwing Saunders & Hill, 2007, p. 1019)

To this end, I unpack authenticity in a self-exploration with insights and conceptual tools that shape respectful dialogue on, with, and for Indigenous Peoples. To address prior research done wrong and teaching methods that have exposed histories without teaching learners how to interact with Indigenous peoples meaningfully, I write to this practice of unpacking and coming to know ourselves.

Unpacking and Coming to Know Self

The following themes are connected to coming to know ourselves and our understanding of how comfortable each of us is or not with our efforts related to Indigenizing the academy. Each details an insight that I have collected in my collective experience as both a student and now professor in academia in the field of Indigenous studies.

Lean into Discomfort with Self-Reflection

Teaching in academic spaces has offered me a glimpse into how we as a society shy away when we feel discomfort. Much of this discomfort manifests from fear of the unknown, ignorance, or feeling overwhelmed with where to start learning about Indigenous Peoples and being in relationship. The work to alleviate the impacts of colonization is more than adopting the discourse; it often attempts to “reconcile settler guilt and complicity” without acknowledging the deep lasting impacts of using decolonization as a mere metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). A safe place to start this work individually is in self-reflection and evaluation. Guiding questions in this space could be:

1. How much do I know?
2. Where are gaps in my knowledge?
3. How do I fit in this conversation?
4. Am I contributing to decolonization work that is supportive of Indigenous sovereignty?

These are only beginning questions that will be expanded upon depending on the direction and depth of understanding you are willing to explore. There is no right or wrong way to begin this exploration, which is why it is impossible to ask someone the question of “where do I start?” Everyone must start with themselves. This exploration opens up when we look at what ignorance we possess. To really come to understand the gaps in our knowledge however, we need to assess and reflect on how we are positioned in the world, what privileges we have been given, and what power we possess.

Positionality, Privilege and Power

Who are you? Look within, think about your identity – what makes you... you? We operate in social, academic, and personal spaces without the time to consider who we are and how that information contributes to why we make decisions the way we do; why we interact the way we do, and why particular information is more salient than others. There is a significance in knowing who you are. The ability to be in relation with others is a skill, a gift, and a determinant to how an interaction will play out and what that relationship may look like down the road. You must be willing to ask yourself what it means to be who you are. Your understanding of who you are also lends itself to the power and privilege we possess. Recognizing how power and privilege intersect with positionality grounds us in an authentic relationship with others.

While challenging, asking about power and privilege uncovers distinct advantages experienced by some individuals because of who they are, how they look, and the positive perceptions of others. We cannot control these factors that contribute to the amount of power and privilege we possess. Power and privilege can be possessed simply due to our identity, family, and social environments we are born into (ie. Socio-economic status, identity, culture, wealth, support systems). Privilege and power are challenging concepts to unpack as neither can be seen, held in the hand, or tested. They are not only unseen but are also not awarded equally. When we do reflect on power and privilege, however, we may experience emotional responses ranging from anger to guilt or even shame. We can acknowledge what we possess, identify how it impacts our experiences in the world and examine the impact it may have on our interactions and relationships. We are learning beings, ever-evolving and learning who we are in the world. This is the basis of Indigenous philosophy(ies).

... the indigenous approach to philosophy does not lie in assessing the truth of a proposition through logic, but in how the self is located in the world. A general indigenous philosophy may look most essentially at how one is positioned in relation to another. (Mika, 2015, p. 1137)

Dancing with Ignorance

The word ignorance is derived from Latin words *in* (not) and *gnarus* (knowledgeable or acquainted with) and simply stated, ignorance is a lack of knowledge (Peel, 2008). While Peel goes into great detail on different aspects, reasoning for, and foundations of ignorance, I would argue that ignorance itself is not a bad thing. The negative connotations associated with ignorance, tend to influence us towards moral decision-making (or choices) around what information to use in scenarios where ignorance can be claimed. However, if we agree to acknowledge ignorance and work towards filling gaps in our knowledge, then ignorance does not carry that negative connotation. In fact, if we choose to remain ignorant, this is something else entirely – this is a willful choice to not expand our knowledge. As an educator, I have found that unpacking ignorance reveals a world of the unknown to us. We cannot expect to know everything but we can be humble when a learning opportunity is presented. A noted barrier we do not often acknowledge lies in the fact that academic spaces carry an unspoken expectation of becoming the expert. There is a predominating belief that once we graduate into our respective professions or trades that not knowing something may be seen as unprofessional, or that asking questions for clarification is a sign of incompetence.

Someone once told me years ago that we don't know that we don't know something until someone says we don't know. This is easier to accept, when we view ignorance as a gap we have not come across or interacted with yet. However, ignorance can also be willful, a choice that we make. This is when ignorance can be troublesome and an indication of close-mindedness; perhaps as an attempt to avoid discomfort. Additionally, we face a barrier of being frozen with fear. Fear of not knowing where to start, who to approach first, or where to begin with building new partnerships/relationships. Much of this is founded in wanting to avoid feeling uncomfortable – our fear of discomfort. Fear of offending someone or making a mistake. This fear can be mediated by asking in a good way, being respectfully curious or being explicit about not knowing how to ask a question. Indigenous communities are ready and willing to walk beside you as you learn. Once we achieve awareness, we can unpack that feeling to identify the utility behind the sensation of discomfort.

Feelings of discomfort carry an inherent utility; it can give us information about ourselves and a situation if we are brave enough to explore. Ask why you feel discomfort, why is this feeling present? Once you arrive at a place where you are willing to unpack the feeling of discomfort you can begin the work of asking if there something you can do to alleviate that discomfort. The problem with discomfort is the paralysis we can feel when we do not know where to start. Though we believe we know ourselves very well, it can be challenging to look at ourselves. When we spend our days distracted by everything in our lives, we can forget to look at the self. This is our sign to add self-reflection to our toolbox. Self-reflection gives us the space to examine all the parts that make us who we are, how we walk in the world, the relationships we possess, and how we process information. Our positionality, privilege, and power will also be spotlighted in these moments of self-reflection.

Gather Gifts – Build Your Toolbox

I have had great opportunities to meet mentors, knowledge holders, and Elders in my time as student, researcher, and now teacher. In that time, I have come to see these encounters and the teachings I have received during them, as gifts. Even when we encounter others, this interaction is a gift. When others give us their time and teachings, this is a gift. If another person acknowledges you and sees you, this is a gift. Time, knowledge, space, relationships... each of these things are gifts when we consider what is valuable to us. Likewise, to give these things to another is a gift. Social structures, jobs, families, and academia keep our lives busy and occasionally some of our daily priorities will blind us to the opportunities to express compassion or sit with gratitude.

I use the metaphor of gifts to shift the burden I have witnessed in academia over the huge amount of transformation required to do good work towards reconciliation and inclusivity with Indigenous Peoples and communities. When we see opportunity within the gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the world, we might just give ourselves a chance to keep exploring while permitting ourselves to engage other ways of knowing and understanding our surroundings. Opportunity lies in considering a few tools I have come to use in classrooms with my students. It is my intention to share these tools that students have provided positive feedback on. They are tools I have borrowed from Indigenous scholars who have come before me.

Ethical Space

Two years ago in 2020, Eddie Benton-Benai passed away after a lifetime of work reminding people of virtues and how to live in a good way according to Anishnabe teachings. Specifically, these teachings are the Seven Grandfather Teachings expressing virtues we should aspire to as humans. They are: Wisdom, Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth (Benton-Benai, 1988). These virtues (teachings) were given to the people by Creator as our responsibilities to ourselves and for one another. Each of us knows these virtues, they are rarely discussed beyond childhood and I do not hear them spoken about in academic spaces. This is a call to bring these conversations of virtues back and employ them in our capacity as learners and teachers. In tandem with the tools I'm about to present for your consideration, these virtues will be the foundation for transformative practice in academia. We can fall back to these virtues as a reminder of why and as inspiration as we navigate the abstract concepts being discussed next. I begin with an invisible space packed with information, this space known as the Ethical Space.

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The concept of ethical space was first introduced by Roger Poole (1972) and expanded upon by Cree scholar Dr. Willie Ermine (2007). These early discussions centered upon the subjectivity of knowledge, that our knowledges are shaped and influenced by our worldview (Laurila and Carey, 2022). Ethical space can be practiced on your own by considering how you would like to be approached by someone. According to Dr. Willie Ermine:

The ethical space is formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are poised to engage each other. It is the thought about diverse societies and the space in between them that contributes to the development of a framework for dialogue between human communities. (Ermine, 2007, p. 193)

Engaging in an ethical space is an active decision by people carrying disparate worldviews to come together and agree to a respectful and ethical space between them, in order to facilitate healthy communication. In order to see and hear one another without judgement, participants agree to co-create a transparent relationship. The ethical space is literally that space we perceive between peoples that contains our respective epistemologies, ontologies, cultures, communities. That space between peoples is not empty (Ermine, 2007). That space carries beliefs, notions, values, stereotypes, bias, and even racist or discriminatory thoughts. We cannot control the existence of these thoughts but we can acknowledge them in order to see the impact or harm they can create if not addressed appropriately. Blended with cultural safety, two-eyed seeing, and a pinch of humility, we begin adding to our toolbox for facilitating healthy and truthful conversations. The words of Sto:lo author, Lee Maracle, also calls our attention to virtues:

Humility is critical to recognizing and examining our failures, our mistakes, our contribution to broken relations, and the origins of dropping our bundles, neglecting our relations, ignoring our obligations, and the emptiness that creates. Courage gives us determination to overcome our fear of self-examination, of admitting to our neglect. Honesty teaches us to own our self, our emotionality, our thoughts, our desires, and our very path. Face ourselves. Respect, generosity, and love guide our path to relationship. (Maracle, 2017, p. 131)

The virtues discussed by Lee Maracle, carry our Indigenous philosophies across generations so we can live harmoniously. We must do the same in academia. Embodying these virtues, the Seven Grand Father Teachings and the virtues mentioned by Lee above require a reflexive practice.

Cultural Safety

A reflexive practice involves getting to know the self in relation to others. One way to do this is through employing practices based in cultural safety.

Cultural safety is when your entire being feels at ease: you do not feel threatened or defensive, alienated, or isolated; you feel supported, safe, secure and protected. You are free to embrace your cultural identity without fear of judgement, harassment, racism, or discrimination. (Newton, 2021, p. 7-8)

To be culturally safe, one engages in actions and conversations that empower and acknowledge others with a commitment to ensuring the safety of others (Newton, 2021; Greenwood et al., 2017). By contrast, actions or words that serve only to disempower, devalue, or diminish others are culturally unsafe. The added complexity to this conversation is that we cannot determine for ourselves if we are being culturally safe in our interactions with others. We cannot say we are acting in a culturally safe manner, only the recipient or person holding the least amount of power can say that they feel culturally safe (Newton, 2021). Blended with humility, cultural safety is expressed through a lifelong commitment to learning not only about others but ourselves through self-reflection and evaluation.

We can, however, recognize the sovereignty of the person we are interacting with. But what is cultural safety without our ability or willingness to engage with two-eyed seeing?

Etuptmumk/Two-eyed Seeing

The advantage of Two-Eyed Seeing is that you are always fine-tuning your mind into different places at once, you are always looking for another perspective and better way of doing things. (Marshall et al. 2018, p. 46)

Two-eyed seeing is an acknowledgement of the reality we are living in. We each possess our own epistemologies, ontologies, and set of axiologies that are shaped by how we are raised, the people who influence us, and our experiences. It is a coming together of strengths within diverse knowledge systems to create a binocular effect capitalizing on the best of multiple ways of knowing. Using the best of multiple ways of seeing, understanding and doing and employing them in a way that serves you best. It is a way to avoid recycling our own thoughts and ways of doing things which puts us at risk of never evolving or striving to do better. Two-eyed seeing is natural for Indigenous peoples because other ways of seeing the world were imposed on our communities. The foundation of two-eyed seeing is the embodiment of knowledge systems coming together to find not only common ground but overlapping strengths to become united in seeing one another (Iwama et al., 2009; Hatcher et al., 2009; Bartlett et al., 2012). The foundations of two-eyed seeing include respect, responsibility, relevance, and reciprocity.

Respect, Responsibility, Relevance, Reciprocity

These four concepts first highlighted by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) within the context of First Nations education effectively articulated the mindset and expectations that shape Indigenous thought and interaction with learning. The concepts of respect, responsibility, relevance, and reciprocity unpack a different way of not only delivering information through teaching but also how people learn and process information. How do each of these concepts inform your understanding and of Indigenous and settler worldviews?

Connecting these four concepts in our relationships with others encourages and supports respectful relations that are cognizant of others while ensuring that we are adding value to a scenario that has the potential to profoundly benefit everyone involved.

Hagwil yaan (Walk Gently/Softly), Algyaxs yaan (Speak gently)

It is easy to focus solely on the self, to the extent that we almost become unaware of not only our impacts on others but the experiences and histories others carry. The impact of not only our words but our mere presence in a room can shift the tides of interactions towards positive or

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negative outcomes. Growing up I was taught to speak and walk gently, though the words were never spoken, they were inherent in my socialization. Oftentimes this teaching came insulated with moments of silence, and not knowing the desire to fill quiet and empty space with noise or speaking that did not add to or enrich a moment. To sit and listen, to be, and to witness in a good way were the values I was raised by.

To walk gently and speak gently is a heightened awareness of not only those around us but also the impact we are capable of making. Far-reaching effects exist in words, decisions, actions. This harkens to the Indigenous philosophy teachings of holism and interconnectedness; two teachings which beg our attention and nurturing spirit. When we begin to see the whole – the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional components of a person we begin to see how we are connected to one another, the land, the animals, and the environment. This connection then feeds into relationships, accountability and trust.

Earning Trustworthiness

The community doesn't trust us, they carry a deep mistrust towards the university, healthcare.

Indigenous communities don't trust, I give up. What's the point of trying to help?.

In academia within the context of Indigenous history, philosophy, health, research, and reconciliation, I've witnessed stories depicting the lack of trust Indigenous communities have towards academics, health care providers, and others in positions of service. We often hear that Indigenous peoples carry mistrust towards outsiders, as demonstrated by my reflection above. I challenge you to shift your gaze and look at this from a different angle. We should ask why someone from outside of the community would be unworthy of trust. What can the external group do in order to earn trustworthiness? Being accountable for our actions is the first step to earning someone's trust. Accusing Indigenous communities of not trusting sectors that have not earned trust makes this an Indigenous problem, thus absolving external entities from earning trust. It also portrays an image of violent and silent paternalism (ie., If you don't want help, I won't help you).

We need to look at trust from the perspective of trustworthiness. Much time is spent trying to unravel the complicated web of reasons communities do not trust outsiders, when not enough time is spent asking what makes a person or entity worthy of trust? Shifting how we think of trust takes the onus off Indigenous Peoples and communities and is essential to creating lasting and meaningful relationships where we can explore moments of joy while learning of one another.

Moments of Joy

Take those moments to celebrate joy. Make space for laughter and healing; Jesse Wentz (2021) describes how events in our lives, whether positive or negative, can still be framed in joy. His writing takes us on a journey to fully appreciate joy in the world while asking us to hold up a mirror up to see our collective hunger for stories of pain and trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples. This appetite exists within academia; I too am guilty of asking people to come to classes in order for students to witness their pain and trauma. Nowadays, I invite people to meet students with any stories to share, whether positive or negative, and fully intend to introduce

students to a way of teaching and learning that needs to be fostered in the university. Knowledge offered through stories and relationship, provide meaning and value that transcend the typical classroom experience.

I think often about reframing our stories in joy. I remember watching my Dzi'is/Gamma move to a quiet corner of the mall in Prince Rupert when she ran into her sisters. Back then I thought how sweet and innocent it was to have such a strong bond and to move away to talk to them the way she did; to give her sisters her full attention. I learned on a car ride to Campbell River with her in 2012 that they moved to the quiet corner of the mall so they could talk to each other in our language, speak Sm'algyax without anyone hearing them. I didn't hear her speak our language out loud (among family) until 2012 and I heard the joy in her voice blended with that hearty, rich, and healing grandmother laugh. There was no fear that day when I heard her speak our language. I was 28 years old hearing her speak our words for the first time. Though I never learned what she said, it remains with me. She would be gone two years later after a short battle with cancer. Many of my great aunts and uncles passed away in a short time frame, something my Dzi'is/Gamma said they always knew would happen. I grieve the loss of her and I grieve for never being able to speak to her in our language. Still now, almost 8 years after she went to the spirit world, my Dzi' is still teaching me; although she would never claim to being a teacher and would probably flinch at me even hinting at it! How she walked through this world, related to others, and behaved informed my evergreen philosophies around who I am, how I see the world, and the fundamental building blocks for decision-making I have.

If we can link our experiences to not only the knowledge we have gathered over our respective lifetimes to how these philosophies inform and manifest in our daily lives, we open our eyes to a broader perspective of the world. A deeper meaning to each of our actions is found when we open ourselves to the role we play in the world, our orientation to everything, and our Indigenous philosophy(ies). Traditionally, Indigenous Peoples have asserted this orientation since time immemorial. Indigenous philosophies are not, like Western philosophy, driven to seek out the truth of propositions guided by objectivity. They are, however, aimed at critically looking at our positionalities; how we are positioned in relationship to the world and others we are in relationship with.

Thoughts to Carry Forward

One arm of philosophy that is allowed to remain in the realms of dominant philosophy, although even then begrudgingly and as long as it resides on the outskirts, is metaphysics. It is towards this discipline that many of us Indigenous writers tend to gravitate, because it promises to explain the very basis of orientation towards the world. (Mika, 2015, p. 1137)

The insights presented here are my own. They are the words of a Ts'mysen, Irish, Scottish academic philosophizing on the experience of teaching, engaging critical decolonial dialogue, and helping others to build a toolbox in their learning journey. The Indigenous part of my mind naturally gravitates towards understanding my position in the world while helping others to reflect on theirs. Knowing self is the first step to healthy relationships, something we should nurture more in academic spaces. Shaping conversations and relationships to Indigenous Peoples and knowledge in the academy will require unpacking what we think education should be. The current education system is at a crossroads where we are now exposing the gaps, the

missing pieces and stories in our collective knowledges. This unpacking will be challenging and lifelong as it calls us to examine the philosophy(ies) we were socialized with. Education and philosophy have been dominated by Western-based perspectives and philosophies that have excluded Indigenous values. As a result, it has skewed the dominant structures and systems that define our concept of 'society'. Exploring how these philosophies are incompatible with Indigenous ways of knowing and being, would be an ideal place to start a decolonization journey.

As Indigenous people, we were not placed in this world to objectively deconstruct it in order to find the most right answer of them all; this is not to say this path is completely wrong, but it does not suit everyone and neglects to include us as beings in the conversation. Indigenous peoples know and live by our original purpose to be part of the world in good relationship to pass on to future generations. These are the philosophies we can make space and time for. We do this work by knowing who we are, acknowledging one another, and living values of respect, responsibility, relevance, and reciprocity (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991).

Collectively, we have an opportunity to build ethical spaces that allow us to bring a two-eyed seeing perspectives to our understanding of the world. Ensuring that multiple ways of knowing and being in relation is a shared responsibility, is critical in achieving this goal. All spaces within academia need to find the courage to transform colonial spaces through decolonization and indigenization. It starts with the toolbox you build.

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