



Knowledge as the Gift: Our journey in de-centering colonial knowledge structures in Physical and Health Education teacher education

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Author Biographies

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Abstract

We begin by extending our deep appreciation to the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples, whose traditional territory provides us with places to learn, teach, and sustain ourselves. We are uninvited guests on their traditional and ancestral Lands. As non-Indigenous people we are required to confront our complicity in colonialism and uphold our responsibilities to Indigenous peoples and Lands. In this reflective paper, we interweave duo-ethnographic narrative and critical self-reflection with theoretical literature to interrupt and transform our Physical and Health Education teacher education (PHETE) practices through de-centering colonial practices and Indigenization. Willingness to sit with the complex emotions and contradictions that arise was imperative and we approach our learning journey with humility at the forefront. We reflect critically to prepare for reconciliation in relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues, students, and communities, and develop strategies for meaningfully pursuing this work throughout our careers and lives.

Keywords: physical education; health education; teacher education; PHETE; reconciliation

Résumé

Nous tenons à exprimer notre profonde gratitude aux peuples Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees et Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) et W̱SÁNEĆ dont le territoire traditionnel nous offre des lieux pour apprendre, enseigner et subvenir à nos besoins. Nous sommes des invités non conviés sur leurs terres traditionnelles et ancestrales. En tant que personnes non-autochtones, nous devons faire face à notre complicité dans le colonialisme et assumer nos responsabilités envers les peuples autochtones et leurs territoires. Dans cet article réflexif, nous entremêlons un récit duo-ethnographique, une démarche d'autoréflexion critique et la littérature théorique afin de remettre en question et de transformer nos pratiques de formation à l'enseignement en éducation physique et à la santé (PHETE) par la décentration des pratiques coloniales et l'intégration des perspectives autochtones. La volonté d'accueillir les émotions complexes et les contradictions qui émergent de cette démarche s'est avérée essentielle et nous abordons ce parcours d'apprentissage avec humilité. Nous menons une réflexion critique afin de nous préparer à la réconciliation dans les relations avec les collègues, les personnes étudiantes, ainsi que les communautés autochtones et non autochtones. Nous cherchons également à développer des stratégies pour poursuivre ce travail de manière significative tout au long de nos carrières et de nos vies.

Mots-clés: éducation physique; éducation à la santé; formation à l'enseignement; PHETE; réconciliation

Introduction

In British Columbia (BC), the Physical and Health Education (PHE) curriculum encompasses student learning in diverse areas including physical literacy, healthy and active living, social and community health, and mental wellbeing (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care, n.d.). As part of the learning targets in PHE, teachers are encouraged to include Indigenous perspectives in students' learning opportunities guided by the First Peoples Principles of Learning (Chrona, 2022; 2014). The First Peoples Principles of Learning were developed by Indigenous educators and knowledge holders in BC to guide Indigenous education and are considered common to the diverse Indigenous traditions in the region (Chrona, 2022; 2014). As PHE teacher education (PHETE) instructors, we must interrogate how modernity reframes relational teachings as content to be delivered, rather than practices to be embodied (Coulthard, 2014; Tea and Ladybugboss, 2024).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada ([TRC], 2015) formulated 94 Calls to Action that advance reconciliation in Canada in response to the history of residential schools, including specific actions for Education for Reconciliation. During this reflective journey we focused on Calls 62 and 63. These calls include the need to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into the classroom and the need for pre-service and in-service training for teachers (TRC, 2015). We view our goal as teacher-educators to support PHE pre-service teachers in engaging with contemporary Indigenous perspectives. We aim to help them consider how they will engage Indigeneity within PHE, and their overall teaching practices. Similarly, PHE scholars have emphasized the importance of relational learning with Indigenous communities and Knowledge Keepers. Research with Mi'kmaw Elders and community leaders demonstrates that culturally relevant PHE requires educators to meaningfully engage with Indigenous understandings of wellbeing, movement, and relationships to Land to foster inclusive and culturally sustaining learning environments (Robinson et al., 2016).

Teachers often have a limited understanding of the impacts of Canadian colonialism because of their own education in a colonial system (Csontos, 2019). This lack of understanding is not incidental, it is an intended outcome of a post-colonial regime (Andreotti et al., 2021). Tuck and Yang (2012) assert that awareness and conscientization cannot be viewed as decolonization, which requires concrete actions to give back Land. However, it is a required step to enable the work of decolonization (Csontos, 2019). Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous Land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools (Tuck & Yang, 2012). We understand that absorption, adoption, and transfer of the term "decolonization" is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we aim not to offer it as a swappable term for other actions to improve PHETE (Tuck & Yang, 2012). We, therefore, centered our journey on learning of and from Land and Indigenous peoples. Our objective is to reflect critically to prepare ourselves for moving toward reconciliation in our relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues, students, and communities, and in our work as teacher educators. We have chosen to dialogically document, analyze, and probe our experiences as non-Indigenous teacher-educators in PHETE, therefore, the research question we sought to answer is: As non-Indigenous teacher-educators, how can we begin the work of Indigenizing and de-centering colonialism in our teaching within PHETE and develop strategies to meaningfully pursue this work?

Our Context

As non-Indigenous teacher-educators in Canadian postsecondary education for a combined 22 years (plus 10 years in secondary education for Gruno), we acknowledge that our institutional educational experiences have privileged settler-colonial systems. As non-Indigenous scholars, we have a responsibility to engage in this process of unlearning, and we are encouraged by the stories of other settlers on this journey (e.g., Kilborn & Taylor, 2024; Lorusso et al., 2019; Mooney, 2021). We hope that by sharing our experiences including our rich and challenging emotions, we may provide encouragement to other settlers to begin or continue their own journey.

In 2015, the Calls to Action urged all Canadians to learn the truth about residential schools and the genocidal legacy against Indigenous people and communities (TRC, 2015). In response to these Calls to Action, many Canadian universities and colleges developed strategic plans to “Indigenize” their campuses. However, these institutional strategic plans do not typically identify how to implement at the classroom level (Mooney, 2021). On Canadian campuses, only 1.4 percent of professors identify as Indigenous (Shen, 2018), placing unfair pressure on those professors to teach or lead decolonization efforts. This highlights the need for non-Indigenous faculty to prioritize unlearning and learning how to de-center colonial practices and Indigenize teaching practices. We understand learning from and alongside our Indigenous colleagues is of utmost importance, but the responsibility to seek out knowledge and resources is ours. Slowly, we are working to undo our mis-education, including learning dominant misrepresentations about Indigenous peoples during our foundational educational experiences (Iseke-Barnes, 2005).

We realize we are deeply embedded in and formed by a settler-colonial society, creating a challenge to separate our thinking from the society we were raised in. Therefore, we spent over two years together contemplating these ideas, learning from Indigenous colleagues and Knowledge Keepers, and discussing how we can begin de-centering colonial knowledges in our teaching of PHETE and re-centering “land [as] the real teacher” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 222). Along with our weekly dialogue and reflection, we committed to attending workshops and talks and reading academic papers and books together to focus our discussions. For example, we completed a Reconciliation Education course through the First Nations University of Canada and the Outdoor Learning Store (<https://outdoorlearningstore.com/4-seasons/>), which gifted us opportunities to listen to and learn from Indigenous Knowledge Keepers across Turtle Island. For our readings, Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer's work (2013, 2024) had a profound impact on both of us and is interwoven throughout our Findings and Discussion section. We recognize that our thoughts are shaped by the words, teachings, and writings that we have engaged in during our learning journey. We have deep gratitude for Indigenous Knowledge Keepers who are willing to share their teachings or stories in a public domain and feel immense privilege for these learning opportunities.

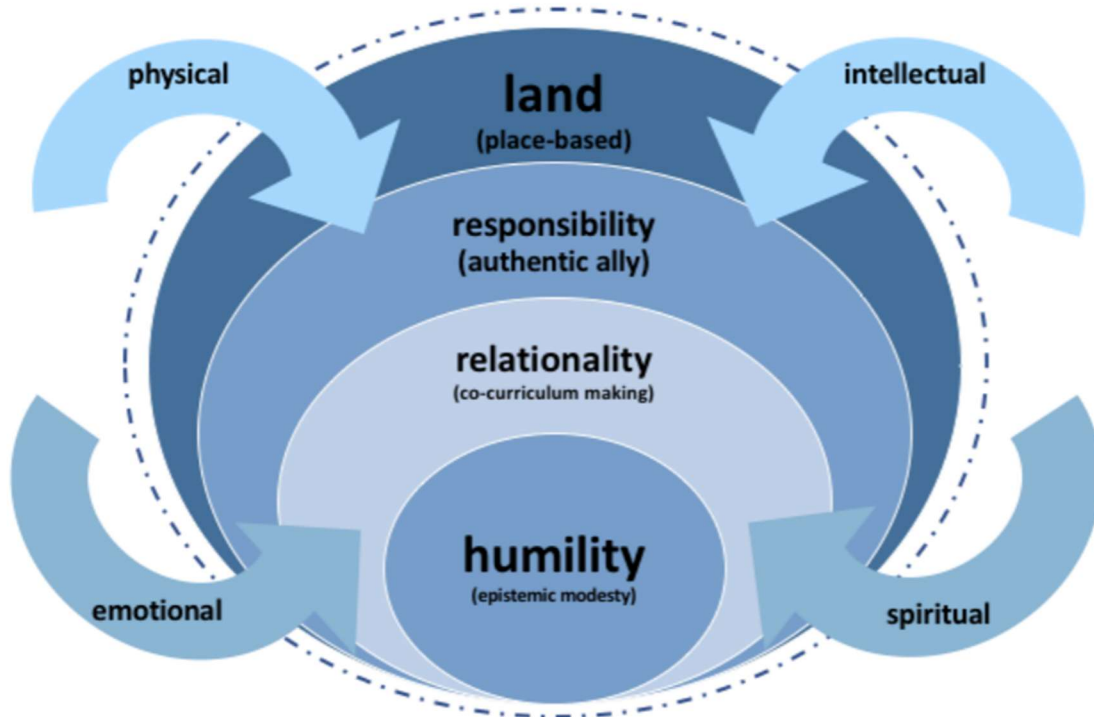
Methodology

This study employs duo-ethnography, narrative writing, and critical self-reflection to explore our stories of experience, as we learn and ask questions about de-centering colonial practices and Indigenizing our PHETE teaching practices. We selected a duo-ethnographic methodological approach as the opportunity to reflect critically and share aloud provided space for mistake-making, unsettling conversations, and deeper learning. The narratives presented in this paper were written separately and together over two years, and were influenced by the readings, workshops, and podcasts we engaged with over that time. We relied on Mooney's (2021) process model, Settler Starting Points (Figure 1), as a framework to analyze and structure our narratives.

Within this section, we describe our process of duo-ethnography, our data collection methods, and the Settler Starting Points model we utilized for data analysis.

Figure 1

Settler Starting Points (Mooney, 2021)



Duo-Ethnography

In this article, we focus on our role as educators in PHETE and learning in Indigenizing our teaching practices. Acknowledging this path is challenging (Mooney, 2021), we chose to walk it together when accessing our implicit knowledge and disturbing moments that have the potential to transform us as educators and people. Burleigh and Burm (2022) define duo-ethnography as “a collaborative research methodology that invites researchers to serve as sites of inquiry” where two voices work “in tandem to untangle and disrupt meanings about a particular social phenomenon” (p. 1). We selected duo-ethnography as it provides opportunity for self-study and reflection, with the accountability that another person witnessing brings (Burleigh & Burm, 2022). In this duo-ethnography, we came together to engage in conversational dialogue about decolonizing PHETE, and worked together to untangle and disrupt our own assumptions while acknowledging the broader narratives influencing how we see ourselves and others (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Duo-ethnography is often employed in the teacher education space to explore complexity and tension that teacher educators face in preparing their teacher candidates to critically examine their pedagogical perspectives (Burm & Burleigh, 2022; Loeffler & White, 2022; Rudnick & Atkinson, 2026). We remain cautious not to treat our storytelling as a substitute for structural change. Personal narrative must be situated within, not isolated from, the systems of colonial violence we seek to disrupt (Smith, 2016; Tea & Ladybugboss, 2024).

Data Collection

Alongside our discussions on the works we were listening to and reading, we employed walking and journaling as additional methods. Every week for a year, we walked together and discussed the questions described in Mooney's (2021) *Settler Starting Points: Humility, Relationality, Responsibility, and Land*. Place is a significant concept in walking research, where place is a specific location and a process or an event (Springgay & Truman, 2018). Walking is a way of becoming responsive to place; it activates modes of participation that are situated and relational (Springgay & Truman, 2018). While walking we acknowledged the more-than-human world and recognized how place-based research is entrenched in ongoing settler colonization. During our walks we discussed how grateful we were to learn of the Indigenous perspectives that center Land, where human and more-than-human are entwined. We both kept a journal to summarize our thoughts after our walks and when stories arose individually.

Data Analysis: Settler Starting Points

Mooney (2021) developed the Settler Starting Points which is intended for settler engagement in Indigenizing and de-centering colonial curricular and teaching practices in Canadian higher education. The model integrates elements of Pidgeon's (2014) Indigenous holistic framework: intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical, which challenges Western academic emphasis on intellectual reason by valuing a wholeness of human experiences. The model also incorporates values consistent with the four Rs: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Marker, 2004). The four starting points - humility, relationality, responsibility, and Land - appear as overlapping and interconnected circles, infused by the values of holistic engagement with mind, spirit, heart, and body (Mooney, 2021). By calling on these values of humility, relationality, responsibility, and Land as non-Indigenous peoples, we do not wish to appropriate Indigenous cultures, but to recognize and honour them. The model represents Indigenous and settler individuals, communities, students, academics, Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and administrators working alongside one another to transform post-secondary teaching and learning (Mooney, 2021).

In the next section, we include excerpts of our own self-reflective stories. We have arranged our narratives and references within the four tenets of the Settler Starting Points process model and provide sub-themes that fall within each tenet. Sub-themes were identified through a critical, reflexive discussion, which highlighted key learning points on our journey, and the subtheme titles reflected relevant learnings from Indigenous voices that we were honoured to learn from during this process. We wrote this paper in a collaborative process, each taking a turn, and returning the paper to the other with edits, annotations, reflections, and comments.

Findings and Discussion

Here we organize our thoughts, stories, and reflections within Mooney's (2021) four settler starting points: Humility, Relationality, Responsibility, and Land.

Humility

Mooney (2021) subtitled this Humility Settler Starting Point as "Epistemic Modesty". Within this tenet we recognize there is still much we must learn. Humility and modesty are required when entering this challenging arena. To learn to decolonize teaching practices, we need to face our own prejudices. We want to create a safe, collegial community, starting with our partnership,

in order to learn better (Yeo et al., 2019). Within this Starting Point, two themes emerged within our conversations: (a) learning spirit, and (b) feeling discomfort and being disturbed.

Learning Spirit

Colonized education systems often taught and teach Indigenous peoples to distrust Indigenous knowledges including the wisdom of their Elders and their learning spirit, which provides guidance to continuously seek out knowledge and reconsider assumptions (Battiste, 2013). Knowing better is the foundation of doing better and synthesizing culturally responsive and decolonizing practices calls for transformation of the current education system (Smith, 2016). At the center of change is the mind and spirit (Smith, 2016). For decolonization to happen, educators must engage in a process that requires flexibility in thinking and accept multiple ways of knowing and strive to understand from others' perspectives. Little Bear (2000) stated, "no matter how dominant a worldview is, there are always other ways of interpreting the world" (p. 77). As non-Indigenous educators we must value other ways of knowing. The challenge for us educators is to question worldviews and allow for the possibility of differing worldviews to exist (Smith, 2016). Within PHE specifically, Indigenous youth have emphasized the importance of educators questioning dominant assumptions within education and intentionally creating inclusive learning environments. Halas et al. (2012) report that Indigenous youth value teachers who actively build relationships with students, demonstrate respect for Indigenous cultures, and ensure that PHE spaces feel welcoming and equitable for Indigenous learners.

A line from Kimmerer's (2013) work, "We need to learn to listen" (p. 10), greatly resonated with us. We discussed many times the importance of learning from Indigenous colleagues, local Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and the more-than-human world. A common thread throughout our discussions was how to seek out resources to strengthen our journey, while remembering that our Indigenous colleagues are asked too often to be the guides for their settler colleagues. We prioritized finding existent knowledge sources (e.g. books, podcasts, courses). We chose materials that were Indigenous owned and created, reflective of the place or Land we were situated on, and references we came across in our journey. We recognize that our own self-direction guided this process, and we discussed and disrupted each other's assumptions about our choices.

Kimmerer (2013) describes the Original Instructions – ethical prescriptions for hunting, family life, and ceremonies that made sense for Indigenous peoples' world. She explained, "These are not 'instructions' like commandments, though, or rules; rather, they are like a compass: they provide an orientation but not a map" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 7). *Grano: I have been thinking about the First Peoples Principles of Learning which are so important in the BC curriculum. They are ways of knowing and seeing which are like a compass, not a map. I realize that learning from others is in the principles rather than following prescribed instructions, lesson plans or resources. I am (hopefully) finding my own pathway towards de-centering colonialism in my teaching, finding resources and learning to use the compass Indigenous educators have gifted to me.*

Feeling Discomfort and Being Disturbed

Feeling our discomfort throughout many of our conversations moved us into moments of unsettlement, and recognition of our limited knowledge (Easton et al., 2019; Regan, 2010). We read one of Kimmerer's (2013) first lines, "[Sweetgrass] thrives along disturbed edges" (p. 2), as a metaphor for our goals. *Buckler: It felt like the book was speaking directly to me. In this journey we were embarking on we were disturbing the "norms" of our teaching and opening space for new ways to share and exchange knowledge. It gave me hope for the possibilities.* This is

something we have discussed repeatedly throughout our journey. We have both taken leaps as educators to try new things and disrupt and disturb our ingrained teaching practices. *Gruno: This reminded me of the Lil'wat principle of Cwelelep to which I introduce my PHETE students: "recognizing the need to sometimes be in a place of dissonance and uncertainty, so as to be open to new learning"* (Sanford et al., 2014). *I try to model this uncertainty by being open with my students about not having all the answers and still learning myself.*

Buckler: I used to shy away from making my students feel uncomfortable or talking about topics I am not an expert on. But I started a class this year on Indigenous Health by sharing who I am and that I too am learning. I invited my students to correct me if I made errors, and to share what they knew. Several students provided insights and learnings which broadened our discussion. Opening up to my students as a non-expert made the class discussions livelier and more interesting, and I am grateful this journey gave me the courage to feel discomfort.

Relationality

Our conversations within this tenet explored the idea that all beings on earth are connected. Within this tenet, we discussed Kimmerer's (2013) idea of "All flourishing is mutual" (p. 15). Our discussions within this tenet formed into a single theme: Etuaptmumk.

Etuaptmumk

The concept of Etuaptmumk, or Two-Eyed Seeing, was introduced by Mi'kmaq Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall. Etuaptmumk reflects the strengths of Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Western science, and these two knowledge bases are interwoven when approaching learning (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012). Gruno had the honour of meeting Elder Albert¹ at a conference. *Gruno: I learned so much from Elder Albert, but my biggest learning was his key teaching on Etuaptmumk – 'we have to relearn how to walk together in this one world'* (A. D. Marshall, personal communication, May 9, 2024). Recent scholarship in PHETE has similarly explored how embedding Indigenous perspectives can challenge Western-dominant assumptions about PHE and open space for more holistic understandings of health and wellbeing. For example, Kilborn and Taylor (2024) describe efforts within PHETE to incorporate wisdom traditions and Indigenous perspectives as a way of moving beyond achievement-focused Western norms toward more relational and holistic approaches to PHE.

When describing a field of Asters and Goldenrod, Kimmerer (2013) asks, "Why do they stand beside each other when they could grow alone?" (p. 41). This entire chapter of *Braiding Sweetgrass* inspired us to discuss the meeting of Western and Indigenous perspectives. *Gruno: I often contemplate what it would look and feel like if First Peoples Principles of Learning and Western education principles could complement one another like the Asters and Goldenrod. Buckler: How do I bring into my teaching these pieces that are so valuable and important, while also holding the Western teaching ideologies that I find important and meaningful for my students? I think right now I am perhaps not quite yet "teeter[ing] precariously with an awkward foot in each of the two worlds" (p. 47) but starting to dip my foot into the waters of this way of viewing learning and education. I am looking for opportunities to move outside the traditional classroom and class structure (into nature, into circles) and to shift the pace of my courses. And I am reflecting - if I remove a module from my course to do things differently - will it matter that they've*

¹ We wish to acknowledge and thank Elder Albert D. Marshall (Mi'kmaw Nation) for sharing his teachings with Gruno at the 2024 Outdoor Learning Conference (Banff, Alberta, May 9, 2024).

missed that module? Or, will it be better because they have connected deeply with different ideas and concepts?

Buckler reflected on these thoughts, after listening to an episode of the “All My Relations” podcast when she heard the quote, “So when you really dig down to the depth, even of our religion, spirituality, it's extremely scientific. It's all based on Indigenous people. Our practices are based on scientific observations” from Lanakila Mangauil speaking about conflict between Hawaiians and Western researchers around Land preservation (Wilburt, 2020). *Buckler: This quote resonated so deeply with me because I realized that I needed to let go of what I thought integrating Indigenous knowledge into my classes was, and instead of doing it “perfectly”, I needed to just start doing. So, with each iteration of my courses, I bring in new resources and stories told by Indigenous people, and each time I teach my classes, the Indigenous voices get stronger. What I know now is that I do not have to have perfect balance, but instead keep learning more, and sharing Indigenous voices.*

Throughout our teaching over the last few years, we have invited Indigenous voices into our classrooms. These Indigenous colleagues, community members and students have broadened our understanding of what it means to Indigenize and de-center colonial teaching and curricular practices. *Buckler: I have been thinking about providing space as educators for storytelling. From a Western tradition it is seen as a formality to have introductions (e.g., do it as a think-pair-share) in a classroom setting. However, when we have invited Indigenous guests to our classes, they have spent a significant portion of time on introductions.* On the first day of class, introductions between students and ourselves could be the central focus for half or more of the first class. This was something we learned from an Indigenous colleague, who expressed the importance of building relationships. *Buckler: The first time I tried this, my students were hesitant, but as I started sharing about myself, it opened space for them. We do this sitting in circle which has allowed the students to open up more as they are out of the standard Western classroom seating arrangement with everyone facing the instructor.* Indigenization and decolonization are not meant to be easy or comfortable for settlers. When we, settlers, can move past our discomfort with, and hesitation to, Indigenous pedagogies, we can expand our curriculum making it more responsive to learners’ needs. We strive to be less hesitant to let go of our attachment to an established plan and process and open ourselves to different ways of creating learning opportunities.

Another learning we received from Indigenous students related to inclusion and relationality within PHETE. Through an Etuaptmunk lens, we began to recognize that Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing approach inclusion more holistically than dominant Western educational structures, which frequently prioritize order, efficiency, standardization, and individual achievement. Indigenous pedagogies opened space for learners to show up as whole people whose identities, responsibilities, families, cultures, and lived experiences remain interconnected with learning. This challenged our assumptions about what participation, professionalism, and engagement “should” look like within PHETE contexts. *Gruno: I have noticed over the years of teaching within PHETE that when I am teaching non-Indigenous students, we explicitly discuss meaningful inclusion within PHE. Interestingly, when I taught exclusively Indigenous pre-service teachers, inclusion occurred very naturally and without discussion. A third of our group required adaptations to activities for a variety of reasons. The Indigenous students designed lessons and activities that naturally involved all their colleagues without explicit instruction. This experience also made me think of accepting what we usually consider “disruptions” to class: students’ children coming to class, students missing due to cultural commitments; lives that encompass all aspects, not just the course. During Buckler and*

I's discussions, I posed a question: How do we create a classroom culture of inclusivity and allowance for "disruptions" amongst our students?

Responsibility

Within the responsibility tenet, Mooney (2021) explores how to be an authentic ally. The two of us often discussed how we can demonstrate our responsibility within the colonial structures that persist within the university. *Grano: Something I learned from Elder Albert that will stay with me the rest of my life is his teaching that 'nature has rights, we have responsibilities'* (A. D. Marshall, personal communication, May 9, 2024). We aim to be responsible by serving on our Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization committee and sharing our learning journey and our respect for Land as relation through workshops and presentations.

Within PHETE, culturally relevant and relational approaches have been identified as essential for creating learning environments where Indigenous students feel supported. Halas and colleagues (2012) emphasize that educators must move beyond simply "including" culture and instead work as allies who build caring, equitable, and supportive relationships with students while recognizing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous youth. Similarly, Robinson and colleagues (2016) argue that culturally relevant PHE requires educators to critically disrupt dominant Eurocentric approaches and intentionally honour Indigenous ways of knowing and culturally meaningful movement practices. Our conversations under the Responsibility tenet fell within three themes: Reciprocity, Language, and Making Mistakes.

Reciprocity

An important part of our journey was growing our understanding of reciprocity. Kimmerer (2013) explains the idea of reciprocity:

It is an honor to be the guardian of another species...A Black Ash basket is a gift that reminds us of the gifts of other beings, gifts we can gratefully return through advocacy and care. (p. 151)

Within the Western capitalistic culture we are ingrained in, reciprocity stands in stark contrast. Within education, we began to discuss how a 'gift economy' could exist. Kimmerer's (2024) *The Serviceberry* extends this thinking, where a gift economy is rooted in abundance and reciprocity, where value lies in relational exchange and mutual flourishing. This metaphor of the serviceberry as a communal currency challenged us to ask: what if knowledge, like wild fruit, is meant to be shared rather than hoarded? *Buckler: Knowledge as the gift? I think of your Indigenous students this summer, and listening to their stories and knowledge was a gift. Learning from an Indigenous colleague and their willingness to share and be open. Learning from each other – having the opportunity to share our experiences together has provided this space for giving and receiving knowledge. In spaces where knowledge is shared and passed on "the sweetgrass is kept in motion"* (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 27).

We considered this passage regarding basket making from *Braiding Sweetgrass*:

The first two rows of the basket are the hardest ... But then there's the third row - my favorite. At this point, the tension of over is balanced by the tension of under, and the opposing forces start to come into balance. The give and take - reciprocity - begins to take hold and the parts begin to become a whole (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 152).

Only a few months into our journey we realized we were not at a place where we felt we had balanced opposing forces of knowledge, and that this was something for which to strive. Now,

over two years into our journey, we still strive for it. *Buckler: The balance of adhering to one side of the scientific community, where I am required to create manuscripts, apply for funding, and critique the work of others, but also this new piece of teaching and research I am learning and integrating into my life, this decolonial work. Right now, it feels like I am building the first rows of the basket. I am striving to reach that third row where I find my balance.* We recognize that our journey of working to understand decolonization is not taking place in a vacuum. Our roles within the university still exist, and we are still required to do the aspects of our jobs that contrast our journey of de-centering colonial knowledge structures. We feel the internal challenge of this disconnect. We acknowledge that this is lifelong and ongoing work requiring continual reflection, unlearning, relearning, and reimagining as we confront the assumptions and colonial structures that continue to surface in our practice. Reciprocity is not a fixed destination, but an ongoing relational process.

Language

Our journey around Indigenous language has been challenging. We pondered if we feel we can truly teach about Indigenous perspectives while speaking, writing, and thinking in English. As Kimmerer (2013) explains, “in...most...Indigenous languages, we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family” (p. 55). We understand that “authentic Indigenous land-based knowledge is embedded in language and in the stories that transfer knowledge passed down from our ancestors” (Canadian Commission for UNESCO [CCUNESCO], 2021). As two speakers of English only, we questioned how we could contribute to language revitalization. We believe that using local Indigenous languages is important, and when we create Land-based activities for our students we provide the SENĆOŦEN language words. At the same time, we came to understand that Indigenous language learning within PHETE extends far beyond vocabulary or translation. Indigenous ways of communicating are often embodied, relational, rhythmic, Land-connected, and grounded in lived experience. Within PHETE, this may include learning through movement, drumming, song, silence, dance, and time on the Land. These experiences helped us reconsider language not simply as spoken words, but as a way of relating to Land and one another through the body.

Early in our journey, we reflected on a key passage from *Braiding Sweetgrass*, when Dr. Kimmerer shares that as a young person she did not speak an Indigenous language. Bill Tall Bull, a Cheyenne Elder reassured her, “‘If you speak it here,’ he said, patting his chest, ‘They will hear you’” (p. 59). *Buckler: How do I know I’m doing it “right”? And will I know when I have shifted the way I am using language? I want to be able to self-reflect instead of using an outside assessment because only I will know if I am “speaking it here”.* This is a part of our journey we know will be continuous, and “speaking it here” is something we will constantly be working towards. In 2025 Buckler visited New Zealand for a short trip and reflected further on the value of Indigenous language use in the day to day. *Buckler: It made me realize how little SENĆOŦEN I know, and how creating a structural change where local languages are used everywhere would bring language and Indigenous voices to the forefront.*

Making Mistakes

As anticipated, when walking this path, not everything went as planned. We faced our own failures and mistakes as important sites of learning and unlearning. With every mistake made, we gained more experience and developed new questions. In this section, we share some of our reflections about this process.

Gruno: I help lead a schools-university partnership in which 20-30 teachers come together annually to discuss best practices in PHE. Most of the teachers involved are non-Indigenous educators and the last two meetings focused on their thoughts and feelings on embedding Indigenous pedagogies and physical activities in PHE. After two years of discussing fears, concerns, positive first steps and questions, the teachers expressed a desire to have hands-on, practical examples of ways to embed Indigenous learnings and teachings in their K-12 classrooms. At the time, I felt I had learned a lot from Indigenous educators in the field of PHE and I bundled several activities that had been either shared with me to pass along, came from the teachers of the partnership, or were from authentic Indigenous organizations online. I cited all sources and provided contextual information for the origin of each activity. I was proud of the resource bundle and thought I had been respectful in putting it together. An Indigenous colleague happened upon this resource, and questioned several aspects of the resource, including: if I had sought permission from the individual nations to share these activities, the brevity and disconnectedness of the contextual information, and that I had put my name on a bundle of activities that were not mine. At first I felt deflated as I thought I was doing good work. Then I reflected on what my colleague had said and realized that I tried to fit the dynamic concept of culture into a resource bundle, and cultural activities cannot be bundled like 'teambuilding activities'. Although I was explicitly trying not to appropriate Indigenous culture, I had failed in my efforts. Even though I was embarrassed, I had to keep my commitment to doing the work and repair my relationship with my Indigenous colleague who had taken the time and care to talk to me as she knew my heart was in a good place. She has made me want to do better.

Following our self-reflections after this opportunity to learn, we engaged in a workshop series around reconciliation. At one of the workshops, the conversation turned to how non-Indigenous educators can respectfully share Indigenous resources in a culturally sensitive manner. Specifically, a non-Indigenous educator asked about if and how they could share in the Moose Hide Campaign (<https://moosehidecampaign.ca/>). One of the facilitators in the Learning Circle replied, "It's not about teaching culture, it's teaching *about* culture" (April 13, 2023 Learning Circle). We hold this thought in us as we ingrain Indigenous perspectives into our teaching. We consider where the knowledge came from, if we have permission to share it, if there are culturally sensitive components to it that we cannot share, if it requires contextual situating, and if there is time and space to honour the topic.

Land

Throughout this journey, we aimed to practice self-reflexivity, including the ability to observe how we are contributing to ecological harm (Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, 2023). Within this tenet, our discussions fell within three themes: Land as Teacher, Honourable Harvest and Relatedness for Future Generations.

Land as Teacher

Throughout this duo-ethnographic journey, we have reflected on what place and Land means to us as individuals and educators. As we engage in writing and reflecting about decolonizing and Indigenizing PHETE curricula, we have pondered "To what land do [we] belong" (Chambers, 2006)? In BC, most Lands were never ceded and yet the landscapes were violently remapped, redrawn, and renamed. This silenced Indigenous Land-based names and erased them from Canadian historical records, curricula and public memory; this redefined the Land through a Eurocentric lens as an object (CCUNESCO, 2021).

We attended a virtual gathering with Sophie Pierre, who survived the St. Eugene residential school, as part of our learning in the *4 Seasons of Reconciliation* course (2023). What struck us most about her talk was the importance of Land. She spoke of Land as our greatest teacher, who can help us to understand the people and languages of where we live. Land can tell us stories, and connection to Land is the most important part of reconciliation efforts. The following teaching from *Braiding Sweetgrass* inspired us to consider where we go next in our journey:

[Humans] must look to our teachers among the other species for guidance. Their wisdom is apparent in the way that they live. ... They've been on earth far longer than we have been and have had time to figure things out (p. 9).

The importance of place- and Land-based learning is something we value and connect to our students' learning. For example, Gruno created a major assignment in one of her PHETE courses called the Greenspace Lesson Plan: students design and deliver a lesson that is centered on connecting students to a local place. This assignment encourages pre-service teachers to move beyond viewing outdoor spaces simply as locations for physical activity and instead consider how Land can shape relationships, learning, movement, and wellbeing. This has involved inviting students to slow down and observe local ecosystems, learn the Indigenous names and histories of places, incorporate storytelling and reflection into movement experiences, and consider how physical activity can foster reciprocity and connection with Land. We have also encouraged students to critically reflect on whose knowledge is centered within PHE spaces and how Land-based pedagogies may create more relational and inclusive learning experiences. In this way, Land as Teacher becomes not only a conceptual idea, but a pedagogical orientation that shapes how future educators can teach and build relationships within PHETE contexts.

Land relates to how Indigenous people make sense of their lives, so life without meaningful relationships with Land becomes senseless (Spillett, 2021). Land, when capitalized, acts as a proper noun to exemplify the ways that it is incorporated by Indigenous peoples into a kinship system that is culturally regulated (Spillett, 2021). This is critical when we consider the importance of learning from Indigenous peoples who know how to live connected to Land.

Honorable Harvest

Gruno: When considering how to de-center Eurocentric views on Land in my classes, my mind went to harvesting and sharing the Honourable Harvest with students (Kimmerer et al., 2022). We created an Indigenous plant identification activity for students using local, Indigenous created plant cards with the hope of having them think about food in a different way. Often within PHETE we teach nutrition using a colonized perspective (e.g., reading food labels). Additionally, Canada's Food Guide was developed through exploitative research on residential school students, further problematizing a colonized perspective on food education (Mosby, 2013). Both of us feel that food is a vital part of celebration and wellness, but as settlers, our links between food and wellbeing are co-opted from other cultures. We recognize that settler food culture is one of excess, and "the tradition of the Honorable Harvest: [is to] take only what you need and use everything you take" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 148). While reading *Braiding Sweetgrass*, we thought deeply about the role of food in our lives, and how it shapes the education of our students where they learn about food as an inert object, rather than a living entity. Kimmerer (2013) states, "plants speak in a tongue that every breathing thing can understand. Plants teach in a universal language: food" (p. 129).

We embraced these teachings from Dr. Kimmerer and integrated these principles and ideas into our plant identification activity. We reframed the way we teach nutrition and food practices

to our students to support them in reframing their understanding of food. Dr. Kimmerer reflects on strawberries as a gift, where food sits outside of the consumer exchange we typically experience:

Wild strawberries fit the definition of gift, but grocery store berries do not. It's the relationship between producer and consumer that changes everything...wild strawberries ... were not meant to be sold, only to be given (p. 26).

Reciprocity within the food system can only be appreciated and understood when witnessed firsthand on Land.

Relatedness for Future Generations

A fundamental difference between Indigenous and European worldviews is hierarchy versus interdependence with nature (Reconciliation Education, 2023). The hierarchical nature of the Western worldview, where there is “a recognized hierarchy of beings, with ... the human being on top...and the plants at the bottom” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 9) does not exist in Indigenous worldviews. There is an interdependence amongst all living things and each child, youth, adult, and Elder has a role and a responsibility to each other and to the community. Indigenous peoples consider that Land is sacred. They view their relationship with Land as its caretakers and co-creators, not as its masters.

We understood at the beginning of our journey that “just going outside is not enough” and that Land-based education is “understanding our place within, and our responsibility to, the wider universe” (CCUNESCO, 2021). As we struggled with the idea of being settler-educators teaching Land-based education, we were reminded again of Two-Eyed Seeing – “that science validates Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous knowledge validates science...that’s where true reconciliation occurs: when one respects the other’s knowledge” (CCUNESCO, 2021).

Buckler: I reread the preface of Braiding Sweetgrass this afternoon as I was adding notes into my journal, “hold the bundle up to your nose. Find the fragrance of honeyed vanilla over the scent of river water and black earth” (p. ix) ... and this morning my child said, “I just think my favourite smell is when the dust and dirt and sand mix together. It smells the best. It’s where I play.” I considered whether the connection to Land is something we have removed from us through society, rather than something we must find? We can grow to be more connected, but we usually grow away from our connection to Land as we age.

Land-based education invites us into a process where we can begin to discuss and address questions of Land reclamation, reparations, Indigenous sovereignty and jurisdiction while supporting Land-based practices that will sustain Mother Earth (CCUNESCO, 2021). This connection with nature can transition into respect for the more-than-human world, develop children’s sense of self, and help them understand that they are a part of nature (Taylor et al., 2012). As teacher-educators, we believe we are in a position of responsibility to share our learning experiences with our students, to integrate these important values and knowledges into future classrooms.

Conclusion

In writing this paper, we often thought of Kimmerer’s (2013) words, “And now there’s another layer of responsibility, writing on a thin sheet of tree and hoping the words are worth it. Such a thought could make a person set down her pen” (p. 152). We considered setting down our pens many times. However, through this duo-ethnography, we felt it was our responsibility to interrogate our taken-for-granted knowledge, to be uncomfortable, to be disturbed in our thinking

and being, so that we can work to reeducate ourselves and prepare for living, working, and teaching reconciliation. In returning to our research question, how non-Indigenous teacher-educators can begin the work of Indigenizing and de-centering colonialism within PHETE, we recognize that this work is not a checklist of curricular additions, but an ongoing relational, reflective, and pedagogical commitment. Our journey demonstrated that PHETE can become a space for relationality, Land connection, reciprocity, inclusion, storytelling, embodied learning, and the honouring of multiple ways of knowing, being, and moving. We believe this requires PHETE instructors to move beyond viewing Indigenous perspectives as content to be inserted into courses and instead reconsider how we teach, build relationships, structure learning experiences, and understand wellness, movement, and community. As PHE teacher educators, we recognize that in order to prepare our students to do this ongoing work, we must also commit to a lifetime of learning and unlearning. Our journey has only just begun with this paper.

As Kimmerer (2024) writes in *The Serviceberry*, “the currency of a gift economy is relationship, which is expressed as gratitude, as interdependence and the ongoing cycles of reciprocity” (p. 33). Our pedagogical and relational commitments are similarly rooted in the belief that knowledge and community are not commodities but reciprocal, life-giving connections. We took on this work to transform ourselves, therefore, it represents our “for now” understandings (Simpson, 2011). This means engaging not only with content, but with ethical relationality (Donald, 2012) - an ongoing commitment of responsibility to Land, people, and knowledge systems. This paper represents our learning and unlearning up to this point in time, and we commit to continuing to learn and unlearn in reciprocal collaboration with Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues and the more-than-human world in a commitment to transformation and reconciliation.

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