

Indigenizing and Decolonizing the Teaching of Psychology: Reflections on the Role of the Non-Indigenous Ally

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Highlights

- Describes how and why non-Indigenous psychology professors should integrate directives from the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission into their teaching practices.
- Reflects on the successes, questions, and ongoing challenges of decolonizing and Indigenizing the teaching of psychology.
- The core values and practices of Community Psychology are particularly well suited to the endeavor of decolonizing and Indigenizing academia and its curriculum.

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Abstract Canada's 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission published 94 Calls to Action including direction to post-secondary institutions "to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms" as well as to "build student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect." In response, Canadian universities have rushed to "Indigenize" and are now competing to hire Indigenous faculty, from a limited pool of applicants. However, it is missing the true spirit of reconciliation for non-Indigenous faculty to continue with the status quo while assigning the sole responsibility of Indigenizing curriculum to these new hires. How can non-Indigenous psychology professors change their teaching to ensure that all students acquire an appreciation of traditional Indigenous knowledge about holistic health and healing practices, as well as an understanding of Canada's history of racist colonization practices and its intergenerational effects? Community psychologists, particularly those who have established relationships with Indigenous communities, have an important role to play. In this article, I survey the existing literature on Indigenizing and decolonizing psychological curriculum and share ways in which I have integrated Indigenous content into my psychology courses. I also reflect upon the successes, questions, and

ongoing challenges that have emerged as I worked in collaboration with first Anisinaabek First Nations and then Mi'kmaw/L'nu First Nations.

Keywords Decolonization · Indigenization · Indigenous peoples · Teaching Psychology · Truth and Reconciliation · Allyship

Introduction

In 2006/07, the biggest class action lawsuit settlement in Canadian history was reached between the Indigenous survivors of Canada's notorious Indian Residential Schools (which operated from the 1860's to 1998) and the Canadian government, along with several Christian church denominations which ran the 140 so-called "schools" and enacted the government's policy of cultural genocide and forced assimilation upon more than 150,000 imprisoned Indigenous children (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b). The landmark settlement resulted in the Prime Minister of Canada issuing a National Apology to Survivors in June 2008, the establishment of a process for issuing financial compensation to survivors, and an agreement that the Canadian government would fund the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Beginning in 2008, three TRC commissioners and an advisory council (all respected Indigenous leaders) began the complex and deeply emotional task of crossing

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the country to collect survivor statements about the trauma, abuse, and neglect they suffered, while also uncovering information about the many children who died or went missing while “wards of the state” as mandated by then-Canadian laws. This lengthy and often deeply painful process exposed the long-suppressed Truth. To help move Canada toward Reconciliation, the TRC concluded by publishing a 2015 report with 94 Calls to Action. These provide important directives to different sectors in Canadian society about what we need to do differently to make amends, rid our country of current racist practices, and heal the broken relationships, as well as broken treaty promises. For the purposes of this paper and its focus on teaching, Calls #6-12 address ways in which Canada must improve education for Indigenous students, and Calls #62-65 address “Education for Reconciliation” for all Canadians from kindergarten through to post-secondary education. Post-secondary institutions are tasked with “integrat[ing] Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms” as well as to “build student capacity for intercultural understanding,” and to contribute to “a national research program to [...] advance understanding of reconciliation” (pp. 7-8). Special directives remind the federal and provincial governments to provide ongoing funding and training to educators, for these important initiatives to be realized. According to the TRC chair Senator Murray Sinclair (whose Ojibway name is *Mizanay Gheezhik*, meaning “the One Who Speaks of Pictures in the Sky”): “Education is what got us into this mess ... but education is the key to reconciliation” (as cited in Walters, 2015). He also stated with regard to the enormity of the challenge of reconciliation: “We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the way to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing.” In other words, there is no quick nor easy path to reconciliation and healing after more than a century of state-sanctioned cultural genocide and ongoing oppressive discrimination. However, from a more optimistic point of view, the TRC provides us with an abundance of direction, ideas, and suggestions regarding the path ahead.

Academia's Response to the TRC

In response to the TRC's 2015 Calls to Action, many Canadian universities have suddenly rushed in the past four years to “Indigenize” their curriculum offerings (i.e., inserting Indigenous teachings, pedagogy, culture, language, and history into courses that have long been limited to a Eurocentric perspective). Universities are now simultaneously competing with each other to attract and hire Indigenous faculty members to lead these efforts. This process has, in turn, involved considerable trial and

error learning around what “Indigenization” involves. According to Gaudry and Lorenz (2018):

On one end of this continuum, the academy maintains most of its existing structures while assisting Indigenous students, faculty and staff in succeeding under this normalized order, and on the other end, the university is fundamentally transformed by deep engagement with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous intellectuals, and Indigenous knowledge systems for all who attend. [...] For most university administrators, however, this transformative vision of indigenization is too destabilizing and so [they] propose more modest goals of increasing Indigenous student enrollment and hiring more Indigenous faculty and staff.

(p. 218)

As a result, a great deal of pressure and expectation has been placed on these newly hired, pre-tenure Indigenous faculty who may already feel isolated, vulnerable, and alienated as a visible, marginalized minority among a predominance of privileged, Euro-Canadian colleagues on-campus. A panel of Indigenous professors from Canadian universities asserted during a February 2018 CBC radio-broadcast that universities must commit to “cluster-hiring” several cohorts of Indigenous faculty members over a number of years (a long-term strategy), rather than placing the burden on a few individuals (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2018). They also suggested rethinking the “publish or perish” / “sink or swim” competitive and individualistic nature of the Eurocentric academic tenure system which can demoralize some Indigenous graduate students and ultimately discourage them from wanting to complete PhDs and work in university environments.

This may help us to understand (in part) why there is also currently a fairly limited pool of Indigenous students graduating with PhDs in Canada (particularly outside of Indigenous Studies departments) for universities to hire. Additional reasons include Canada's discriminatory education funding formulas for Indigenous students living on-reserve, subtle institutional racism that persists throughout Canadian universities, and university curriculums that are too often grounded in Eurocentric, colonialist assumptions. According to Louie, Poitras Pratt, Hanson, and Ottmann (2017), “the difficulties faced by Indigenous students in Canadian universities, evidenced by lower rates of achievement and completion, primarily stem from well-documented institutional and cultural barriers that set the longitudinal grounds for educational marginalization” (p. 18). The ramifications of this are plainly stated in a 2018 report by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) in response to the TRC report which estimates “that at present there are likely fewer than twelve

Indigenous practicing and/or teaching psychologists in Canada” (p. 25). This suggests that many of the Canadian psychology departments who are seeking to hire Indigenous faculty will not be successful, at least at the present time.

On a more positive note, the chair of CPA’s Indigenous Peoples’ Psychology division, Dr. Jeffrey Ansloos (2019) notes that 50% of these twelve Indigenous psychologists currently hold prestigious Canada Research Chair positions (reflecting that they are well-respected national leaders in innovative mental health research) and furthermore that each one is currently supervising at least three Indigenous graduate students. According to Ansloos (2019), the top priorities of this group (of which he is a member) include seeking to nurture and mentor Indigenous psychology students, and researching ways to reduce suicide and addiction rates in one’s communities. But that too often this small group of psychologists gets called away from their top priorities by post-secondary institutions and other academic organizations who expect them to devote considerable time to educating non-Indigenous psychologists about cultural safety and being culturally appropriate, paying Elders honorariums for opening and closing prayers, colonial history, Indigenizing (i.e., injecting Indigenous content into teaching, counseling, and research practices), and decolonization (i.e., “the interconnected processes of deconstructing colonial ideologies and their manifestations, and reconstructing colonial discourse through Indigenous counter-narratives” (Fellner, 2018, p. 283)). To assist our overburdened Indigenous colleagues in some of this work (especially if their priorities lie elsewhere) may be an appropriate role for non-Indigenous allies.

The Role of the Non-Indigenous Ally

Given this current level of inequity, how can non-Indigenous psychology professors decolonize and Indigenize our teaching and research methods to follow the TRC’s recommendations? How can we transform the way we teach psychology to make it more meaningful and welcoming to Indigenous students, while also educating non-Indigenous students and our academic colleagues about Canada’s racist oppression and its devastating intergenerational effects on Indigenous communities? For many, this can lead to uncertainty regarding how to best navigate this terrain: “A common frustration voiced by non-Indigenous scholars is a lack of knowledge, training, or confidence to incorporate Indigenous knowledge or methods of education in their classrooms” (Louie et al., 2017, p. 22). Even when a non-Indigenous professor has collaborated extensively with Indigenous communities, is it appropriate,

respectful, and/or ethical for us to teach about Indigenous cultures and their history (creating an illusion that we are “experts”), particularly if/when our cultural background is that of the privileged and often-ignorant oppressor? A controversy erupted in May 2018 at a Halifax, Nova Scotia university who assigned a course on Residential Schools to a Euro-Canadian professor: Was she the best candidate? Or was this a case of “historical appropriation and systematic oppression of Indigenous nations” as critics alleged? (CBC, 2018)

According to Mihesuah (1998), Indigenous academics often struggle with a similar question: Is it lacking humility to teach about “Indigenous peoples” when there are hundreds of different Indigenous cultures in North America and you are only a member of one? How can one avoid perpetuating the myth of pan-Indianism (i.e., the incorrect belief that Indigenous cultures are all the same)? Furthermore, how can we respond when colleagues insist that mainstream psychology is “objective, unbiased science,” and/or express racist stereotypes and ignorance about our country’s deep roots in colonialism? It seems to be missing the true spirit of reconciliation for non-Indigenous faculty who identify as allies to maintain the status quo and do nothing. How best can we utilize and harness our power as instructors to open the minds of the next generation of psychology students in our classes? And what can we do to open the minds of colleagues and motivate a desire to change their pedagogy?

The Role of Psychology Professors in Reconciliation

The Canadian Psychological Association’s (2018) response to the TRC report asserts that all “undergraduate psychology students should have access to a course on Indigenous cultural literacy” that covers (a) an introduction to Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, (b) the impacts of Canada’s colonial policies (e.g., the Indian Act, Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, intergenerational trauma) on Indigenous peoples and communities, and (c) Indigenous psychology and cultural allyship. Community psychologists, particularly those who have established research partnerships with Indigenous communities, have an important role to play. The 2018 CPA response paper puts forth six “Guiding Principles Applying to the Study and Practice of Psychology in General” which are very much aligned with the core values of community psychology. These include (a) Cultural Allyship, (b) Humility, (c) Collaboration, (d) Critical Reflection, (e) Respect, and (f) Social Justice. They also emphasize the importance of collaborating with a diversity of Indigenous cultures to develop “culturally grounded assessments and

approaches,” utilizing participatory research methods that empower Indigenous communities and respecting the Aboriginal Healing Foundation’s OCAP principles which emphasize that researchers need to respect Indigenous communities’ right to maintain Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession over the entire research process and the data generated. None of these principles likely sound at all unfamiliar to community psychologists.

Tuck and Yang (2012), however, warn that there are important distinctions between the community psychology that aligns itself with Paulo Freire’s conceptualization of Liberation and Franz Fanon’s understanding of decolonization. Whereas Freire emphasized that educators have a duty to help liberate the minds of the oppressed, Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us that, as educators, we also need to critically examine our own minds (as we are not innocent bystanders but rather benefactors and products of the exploitative colonial system) and work toward our own decolonization. They also remind us that Conscientization (raising critical consciousness) is only the first step in decolonization, and should not be confused as the end goal. What true decolonization looks like (and if it is even possible) is to be decided by self-determined Indigenous peoples, according to Tuck and Yang (2012), and the presence/role/place of non-Indigenous settlers (even those who try to be allies) in this future vision is uncertain. Whereas Tuck and Yang (2012) center land and territorial control as the essence of decolonization, other Indigenous academics such as Fellner (2018) assert that the future vision for true decolonization is uncertain and up-for-debate (although we must continue to move toward it). From their online survey conducted with 25 Indigenous academics and allies, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) concluded that “the university [is] an important site of resurgence, and one that will become more important if indigenization took a more decolonial path” (p. 224). How can a non-Indigenous psychology professor best use their position of privilege and power as an educator to contribute to the critical decolonization of academia and our field in particular?

Some Early Attempts to Indigenize Psychology

Although this sudden surge of interest in “Indigenization” is new among many Canadian psychology departments, it is important to acknowledge that there have been psychology professors working quietly on transforming their pedagogy to make it more accessible to Indigenous students long before the 2015 TRC Calls to Action. After Canada repealed its racist enfranchisement law requiring Indigenous peoples to relinquish their First Nations status to attend university, Dr. Joseph Couture, an Elder of the

Cree Nation (1930–2007), became the first Indigenous person in Canada to earn a PhD in Psychology in 1972 (Turtle Island.org., 2007). He went on to develop and teach a program in Native Psychology at Trent University in Ontario which combined mainstream psychology with Indigenous healing traditions, spirituality, and traditional knowledge from Elders. He recognized the limitations of the Eurocentric worldview which permeate throughout the discipline of psychology:

Much of mainstream psychology [...] is based on a reductionist/mechanistic model of human behaviour, which has had a direct and disproportionate influence on modern educational theory and practice. The reductionist oriented mind, as Natives are concerned, is arrogant, patronizing, insensitive, excessively systematized, ignorant of other ways of knowing.

(Couture, 1987, p. 191)

According to Walsh-Bowers and Johnson (2002), Dr. Couture carefully tailored his program to work with Indigenous students’ learning preferences by using “experiential learning and Freirean problem-posing education as a fundamental learning strategy” (p. 85) as opposed to lecturing and passive learning. This reflects the fact that Indigenous pedagogies (much like those that we embrace in community psychology) tends to be democratic and egalitarian, unlike the unequal power hierarchies we typically see in universities where the professor yields the majority of the power/authority and the students have substantially less. However, rather than revolutionizing the way mainstream psychology was taught at Trent, Couture’s approach was eventually absorbed into their burgeoning Indigenous Studies department. This was unfortunate because as Louie et al. (2017) comment:

Isolating Indigenous knowledges within discrete classes or disciplines, for instance, occurs to the detriment of all learners, as Indigenous pedagogies and perspectives are thus marginalized.

(p. 22)

Post-Secondary Bridging Programs for Indigenous Communities

In the 1990’s, Canadian universities began to recognize that Indigenous students were often struggling in their courses and were rarely making it to graduation. According to Walsh-Bowers and Johnson (2002), “the literature indicates that Native students enrolled in non-Native college and university courses can experience acute cultural

dissonance” (p. 83). In response, some universities began offering a “transition year” which allows Indigenous students to complete first-year university courses in their own community (a familiar setting) in a small class where they likely know the other students and are the cultural majority. University professors (often non-Indigenous) go to the on-reserve communities to teach their introductory courses, but are quickly forced to confront the reality that their standard teaching practices are neither culturally appropriate nor effective within these non-Eurocentric populations.

Cherry (2001) and Walsh-Bowers and Johnson (2002) describe their challenges and personal discomfort during the process of adaptation, and eventual solutions as they gradually learned how to adapt Introductory Psychology to meet the needs of Indigenous students in various Ontario First Nations. Walsh-Bowers and Johnson (2002), for example, who taught Introductory Psychology on the Six Nations Reserve, describe the importance of allotting time to build mutually respectful, humble, and trusting relationships between the instructor(s) and the students during which the students get to know their instructor personally and have regularly scheduled opportunities to interact informally while reviewing course content. Like Couture (1987), they also describe how experiential learning, concrete examples, and small group discussion were most effective in engaging the students; lectures delivered by a depersonalized authority figure about abstract concepts did not work. They furthermore found themselves contrasting the “linear, compartmentalized, despiritualized” (p. 89) that Eurocentric worldview is that found throughout mainstream psychology, to a holistic and interconnected Indigenous worldview because “many of the students found scientific psychology alien, because for them it is narrow in scope and spiritless” (p. 88). They describe the challenges facing Indigenous university students as trying to find balance when “their feet are in two vessels” (i.e., two very different cultural worldviews, one of whom historically did everything in its power to denigrate and exterminate the other).

As she attempted to make introductory psychology meaningful to students in Algonquin, Mohawk, and Ojibway communities, non-Indigenous psychologist Frances Cherry (2001) particularly struggled about whether or not to assign a mainstream psychology textbook which ignored Indigenous realities (apart from perpetuating negative stereotypes and deficiency models). She also noted the hypocrisy of these textbooks that purport to teach “value-free psychological science” while more often “representing the interests and worldviews of elite Anglo-American white males” (p. 79). Yet, she decided to proceed with the textbook in order to cover the material expected for future psychology courses. She reconciled

this dilemma by teaching the students to adopt a critical stance toward the material. Rather than lecturing and rote memorization, each week the class critically deconstructed the assigned chapter’s material to expose and question its Eurocentric, patriarchal, individualistic, reductionist biases, and contradictions. Cherry also challenged the students to “re-construct” new understandings and ideas by reinterpreting the material from an interdependent and/or traditional Indigenous point of view. She describes, for example, a student who proposed that Erikson’s 8 psychosocial stages of (individualistic) development provide a useful framework for examining relationships between Indigenous communities and the federal government in power: Is there a relationship of trust or mistrust? Is the Indigenous community autonomous and self-governing, or forced into dependence? Is the community confused about their cultural identity, or are they confident and proud of who are they? Walsh-Bowers and Johnson (2002) describe a similar process in which they worked with students to critically compare Eurocentric versus Indigenous perspectives on topics such as personality, family, intuition, and spirituality. After working at it for several years, they created a course that made psychology accessible and relevant to Six Nations students. But the authors also express a sense of their work being incomplete and/or unfinished because “very few access students [...] subsequently majored in psychology” (p. 83). They made it through the course but ultimately decided that psychology was not the field for them.

The Challenge of Decolonizing

Fellner (2018) states that “decolonizing may be conceptualized through the interconnected processes of deconstructing colonial ideologies and their manifestations, and reconstructing colonial discourse through Indigenous counter-narratives” (p. 283). Cherry (2001) comments that throughout her ten-year journey, she found that she was “decolonizing [her] own mind.” Even when motivated and willing, this was an immensely slow and complex process. Boyes (2018) points out that one of major challenges of Indigenous psychology’s curriculum is that “members of the mainstream, settler/colonizer population are essentially unaware of their own culture” and that consequently “our understanding of human psychology and human development may be incomplete, flawed, under-informed, [and] perhaps even a bit racist.” Fellner (2018) advocates for being honest and transparent with our students and colleagues about how decolonizing one’s own mind (even for Indigenous scholars) is a difficult, slow, and lifelong process. Tuck and Yang (2012) caution against academics using the term “decolonization as a metaphor” (i.e., lightly

and flippantly), without truly understanding the deep implications.

Further complicating matters is when the other members of one's psychology department do not understand the rationale for Indigenizing psychology's curriculum, nor feel motivated to learn about it. Even if one is motivated to transform one's teaching pedagogy, another significant challenge involves not perpetuating the myth of Pan-Indianism (i.e., mistaking all Indigenous cultures as being the same) and instead finding ways to respect and teach others about the immense diversity of Indigenous cultures, languages, and nations (even though no one person can ever hope to gain familiarity with all of them). Gomes, Young Leon, and Brown (2013) suggest that each psychology department needs to collaborate in long-term partnerships with the local Indigenous communities on whose territory their institution sits, to create a brand of decolonized psychology that is specific to that unique Indigenous culture. This is not an easy task because it suggests that "specific teachings and practices incorporated into decolonizing curriculums will vary from place to place" (Fellner, 2018, p. 288). Even within each culture / nation, one finds regional dialects and diversity!

As community psychologists, these calls to respect diversity and local knowledge in efforts to bring about social justice and transformative change to marginalized communities ring very true as they are already embedded in the core values of our discipline (Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2011). The Cultural Safety model of Taylor and Thompson-Guerin (2019), for example, stresses the importance of "keeping it local" when developing healthcare services to best meet the needs of the diverse Indigenous communities in Australia. Another commonality that directly links our discipline to current Reconciliation and Indigenous healing initiatives pertains to our prioritizing of the ecological perspective in community psychology (e.g., Kelly, 1968; Stelzner & Wielkiewicz, 2015; Trickett, 1984). Ansloos (2019) states that Indigenous People's Psychology desperately needs vocal allies who appreciate why the key to decreasing suicide rates in an isolated Northern Indigenous reserve community, for example, may be to build a hockey rink, build a community center, and fund dust control (as opposed to short-term suicide prevention programs). With our training in anti-positivist cultural humility (e.g., Prilleltensky, 2001), community psychologists may be particularly well suited to positions ourselves, not as "experts," but as bridges and liaisons who can link non-Indigenous students and academic colleagues with Traditional Knowledge Keepers, Elders, online content, and videos, as well as readings and other teachings that we have benefited from our own journey toward decolonization and related issues highlighted in the 94 TRC recommendations.

What follows next is a First Person Narrative in which I describe my own journey (to date) as a non-Indigenous psychology professor attempting to continually transform myself and my teaching practices in the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation with the local Indigenous communities.

Community Setting 1: Graduate school in Toronto on the territory of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation

During graduate school, I was very fortunate to be affiliated with Dr. Cynthia Chataway's participatory research project on the strengths of seven diverse Indigenous communities from different parts of Canada (Fine et al., 2009). The Indigenous-led steering committee agreed to let me fill different roles within the project, provided that I was not ever taking work away from a qualified Indigenous student. They also reiterated that I must always remember that it was Indigenous people who gifted me the opportunity to earn my PhD and that if/when I attained a privileged position as a professor, I must return the favor by helping Indigenous students to succeed in academia and gain privilege, in turn. Thus, my role was negotiated throughout the research on an ongoing basis, but they always found something for me to do, be it as a note-taker in the beginning, to eventual data analyst and community researcher who visited the First Nations for extended stays when they requested it, and worked with them to problem-solve and get the research on-track. I learned the critical importance of taking time to build relationships of trust within marginalized communities and work at their pace (something that I already knew to expect from reading community psychology literature (e.g., Kagan et al., 2011), but had yet to experience in-person). In some cases, a community's pace felt like break-neck speed in that they were ready to begin the second I arrived and already eager to get their hands on the finished products. While in other cases, the pace was considerably slower and months of trust-building was required to compensate for the unethical practices of other academics who had previously made promises to the community and not delivered. I lived with different families on-reserve (paying for room-and-board) during my community visits, and this helped to break down barriers and build trust. After initial awkwardness, they typically began to treat me like a family member: taking me on family outings, putting me to work during community events, trusting me to babysit their children, etc. I attended powwows, talking circles, baptisms, healing ceremonies, and a naming ceremony where I was given the traditional name "Red Evening Sun Woman." While I loved the communal

lifestyle and relationships, living on-reserve (albeit only temporarily) opened my privileged eyes to the often grinding poverty and substandard living conditions provided by the Canadian government.

While attending graduate school in Toronto, I have vivid memories of campus visits from Anishinaabe Elder and Social Work professor emeritus Barb Riley. She provided the first example that I witnessed of Indigenous pedagogy within an academic setting: We arranged our chairs in a circle so that we were all facing each other, and she insisted that everyone had to put their notepads, pens, and laptops away before she would begin: “Open your ears and listen; that is your only job.” She insisted on our full attention and participation. One of her favorite topics was teaching the medicine wheel perspective on holistic health by teasing us about how terribly out-of-balance most academics are. She described us as running around campus like bobble-head dolls with our enormous heads (prioritizing intellectual health), on our tiny, sleep-deprived bodies running on caffeine and sugar (neglecting our physical health), while our emotional health and spiritual health were a neglected afterthought at most. In psychology classes today, I tell students about Elder Barb Riley, her strict-but-effective rules for being fully present in class, and her teachings on the medicine wheel, balance, and holistic health.

Community Setting 2: Anishinaabe First Nations of the North Shore Tribal Council

My first full-time job teaching psychology tasked me to seek out ways to integrate Indigenous knowledge and Canada’s colonial history into my course content. My job was at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, which is called *Baawaating* by the Anishinaabek people on whose territory the town is located. The university is actually housed in the building of the former Shingwauk Residential School (named after Chief Shingwauk who negotiated in the 1800’s for a “teaching wigwam” where Anishinaabek youth could learn their own culture as well as that of the European settlers; the abusive Residential School that resulted was clearly not what he had in mind). When the university purchased the building in the 1970’s, the seven local Anishinaabe First Nations stipulated that they would support the university provided that every professor regardless of their discipline taught students about the effects of residential schools, as well as the Anishinaabek culture, thus recapturing Chief Shingwauk’s original vision. This directive challenged me to be on a continuous lookout, for examples (historical and current), traditional teachings, and theories/research of Indigenous psychologists to integrate into my courses. I shared an

office with an Anishinaabe Studies professor (whose mother was a survivor of the Shingwauk Residential school), and I was hired by the local Anishinaabe Tribal Council (or *Mamaweswan*) to conduct participatory research within their territory, so I was ideally set up to engage with the local Anishinaabe people and find this new course content.

However, I also quickly learned that the task of decolonizing my teaching pedagogy was not going to be easy. Upon introducing myself as a new psychology professor, more than one Elder chuckled sentiments to the effect of “Uh oh (haha): Psychology! I failed that course! It didn’t make any sense! . . . It took me years to realize it was all studies about white people that were created by white people.” This was startling and eye-opening for me: If none of the Intro Psych course content made sense to these wise Elders, where should I begin? Although I very much wanted to teach an Indigenized version of psychology, I was still very much a product of mainstream Eurocentric psychology and this significantly limited my thinking and awareness of alternatives. I could not simply order the appropriate textbook or instruction manual.

Never-the-less, I tried to take up the challenge of decolonizing and Indigenizing my curriculum to the best of my abilities. Often I went about it in a piecemeal fashion, feeling frustrated with myself and like I was never doing enough, but still experiencing relief at small victories, such as when a non-Indigenous student would tell me that my course had taught them to be more empathetic and less prejudiced toward Anishinaabe people. I taught a statistics course and found opportunities to create practice questions that involved testing hypotheses about, for example, the effectiveness of different healing methods for residential school survivors. This enabled me to pose the question to the class “Who knows what residential school is?”, have a discussion about it, and then return to the statistical formulas.

In addition to offering classes in *Anishiaabemowin* (the Anishinaabe language), Algoma University also attempted to slowly teach all members of the campus-community snippets of the Anishinaabe language using posters in central locations around campus with an “Anishinaabe word or phrase of the week.” For example, when the temperature outside dropped to -30 degrees Celsius (as happens during Northern Ontario winters), the phrase of the week might be “*Gisinaa*” (It is cold. Referring to weather.) or “*Wii-gichi-gisinaamagad waabang*” (It is going to be really cold tomorrow). I enjoyed the gentle-yet-persistent reminders of whose territory we were on, and how much there was to learn about the Anishinaabek culture and worldview.

Another important lesson that I learned while in *Baawaating* involved the immense diversity that can exist

within one Indigenous culture, even among First Nations that are “neighbors” and all technically speaking the same language (albeit with different regional dialects). A pattern emerged where I would learn a word or phrase at the university or in one of the seven First Nations, and then often be met with amused chuckling when I tentatively tried to use it in another of the communities. “Who taught you that?” the Elders would inquire with looks of surprised amusement on their faces. Upon learning my source was someone in a neighboring First Nation, they would respond: “Oh, well, that explains it. The way I would say it is. . .” And, they would either correct my pronunciation, or teach me an entirely different word to use. This became an ongoing reminder that I needed to practice humility, an ongoing willingness to learn, a gentle-spirit, and some self-deprecating humor. Indigenous languages are only recently being revived and so that in part explain why their notions about what is correct may vary. The Canadian government’s laws made speaking Indigenous languages an illegal and punishable offense until 1951, and Residential Schools discouraged their use with brutal physical punishment directed at Indigenous children even after this. Today, Indigenous languages are living, breathing free again, and evolving and adapting to modern times, just as any language does. And in the same way that the English language spoken by the British Royal family sounds nothing like the English spoken on the East Coast of Canada, there is considerable diversity within any language, including those of Indigenous peoples.

During this time, I also gained a better understanding of medicine wheel teachings and how they can be useful in numerous facets from developmental psychology (e.g., Brokenleg and Van Bockern’s (2003) Circle of Courage), to focus group protocols (Schmidt, Broad, Sy, & Johnston, 2012). Gaikezheyongai’s (2002) *Story of the Seven Fires: Teaching Manual* proved especially useful. I also learned about the holistic Anishinaabek concept of *Minobimaatisiwin* (living a good life), I grew to deeply appreciate the benefits of meetings that begin with opening prayers and smudging, and I gained a new understanding of research from Anishinaabek Elders (which I continue to share with students in psychology classes today): Rather than emphasizing “science” or “objectivity,” the Elders emphasized that a researcher must be humble, gentle, and cautious because one is “moving toward a mystery” (i.e., an unknown). They also emphasized the importance of “having a good heart,” and seeing oneself as a “helper” and “healer” who seeks out “medicine bundles of knowledge” to benefit the community. This perspective is not incompatible with conventional psychological research, apart from the much heavier emphasis on the researcher’s ethical obligations and responsibility for the well-being of the participating community.

Community Setting 3: Mi’kma’ki territory / L’nu First Nations in Unama’ki

Most recently, I moved to a tenure-track job at Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova Scotia, which is located in *Unama’ki* (“the land of fog”), the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq / L’nu nation. (To clarify: L’nu is the word that this nation of Indigenous people originally called themselves and the term has only recently been revived; Mi’kmaq is the name they are more often called as a consequence of European settlers misinterpreting the L’nu word “*Ni’kmaq*” meaning allies/friends.) Mi’kma’ki territory extends from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland through to eastern Quebec. They were among the first Indigenous peoples in North America to come into contact with European colonizers, and yet the Mi’kmaq language is remarkably strong today. In some Mi’kmaq communities, children grow up with Mi’kmaq as their first language. They learn English as their second language. While helping to keep the unique Mi’kmaq worldview alive, it creates some extra challenges for fluent-Mi’kmaq students when they leave the school system of their reserve community for the first time and enter Eurocentric post-secondary education. Students describe the time-consuming process of trying to translate an examination question, for example, from English to Mi’kmaq, answering the question in Mi’kmaq and then translating their answer back into written English (Schmidt, 2018).

L’nu / Mi’kmaq Elders Albert Marshall and Murdena Marshall are becoming well known in Canada for creating the concept of “Two-Eyed Seeing” (or *Etuaptmumk* in Mi’kmaq). The phrase came to Albert’s mind while working with CBU biology professor Cheryl Bartlett to make university science courses more meaningful and relevant to Mi’kmaq students. Two-Eyed Seeing challenges us to learn to see the world in a way that simultaneously appreciates the strengths of the Indigenous traditional knowledge perspective with one eye and the Eurocentric (scientific) perspective with the other (Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2015). To learn to see this way, it requires that Indigenous people come together with non-Indigenous people in the spirit of cooperation, both humbling themselves to learn from each other as equals. At a May 2018 conference on “Indigenizing the Academy” where he gave a keynote speech, Elder Albert Marshall emphasized that Two-Eyed Seeing is not easy and that the slow progress can be frustrating at times. In his words: “Two-Eyed Seeing is heavy sledge work.” Even when all parties are working together diligently and with good hearts, it still involves a difficult commitment to lifelong learning and immense patience. How do you learn to appreciate concepts that you currently have no sense of and in a different language? Albert Marshall describes this process as

“Knowledge Gardening” in which seeds of knowledge are to be planted in individual minds but may take many years to bloom and be fully appreciated or understood.

L’nu Elders often emphasize that the Mi’kmaw language must be central in efforts to Indigenize academia and practice Two-Eyed Seeing. While I have heard this repeatedly, it only recently dawned on me that one way to go about this is to seek out aspects of Mi’kmaw language that do not translate well or at all into English. Mi’kmaw, for example, is verb-based (actions), while English is noun-based (things). According to Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, and Bartlett (2009), there is a Mi’kmaw Healing verb tense (to use only when others are present and when announcing intention to change something about yourself that reflects movement toward a healthy life) as well as a Spiritual verb tense (to use only when discussing visions from dreams, fasts, the Sweat Lodge, etc.). Furthermore, for many years there have been repeated mistranslations that referred to “Animate” vs. “Inanimate” distinctions with Indigenous languages such as Mi’kmaw. Inglis (2004), however, clarified that this is better translated as a distinction between objects that are “Connected” (essential to the whole) or “Disconnected” (not essential to the whole). For example, your heart is “connected” (because you cannot live without it) but your hand and your foot are both “disconnected” (because you could live without them). Interconnectedness is a central theme within the holistic Mi’kmaw worldview. Another example is the Mi’kmaw word *Mkamlamun* which translates as “the Heart/Mind” because emotions and thoughts are seen as inseparable (Sable & Francis, 2012). A further challenge for Eurocentric, individualistic Psychology is the fact that:

There is no distinct word for Self in Mi’kmaw. It is only inferred by the inflectional ending added to the verb, implying the self is part of a web of every-changing relationships.

(Sable & Francis, 2012)

The implications of this are huge when one considers that “the central assumption of Western Psychology [is that] the unit of analysis or focus within Psychology is and ought to be the individual” (Boyes, 2018). How do Mi’kmaw students relate to concepts such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-actualization, when there is no equivalent in their first language? How do they make sense of reductionist concepts like “Mind–Body dualism” when a Mi’kmaw worldview emphasizes the interconnected, inseparable nature of Heart/Mind? Is it possible to conceptualize a Mi’kmaw / L’nu Psychology when their understanding of health is so much more expansive: integrating interconnected mental, physical, emotional, and

spiritual health? The comparison is an interesting exercise, in that it highlights holistic Indigenous topics such as Spiritual Health (which provides a bigger sense of connection to the universe and one’s place in it) that tend to be treated as optional or of limited importance in mainstream psychology. It makes one question: what else are we missing in mainstream psychology? Why is our worldview and the English language so limited? Why have I lived in Unama’ki for close to ten years but only begun to have some of these realizations within the past two to three years? The slow nature of “knowledge gardening” may be one answer.

Another part of the answer may lie in my excessively cautious nature about overstepping my role as a non-Indigenous professor. (Mi’kmaw Elder and CBU Vice President of Indigenous Affairs Stephen Augustine has previously informed me: “You’re too cautious! We like what you do. Stop being so cautious!”) Another impetus for this change in my thinking may be related to the new-found desire of Canadian universities to “Indigenize” post-secondary curriculum following the 2015 TRC Calls to Action. My own institution suddenly became very supportive of any initiatives that followed in this spirit. So, perhaps this encouraging atmosphere created the conditions for my thinking to evolve. I had previously offered Directed Studies courses one-on-one to Mi’kmaw psychology students (who were seeking an opportunity to focus on Indigenous psychology), and so my department asked me to develop a new psychology course on Mi’kmaw-relevant topics and supported me through to completion (although it was a little unclear if they genuinely saw the use of such a course, or whether they just did not want to do the work of “Indigenizing” themselves). Some of my colleagues who for years had been vocal opponents of Two-Eyed Seeing (dismissing it as “unscientific”) were supportive of the new course. One colleague asked me to forward Indigenous readings of relevance to his course. On the other hand, my department also asked me develop materials showing them where Indigenous content could be inserted into our Introductory Psychology curriculum. Few of my colleagues ever accessed the documents that I created listing Indigenous topics that align with Intro Psych topics. They wanted a “quick shortcut” to Indigenizing but lost interest when it became apparent that it would require considerable work and effort to educate themselves on these topics. (Australia has had success in developing an Indigenous Curriculum Framework for its medical schools (Phillips, 2004), and so seeking out and learning from these initiatives may be a next step for both my own department and/or the Canadian Psychological Association, more broadly.)

Regardless, I am now offering a second-year undergraduate course titled (albeit still tentatively) “Indigenous

Peoples' Psychology: Mental Health and Healing" which is a fusion of Indigenous/L'nu Studies, the history of colonialism, and psychology (i.e., effects of colonization and traditional healing). In the spirit of Indigenizing my pedagogy, I state that I am not an expert, that I will be inviting Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders to class as guest speakers (some of whom organize cultural activities for the class in nearby Membertou First Nation), and I invite the students "co-teach." So far, the students have voted against examinations, and in favor of projects and weekly papers on the assigned readings. The students report that without the pressure of exams, they enjoy the assigned readings and talk to friends and family about what they are learning. For a term project, students each research a different Indigenous Psychologist and then design a final presentation to share what they have learned with the rest of the class. We end the course with a strong sense of how Indigenous People's Psychology is a dynamic and emerging force within the field of psychology. Our guest speakers sometimes return for this class session and have highly praised the students for their work. Another assignment is the "L'nu Healing Project" where they each select a healing practice (e.g., sweat lodge, beading, Medicine Walk, drumming) and then learn about it from several different perspectives (e.g., Academic literature search, talking to an Elder-in-Residence or Traditional Knowledge Holder, and participating in the activity themselves). The course attracts a wide range of students: some Indigenous and some not, some with extensive knowledge of the topic, and some knowing very little. A frequent comment is "Your course made me really mad, but don't change the course" which suggests some success at Freirean critical consciousness raising.

As such, I continue looking for opportunities to integrate Indigenous content into all of my psychology courses. Whenever possible, I try to integrate it into conversations about privilege, oppression, and "lifting the fog of ignorance" (to quote Seymour Sarason). To encourage students to take a critical look at Eurocentric assumptions, I introduce the terminology of Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010): WEIRD Culture (Western, Educated, Individualistic, Rich, and Democratic-supposedly) because it presents an opportunity to discuss how neither Eurocentric culture nor the English language are universal, objective or representative of the majority of people in the world. To demonstrate, I ask the students to consider examples of Mi'kmaw words that do not translate into English, and then consider how many other concepts do not translate into English and therefore may have never entered our minds.

Injecting Indigenous content into my Community Psychology course was straightforward because I have conducted participatory research with Indigenous communities. I can often think of an anecdote that

illustrates a course concept, such as the process involved in gaining community trust prior to commencing participatory research. I also often share some of my goofy misunderstandings (e.g., I initially began to learn the Mi'kmaw language from 3-year-olds in the family I was staying with, without thinking about how weird it sounds when an adult speaks like a 3 years old!) to illustrate why we need community members to collaborate with us as equal partners in order to generate valid and useful research findings. (I have been teased by both Anishinaabe and Mi'kmaw people that I need to refrain from sharing my "white girl realizations" while they are eating or drinking, because if a person laughs with their mouth full, choking can result!)

During my Qualitative Research Methods course, I teach the students thematic analysis skills by watching the Fiddler and McTavish (2003) film "2003;" (about Merelda Fiddler's journey to discover her own Métis history and identity). I instruct the students to write down "rich quotes" during the film, and afterward, we work together to generate a thematic model from their quotes and resulting themes that answers the question "What does it mean to be Métis?" This class typically begins with at least one student asking me to spell the word "Métis" on the board and expressing general lack of familiarity with the term. By the end of the three-hour class, we have constructed a thematic model that depicts how widespread discrimination in Canada led to a period where the Métis were just trying to survive intense poverty and oppression, and Métis individuals felt shame about their identity. This continued until the Indigenous-power movements of the 1960s led to a revival in Métis culture and pride. The cultural revival process still continues today. Students leave the class having learned about colonial history and Métis identity within a short period of time, while at the same time learning the basic steps of qualitative data analysis.

For Personality Psychology, we discuss Epigenetics and the connection to Intergenerational Trauma of Residential School survivors. We also cover case studies which depict, for example, how severe anxiety lasting into adulthood and manifesting as obsessive-compulsive personality disorder sometimes resulted as a consequence of traumatic Residential School experiences during which the children were punished severely for any housework deemed less than perfect. During another class, we compare Erikson's individualistic theory of lifespan development, to Brokenleg and Van Bockern's (2003) medicine wheel model of lifespan development (which better depicts the essential role of community in development and emphasizes that the health of a community directly impacts the health of individual members).

When teaching History of Psychology, we spend several classes discussing Scientific Racism, Race

Psychology, and eugenics. G. Stanley Hall's theory that the so-called "Lower Races" were stuck in an adolescent state of development and needed "help" from Euro-American "civilization" led the creation of segregated schools for African American and Indigenous children. Here, the government-mandated curriculum forced children to spend more than half the day on "practical education" (i.e., doing manual labor), leaving little time for actual school work, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. This creates another opportunity to discuss Residential Schools and have a discussion about how they connect to the history of psychology. We also discuss why we did not see Indigenous people in Canada earning PhDs in psychology until the 1970's. This is a consequence of both the unresolved trauma caused by Residential Schools as well as the Indian Act which prohibited Indigenous people from attending university in Canada until 1951 unless they renounced their "Indian status" and assimilated. The majority of non-Indigenous students have never heard of the Indian Act, and so there are more "Your class makes me so mad; but don't change the course" responses.

Another topic involves well-known psychologists whose theories and research were directly influenced by Indigenous peoples. With a little digging, I found a reference to a 2016 conference presentation by 2016; titled "North American Indigenous Cultural Influences on Psychology: Erikson, Maslow, Jung, and Sherif" and was able to contact one of the authors, Dr. Jeff King, who generously sent me the presentation slides. As a result, I have been able to share the stories of how Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, and Abraham Maslow came to understand the limitations of their own Eurocentric culture through these interactions and developed their theories of health human development. Also, Muzafer Sherif's classic 1953 Robbers' Cave study would not have happened without the support of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and three Native American graduate students: O.J. Harvey (Choctaw), Bob Hood (Cherokee), and B. Jack White (Kiowa) who were among the first Native Americans to earn PhDs in Psychology and went on to long, successful academic careers.

Ongoing Challenges

I should not, however, in any way purport that I do not still have an immense amount more to learn or that I do not experience ongoing challenges with my teaching. "Decolonizing is a verb. It is an active, intentional, moment-to-moment process that involves critically undoing colonial ways of knowing, being, and doing" (Fellner, 2018, p. 284). For example, I struggle to integrate Talking Circles into my classrooms given there are many desks to

be moved and larger class enrollments. I too often fall back on utilizing PowerPoint slides to cover content, and hesitate about taking a class outside or initiating other unconventional activities outside the classroom. Last year, the Elder-in-Residence was unable to lead a smudging ceremony in my course because smudging at CBU is primarily to be conducted outdoors and the fall in Cape Breton is often cold and rainy. Arranging guest speakers and class cultural trips has proven challenging as some Traditional Knowledge Holders have intensely busy and changing schedules. Initially, I was concerned about navigating difficult topics related to Residential Schools and intergenerational trauma such as childhood sexual abuse with students who have likely experienced it. While weekly thought-papers seemed to provide students with an outlet to safely share their own experiences if they wanted to, more recently a class on the Sixties Scoop triggered unresolved issues for a student whose estranged, deceased mother had been a victim of Canada's child welfare agencies. On the other hand, I am striving to learn and improve upon past mistakes. The first year that I taught my new course, I was upset by how many students either skipped class and/or played with their phones when Elders attended class as a guest speaker. This year, we had an upfront discussion about this problem before the first Elder arrived in class, I relayed Elder Barb Riley's instructions for effective listening, and the students were pleasantly responsive and attentive to all subsequent guests.

Conclusion

The role of the non-Indigenous ally in Indigenizing the curriculum of psychology is sometimes one of great uncertainty, questioning, guilt, and discomfort, which Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest is to be expected. Is it appropriate for me to attempt to Indigenize my curriculum and pedagogy as a non-Indigenous person and non-expert? When I asked Mi'kmaw professors and administrators at CBU, they stated that it is the spirit in which the professor works that is more important (rather than whether or not the professor is Indigenous). So if one proceeds with "cultural humility, cultural safety, and privileging community voices in relation to community agendas, needs and processes" (Fellner, 2018, p. 289), the answer seems to be "perhaps, yes." Still, I experience an unease or dissonance when Indigenous students tell me that my courses have increased their cultural knowledge and cultural pride. Ross (2014) similarly describes oscillating between joy and immense sadness upon learning that an Indigenous woman had decided to "walk the Red Road" after reading his book, because "it was not a comfortable

place, being a member of the race that had put her down so deeply” (p. 276).

But perhaps a non-Indigenous community psychology professor offering something (even if admittedly imperfect and in-progress) is better than offering only the mainstream Eurocentric psychology. Provided that the necessary partnerships of mutual respect can be established with local Indigenous communities, Elders, and traditional knowledge holders, then a commitment to lifelong learning, knowledge gardening (i.e., planting seeds of knowledge and hoping they eventually bloom), and the “heavy sledge work” of Two-Eyed Seeing are what follows. Perhaps another next step as a non-Indigenous ally is learning to be comfortable with the uncertainty and learning to trust that I have a place and a purpose within the Great Mystery even if I am not always confident of what that might be.

As an instructor, I have found transparency around my own learning and mistakes to be key in normalizing students’ experiences, reassuring them that we do not know what we do not know, and must therefore be compassionate with ourselves [as well as accountable] when facing difficult truths we were not previously aware of.

(Fellner, 2018, p. 286)

Conflict of Interest

I have no potential conflict of interest pertaining to this submission to the American Journal of Community Psychology.

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