
2020 ECPN Pedagogist Review

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Land acknowledgements: Pedagogists learning and becoming

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In January 2020, the three of us embarked on our journey of becoming pedagogists in the Early Childhood Pedagogy Network (ECPN) CCRR community stream. This report provides a snapshot of how, during our reading, thinking and engaging together in the process of becoming pedagogists, we encountered the transformational proposition that early childhood education is a political project (Moss, 2014; Vintimilla et al., 2020). With gratitude, we share a brief narrative about a pilot project that supported and challenged us to question what it means to work as pedagogists in early childhood education on colonized lands.

In April 2020, we were invited to participate in a Collaboratory on Pedagogies of Reconciliation in a cross-stream group with a “pedagogist” from the Indigenous stream. The purpose of this pilot project was to create pedagogical pathways and dialogue across the ECPN. It was also intended to support a deeper appreciation of what education as a political project might mean in the context of living and working as pedagogists in British Columbia. We met weekly for eight weeks to begin a conversation about the complex histories of early childhood education on this geopolitical land.

As we were invited to think about how we are implicated in and benefit from colonization, we acknowledged feeling a sense of trepidation, intense vulnerability, and a bit of paralysis. How did talking about what it means to be a pedagogist on colonized lands become so paralyzing? How is it that three people from different places, with different experiences, are all haunted by similar feelings when taking this invitation into question? Vicki noted that, despite being raised in rural northeastern New Brunswick on Mi’kmaq First Nations territory, she knows very little about Mi’kmaq culture, histories, and language. Similarities became visible when Gloria and Lyndsay reflected on their stories of disconnection to the land. How is our common experience not knowing? Marie Battiste (2013) speaks to this theme of not knowing and reminds us of our ethical responsibility to deconstruct it. Our conversations in the collaboratory invited us to consider the colonial violence of education in the creation of our understandings

of Indigenous peoples. Battiste suggests that “teachers have been educated in Eurocentric systems that have dismissed Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy. Similarly, Aboriginal language teachers have been trained to analyze Aboriginal language structures according to Eurocentric linguistic structural models” (p. 169). We felt haunted by the ways our understandings of Indigenous peoples, who they are, their histories, and their cultures came predominantly from Euro-Western settlers' perspectives. Through our conversations we were introduced to the writing of Taiiaki Alfred (2017). He speaks to the voices of his ancestors, who call attention to the land, telling him to “get back to it” (p. 11). Thinking with Alfred, we sat closely with what he refers to as “reculturing yourself” and “recentering yourself in your homeland” (p. 12).

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Affrica Taylor (2015) suggest that “our efforts to unsettle early childhood education begin with the understanding that the field of early childhood education is neither culturally neutral nor politically innocent” (p. 2). Thinking with this idea encourages us to consider the ways colonization shows up in early childhood education and how we are entangled within it. Sitting with Paulette Regan’s (2010) work, we start to see how we are implicated and to “confront [our] own colonial mentality, moral indifference, and historical ignorance as part of a massive truth telling about Canada’s past and present relationship with the original inhabitants of this land” (Alfred, 2010, p. x).

We are coming to understand how education has served as a tool of colonization and how the current educational system upholds and maintains a colonial mindset. As we began to trouble this ongoing colonial history, we felt compelled to create and participate in opportunities to resist this way of thinking and disrupt these stories. The Collaboratory on Pedagogies of Reconciliation invited us to do so, and we spent considerable time grappling with how a land acknowledgment might be a way to unsettle dominant settler colonial knowledge. We were called to think intentionally about land acknowledgments and what they might do (and not do) to situate us and help us think about the land on which we live and work. We were compelled to question: What does it do pedagogically to say that we live and work on colonized land? What does it do pedagogically to make a land acknowledgment? The collaboratory process made visible that we were living early childhood education as a political act.

Thinking with Alfred (2010), Battiste (2013), Pacini-Ketchabaw and Taylor (2015), and Regan (2010), we are obligated to see our connection to colonialism in early childhood education, which is a realization and reality we would much rather avoid, fix or deny. However, Donna Haraway (2016) invites

us to stay with the trouble. As pedagogists, we take seriously our responsibility to listen, show up, and respond to the ongoing colonial injustices in early childhood education, including acknowledging our implication within it, and to stay with the challenges, tensions and possibilities this work brings.

As part of this commitment, we would like to acknowledge with gratitude the L'heidli T'enneh and Tsimshian First Nations territories on which we live, work and raise our children. We extend our thanks to Cathy Ballati for her leadership in the Collaboratory on Pedagogies of Reconciliation with support from the First Nations Pedagogies Network. The pedagogies of reconciliation work continues with a new collaboration that resulted from the original collective.

References

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