How to Mend a 'Good' Education: A Settler Autoethnography

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

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Abstract

Though White Settler educators who profess a critical pedagogy take up the project of decolonization with heartfelt enthusiasm, many of them remain unaware of the ways they unconsciously embody, and are complicit in, reproducing colonial structures. This autoethnography tells the story of my attempt to confront a similar dissonance in my teaching practice. My central question "How can I teach towards social justice and against oppression when my Whiteness represents the very structures of marginalization I oppose?" could only be answered by moving beyond the classroom and examining the deeply personal ways that colonial structures and narratives shaped, and continue to shape, all aspects of my identity. I drew data from my personal journals, a "writing" story composed during the research process, and longer form vignettes written in response to the initial stages of data collection. Wall's (2016) Moderate Ethnography informed my analysis. I used the concepts of *Whiteness-as-Property* and *White-Complicity* to help contextualize my experience and employed Aoki's (1994) *Curriculum-as-Lived* and the theory of *Epistemological Pluralism* as tools to understand the connections between personal and professional decolonization. Though more research is needed, this project suggests that for meaningful decolonization to take place there must be an earnest desire on the part of White Settlers (educators and non-educators alike) to attend to their personal complicity in colonialism.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of a great number of people. No writer ever works in isolation and I owe my thanks to a stalwart group of listeners, reviewers, and calmer-downers who kept me on the path even when I felt like I was lost.

I must thank my thesis supervisor, Susan Tilley, whose patience in me was unmatched. She pushed me to hone my skills as a writer and researcher and taught me that the toughest questions are the most worth pursuing. The feedback and patience of the other members of my committee, Leanne Taylor and Spy Dénommé-Welch, helped me shape this thesis into something I am deeply proud of. To my colleagues at A-Z Learning Services I owe thanks for the countless cups of coffee and tea during tough moments and for the many, many impromptu read throughs they happily offered.

To my family; my mother, Karen, my father, Brian, my husband, Steve and my brothers Ben and Dan, I can never properly express how deep my gratitude runs, you are my heart. You shaped the memories out of which this autoethnography is carved and never, ever, let me take myself to seriously. I love you all.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This project is an *autoethnography*. Autoethnographies are stories. Stories must be meaningful: they must have, at their heart, a driving, difficult problem. The good ones are written for a reason beyond catharsis; they have a purpose and a rationale. This introduction serves as framework for the story to come, and as such, will present an outline of these essential elements. Below, you will read about the educational experiences that prompted me – a White, female, middle-class educator – to begin the process of decolonizing myself and my teaching practice. You will find an outline of the dilemmas that arise when I, and teachers like me, fail to do so. You will read about why I've decided to write this story down, and what I hope others may gain from coming with me on the journey.

A 'Good' Education

What is a 'good' education? If I posed this question to any number of the middle-class parents in my hometown, I imagine that their answer would be fairly straightforward. For instance, they'd think that a model school should have gentle and supportive teachers, strong academics, well-established sports, arts and extra-curricular programs, and a robust student support system. As a White[1], middle-class Settler[2] who grew up in a wealthy suburb, my high school had all of those resources. Despite my chronically late assignments and a 'know-it-all' attitude, my teachers (with some notable exceptions) encouraged and pushed me to achieve my potential. Even when my best

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[1] I have chosen to capitalize the words *Indigenous* and *White* as an acknowledgement that these words represent particular and important categories.

[2] When I use the word *Settler*, I mean, "a broad collective of peoples with commonalities through particular connections to land and place, connections that are forged through violence and displacement of Indigenous communities and nations" (Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 11).

friend and I were caught 'liberating' our school library's copy of the *Communist Manifesto* – we ripped out the magnetic tag, snuck it into a Jansport backpack, and fancied ourselves revolutionaries – a sympathetic social studies teacher intervened with the school librarian on our behalf, handed us a few of his copies of *New Republic,* and gave us more productive ways to express our displeasure with 'the man.' I was given room to explore my ideas, afforded opportunities to try and to fail, and forgiven my adolescent irrationalities. I had a 'good' education.

The social studies teacher in the above account was the first to expose me to the injustices of racism, capitalism, and colonialism, and the first to point out their systemic nature. Yet, in his class, we always looked outward, with fingers pointed accusatorily at our neighbors to the south, oppressive regimes in North Korea and Iran, and corporations hungry for profit. We learned about embarrassing incidents in our nation's history as though they were 'one-offs' or accidents of history, events so aberrant and long past that they could not possibly say anything instructive about the Canada we lived in currently. We never talked about the continued reverberations of residential schools, never talked about the conditions faced by Indigenous[3] peoples living on many isolated reserves, never talked about cultural and linguistic genocide – colonialism was a problem, but not here. I don't mean to disparage this particular teacher: he was a wonderful educator, at once kind and intellectually demanding, and he taught us to be open-minded and critical. In fact, I'm not sure I would be *me* if I hadn't had him as a teacher. Nevertheless, I left his classroom with significant gaps in my understanding of *my* place and *my nation's* place in the systems of oppression that so angered me – gaps that would only deepen as I

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[3] See first footnote.

moved my way through a post-secondary education in Anthropology, a discipline infamous for its role in perpetuating colonial ideologies and structures.

Similarly, my post-secondary experience would also likely qualify as a 'good' education according to many Settler Canadians. I had a series of engaging, charismatic, brilliant Professors. They introduced me to new and deeper ways of thinking about culture, society, and the nature of human interaction. They pushed me to write better, to research with a critical eye, to question received wisdom: all things that an exemplary Liberal Arts program should provide for its students. I read the seminal works of ethnography. *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1962)*, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946)*, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1965)*,* and *The Forest of Symbols* (1973) were my favorites: they thrilled me. Reading them felt a bit like space exploration, experiencing cultures that seemed so alien – and yet, were real, living, breathing societies. It was the otherness of the people described in those books that excited me; that and the challenge of transforming otherness into familiarity through deep experience. I had long felt constrained by the homogeneity and predictability of my suburban upbringing, and the study of anthropology felt like a small kind of liberation. I wanted to know more, to experience another way of life, to open myself up to difference in the way Mead, Benedict, Evans-Pritchard, and Turner had done. These learning experiences felt revolutionary and mind-expanding. It was like peeking behind the curtain of the social world. I was entranced. I had a 'good' education.

One professor, however, taught a course on post-modern ethnography that challenged the overly analytic and impersonal accounts of some of my favorite ethnographers. She was a staunch feminist and critic of a traditional ethnography that she

felt was far too impersonal and fraught with hubris and that, therefore, claimed an impossible impartiality. From her, I learned important lessons about the messiness of interacting with communities you do not understand, of the importance of strategic doubt, the complexity of the ethnographer/participant relationship, and about how ethnography could be a tool for cross-cultural understanding and the dismantling of inequity. She introduced me to works that read like novels, were more intimate, that built empathy, and that drew the reader even deeper into the worlds they described. Like my high school social studies teacher, she had a significant impact on how I saw the world, and on my intellectual sense of self. She solidified within me a desire to not only become an educator, but also to travel and teach in new places, to collapse difference, to dismantle the civilized/uncivilized binary, and to break down cultural barriers in an effort to work for justice and equity.

But, just as before, my encounter with her instilled in me a false sense of confidence in my ability to 'fight the man' responsibly and respectfully. Where was the discussion around the overwhelming Whiteness of the ethnographic community? Where was the focus on privilege, on oppression, and the problematics of studying and working with the other? Where was the discussion of individual complicity in colonial, patriarchal structures? They certainly weren't front and center, and I entered Teachers' College largely ignorant of these very real concerns. I felt ready, though: I felt properly enlightened and suitably liberal, and felt that I had a solid, unshakeable foundation from which to tackle injustice and inequality. It was only in the summer before I began my pre-service teacher education that the gaps and crevasses in that foundation began to reveal themselves.

That particular summer marked my first season working for the local conservation authority. I was a Resource Interpreter, and my uniform included the standard bucket hat, khaki shorts, and collared golf shift combination familiar to school children province-wide. I took Kindergartners dip-netting in marshes, went bird watching with fourth-graders, and taught high-schoolers about watershed ecology. Two days out of the week, I took sixth-graders on tours of reconstructed longhouses, built atop the remains of a long abandoned and excavated Wendat village. This was my favorite part of the job. I loved the smell of the longhouses, showing students how to light a fire with flint and milkweed, and telling the story of Turtle Island. I felt close to the history of it all, and it felt alive to me. It felt like what I assumed those early ethnographers had experienced: entering a new and exotic cultural space and making it familiar. I imagined that my work in the longhouses would help others understand Indigenous peoples and communities better, that it would build empathy and, therefore, help to decrease the discrimination Indigenous peoples faced. It was here that a desire to work with, and in, Indigenous communities first emerged.

But, over time, as I began to interact with my Indigenous co-workers in deeper ways, doubts about my assumptions and my ability to do so began to creep in. There were conversations about the residential schools, about the legacies of the colonial project of which I was largely ignorant. I started seeing Canada, and my place in it, in a very different light. The most unsettling of these interactions occurred during a rather innocuous conversation over lunch in our small library. One of my colleagues, an Anishnaabe woman from whom I learned a great deal about medicinal plants, began describing an elder from her community who was a respected storyteller. What struck me

was her explanation of the time and dedication it took him to learn and respectfully share

the knowledge and stories of their community. It was clear that stories, for her and for her

relations, were not stories in the same way I understood them. They were sacred and

layered and complex. So, who was I to be telling the story of Turtle Island to curious

schoolchildren when I had so little knowledge myself? I'd had all of 12 hours of training

before I was expected to do so. Eventually, being in the longhouses began to feel very

different. I had questions about the objects that filled them, about the stories I was

instructed to tell, and about the lessons I was teaching. As I learned more, however, the

gaps and crevasses became more visible and continued to deepen, instead of shrinking. I

hoped that teacher education would help. After all, I had enjoyed a 'good' education up

to this point: I trusted my teachers, and surely, they wouldn't let me down.

I must give my teacher education instructors credit, as I believe that they did their

best with the limited time available to them. One of my instructors spent the better part of

two weeks discussing how to respectfully teach about the residential school system, and

invited an Elder to come and smudge with us. Yet, another instructor encouraged us to

look at personal complicity in privilege and oppression instead of fixing our gaze

outwards. Importantly, these experiences made me uncomfortable, made me defensive,

and forced me down a path towards a deeper consideration of what it meant to say that I

wanted to teach for social justice and against oppression – a path I did not fully

understand the contours of until I began this project.

When I graduated from my pre-service program, I felt unprepared to teach in a

way that would not perpetuate an ignorance of colonial violence and reinforce

stereotypical notions of Indigeneity, while at the same time being unable to see that part

of this unpreparedness was due to a refusal to consider *my* personal complicity as a White Settler. These doubts, uncertainties, and discomforts followed me halfway around the world when I went to teach in Korea, and came back with me more insistent than ever. Enrolling in graduate school seemed the best way to teach myself how to do better than my teachers had. I still wanted to work with Indigenous students and communities, still wanted to work towards reconciliation, and still wanted to become a better ally. In fact, it seemed even more important as time went by, and I began to gain a sense of the debt that I, as a White Settler, owed to those communities and of the role I played in their continued oppression. But I knew then, and know even better know, how much work I still need to do.

A Problem for Teachers

With a single exception, every one of the teachers I encountered throughout my 'good' education were White Settlers. Many of them were well-meaning, conscientious educators but, like me, they'd likely experienced an education that did not force them to challenge their own privileged positions, or that did not closely examine the insidiousness of Canadian colonialism. Simply put, it is difficult to teach what one does not know. In order to disrupt the re-creation of colonial education structures – like the ones I experienced and that cause disproportionate harm to Indigenous students and communities – teachers like me need to begin to confront their privilege and take some first steps towards decolonizing themselves.

I do not mean to imply that had I had a more diverse group of teachers, it would have guaranteed me a more critical education; colonial ideologies are often internalized by those to whom they bring the most harm. However, that White Settler teachers are

particularly resistant to discussions which center race and decolonization as pedagogical

concerns is well documented (Picower, 2009; Schick, 2014; Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

Even those who entered the profession in order to challenge inequity and work towards

social justice find it difficult to imagine that they – simply by virtue of the circumstance

of their birth and upbringing – not only benefit from, but are complicit in, the very

structures that they oppose. It is uncomfortable and troubling. But, by avoiding

conversations around Whiteness and decolonization, White Settler teachers limit their

ability to critically assess their role in supporting and perpetuating, "educational

institutions that work as agents of colonization" (Biermann, 2011, p. 391). This

reluctance and fear can lead to a kind of willful blindness: a blindness that enables White

Settler teachers to continue believing that their best intentions, kindness, and empathy

will suffice to 'lift-up' their marginalized students, or that an understanding of

colonialism as something bad, as something to be opposed, does not necessarily require

them to interrogate *their own* role in its persistence.

Few would dispute, I think, that empathy and an understanding of the broader

implications of colonialism are important components. They are fundamental first steps,

but steps that very few educators – myself included – are forced beyond in the course of

their standard education (Blimkie, Haig-Brown, & Vetter, 2014; Dion, 2007). It,

therefore, becomes easy for White Settler teachers to conclude that the problems of

colonialism are 'out there,' existing not only outside of the self, but also not applicable to

Canadian society generally. It is, therefore, easy for White Settler teachers to assume that

these problems only affect them if they want them to: if they choose to work with people

for whom *it is* a problem. Those who work in classrooms where the majority of students

are White believe that they can, therefore, excuse themselves from the work of

decolonization. This is a falsehood. In much the same way that men are both the

perpetrators and victims of violence shaped by patriarchal ideals, both White Settler

teachers and their White students are also negatively affected – and their classrooms

shaped – by colonialism. It is an ideology that thrives on oppositions, on 'either/or'

binaries. It is combative and limiting. It forces upon Canadian classrooms a hierarchical

categorization of different knowledges, a categorization that systemically undervalues

Indigenous epistemologies and holds Eurocentric ways of knowing as superior

(Biermann, 2011; Settee, 2011). This *epistemological hegemony* bars access to different

ways of thinking and knowing – and it is not only Indigenous students who are denied

access to a holistic, pluralist education in the process, but their Settler classmates, as well

(St. Denis, 2011).

There must, therefore, be a concerted effort on the part of White Settler teachers

to disrupt the colonial forces at work within themselves, the communities they live in,

and the schools in which they teach – regardless of the racial composition of their

classrooms. To do so, however, requires that a White Settler teacher learn a great deal

about the complexities of race, the history of colonization, and the persistence of

epistemological hegemony.

Purpose of the Study: What Was the Goal?

The purpose of this project was to work towards decolonizing myself and my

teaching practice and, by presenting an evocative and accessible account of my attempts

to do so, to give other White Settler educators tools with which they can also begin the

process of decolonization. It was and remains important for me, from both a personal and

professional perspective, to understand my place as a Settler in a *Settler-Colonial state*, a state where the, "violence of invasion is not contained to first contact or the unfortunate birth-pangs of a new nation, but is reasserted each day of occupation" (Tuck & Gaztambide-Ferndandez, 2013, p. 73). I am, in this context, perpetuating the violence of colonialism by my very presence on this land; being in the teaching profession only exacerbates the negative effects of my unexamined White Settler identity.

Unfortunately, I am just one of many White Settler teachers – a convenient exemplar of the paradoxes and dilemmas that face many of us. Though there is an urgent need for teachers like me to address their particular privileges – and to become more open to engaging in decolonizing work – resistance to doing both remains a significant barrier. I remember the first time my EdPhil[4] Instructor – the only Professor of colour I had during my entire post-secondary education – asked me and my classmates to think about our privilege, and to consider the importance of affirmative action programs. I cannot even begin to imagine how dismayed he must have been at the reactions of the White students in his class, myself included. We were upset and resistant, and we let him know it. Over drinks at the local pub we stewed and raged: "That's not what equality is! Affirmative action is unfair! We worked hard to get where we are! He is a horrible teacher!" We said we opposed injustice, that we wanted to work for equity – and yet, we resisted. Many scholars and educators work at remedying this particularly thorny issue around White Settler resistance (Applebaum, 2007; Dion, 2007, 2009; Oskineegish, 2015; Picower, 2009), and there are many avenues one can pursue in order to chip away at the intransigence of the White Settler teacher. But, I would argue, stories that emerge

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[4] Philosophy of Education course.

from the kind of autoethnographic work I engaged in – ones that are personal, evocative, and cathartic (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), while also holding a strong theoretical and analytic centre (Wall, 2016) – have a unique power to challenge this resistance. Most people experience shifts in perspective throughout their lives, and stories are often the catalyst. They present enough distance and anonymity to make it safe to sit with, and come to know, that which distresses us most. They can force us both out of and in to ourselves, and allow us the space and time to pick up the resulting existential pieces.

The story, therefore, that emerged from this project is a tale about the difficult, unsettling learning journey that I've taken and continue to walk upon: a story about trying to mend my 'good' education by attempting to decolonize myself and my practice. It is a story that tackles problems faced by thousands of teachers like me, and that offers them an outline of how they might explore their Settler identities in ways that do not reinforce the structures of marginalization that they so often claim to oppose.

Study Rationale: A 'So What?' Story About Google and Mountain Climbing

In the summer of 2017, I went on a camping trip in the Black Hills. I'd been spending time with my husband in North Dakota while working on the proposal for this project, and when he suggested it as a long-weekend plan, my initial reaction was a, "Heck yes" followed by a, "Which mountain is the highest and can it be climbed in a day?" The day after we booked our campsite, I hunkered down in a carrel at the Fargo Public Library and took to Google for some mountain research. The highest mountain in the Black Hills is 7,024 feet tall, *can* be climbed in a day, and in 2016, its name was changed from Harney to Black Elk Peak – a name change, National Geographic informed me, that was meant to honour the famous Oglala Sioux holy man rather than the

American General responsible for a massacre of Sioux women and children (Howard, 2016). I remember staring at the computer screen after reading that brief article, the iconic yellow and white square staring accusatorily back at me. My fingers hovered, still, over the keyboard; my heart was beating just a touch too fast and I was thinking, with a great deal of chagrin, "Oh shit, you did it again."

I know that the Black Hills are sacred to the Sioux; I did a degree in Anthropology, after all. I even know a reasonably good amount about the history of the Gold Rush that led to it being illegally (as supported by a 1980 Supreme Court ruling) invaded and annexed by the American government. And yet, here I was, *whilst in the middle of constructing a thesis proposal about decolonizing myself,* gleefully planning a weekend of recreation and mountain climbing without considering how it was that a White Settler like me could have unfettered and unregulated access to this landscape. It simply did not occur to me that this could be a problem, even though the facts of Paha Sapa's[5] theft were *known* to me. My Googling continued. As I read and read, my face got hotter and more flush with embarrassment. I wrote furiously in my journal: one excerpt reads, "The Black Hills…le sigh…I want to go, they're so beautiful. I'm not sure if it is appropriate to do so. Given everything that I have read. How stupid was I to think I knew enough to do this!" (May 22, 2017). This incident signified to me that I was – and, in many ways, remain – very near just the beginning of this personal decolonization effort, but that, at the very least, the work I'd done so far had given me the power to recognize *some* of my blind spots, even if it was in semi-retrospect.

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[5] The Lakota word for the Black Hills.

Ultimately, we decided to go ahead with our trip and we did climb Black Elk

Peak. Though there are still two sacred sites in the Black Hills (Matho Paha[6] and Matho

Thipila[7]) where access by settlers is still a contested issue, the same did not appear to be

the case for Black Elk Peak. Regardless, I'm still not entirely comfortable with that

decision. We spent a lot of hours, as we drove through the National Forest, talking about

our choice to go. We debated whether or not we should make an offering of tobacco at

our campsite and at trailheads – an eventual 'no' since we felt we did not have the

knowledge to do respectfully and had not spoken to any local Sioux people; about how

we could leave the least trace – we changed our reservation to a minimalist campsite with

no electricity or plumbing; and about the bigger issues of land, ownership, and

reconciliation. Despite my continuing sense of unease around our trip, those

conversations were very important to me. They were humbling in their lack of clarity.

The only absolute conclusion I reached was that I needed to make a much more serious

effort seek out, listen to, and learn from Indigenous people. I found myself considering

how differently I would have approached these discussions 6 months ago, a year ago, or 4

years ago – and wondering how many of our fellow travelers were talking about the same

things. "How great it would be if we weren't in the minority?" I thought, and I imagined

how the landscape around us might look differently if this were the case.

How different would the pedagogical landscape be if a few more White Settler

teachers were inclined to have these kinds of conversations? If they were called upon,

"not only to live in the past but in relation with the past, acknowledging the claim that the

past has on the present" (Dion, 2007, p. 332). If they could be comfortable with

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[6] Translates in English to Bear Butte.
[7] Translates in English to Devil's Tower.

conversations and debates around Whiteness, Indigeneity, and land that have no easy

answers? If they prepared themselves to *listen to hear* (McGloin, 2015) the voices of

Indigenous students and their communities? Both Indigenous scholar-educators and their

White allies agree that these are a few of the central components in learning how to

decolonize oneself and to create respectful, pluralist pedagogies (Blimkie et al., 2014;

McGloin, 2015; Oskineegish, 2014; St. Denis, 2007, 2011; Wallace, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The foci of this study are Whiteness, decolonization, and pedagogy. The

connections between these concepts are best understood through a critical lens, one that

holds notions of power and privilege at its center and that prioritizes action towards social

change as a key concern. The theoretical framework for this study is, therefore, shaped by

three broad theoretical categories. This study is, firstly, grounded in critical theory (CT),

specifically as it relates to education and decolonizing pedagogies. In addition, the field

of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) contributes the concepts of *Whiteness-as-property*

and *White complicity*, both ideas that help define some problematic characteristics of

White Settler teachers and the particular ways in which they can reproduce hegemonic

knowledge and racial injustice. *Epistemological pluralism*, specifically its capacity to

disrupt both the personal and pedagogical allegiance to Western ways of knowing, will be

examined as a theoretical tool for decolonization. Finally, Ted Aoki's (1993) notion of

the *lived curriculum* will be used to conceptualize how efforts at personal decolonization

can help White Settler teachers grow epistemological pluralism in their personal and

professional lives.

Methodology

This autoethnography was constructed in an iterative fashion, and as such, is a layered account of beginning the process of decolonization. It is both a personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) about Whiteness, decolonization, and teaching, and an examination of how the construction of said narrative illuminates the contours of the decolonizing process. It uses personal journals as the primary data sources along with a *writing story* (Wall, 2008) that charts the process of *memory mining* and the creation of initial reflective vignettes. Given that autoethnography as a methodology is both process and product (Ellis et al., 2011; Muncey, 2005; Spry, 2001), the data sources contained both a description of the methodological process and the material that was analyzed. The analysis itself occurred over several stages, each of which resulted in more refined pieces that offered a greater synthesis of narrative, theory, and reflection.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The second chapter of this autoethnographical work covers two primary components:

i)   The theoretical framework of my study, inclusive of:

- Critical theory, critical pedagogy, and decolonization;

- Critical Whiteness Studies (CW); and

- Epistemological pluralism and curriculum-as-lived; and

ii)   A review of the related scholarly literature on the topics of whiteness, teaching, and autoethnography.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is informed by three primary areas of scholarship that combine to inform an understanding of how White Settler teachers can begin to decolonize themselves and their teaching practice.

Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Decolonization

Critical theories offer a conceptual tool through which educators and scholars alike can envision a role for theory in the transformation of social reality, the dismantling of colonial structures, and the creation of socially just and respectful classrooms. Most critical theorists place significant importance on the emancipatory potential of their discipline-specific theory and the research informed by it (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). To the critical theorists of the past, and those who take up this work in the present, it is not enough to articulate a theory, to view the world conceptually and in the realm of ideas alone; instead, one must understand how theory is enacted and embodied in the real world and must live, as Hannah Arendt (1958, p. 7-8) advises, a *vita activa,* a life that

sees action as a necessary component of scholarly, theoretical pursuits. Critical theorists, therefore, tend to view, "culture . . . as a domain of struggle where the production and transmission of knowledge is always a contested process" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008, p. 413) and where the theorist is necessarily a participant in said struggle. Thus, both the oppressive and productive attributes of power and hegemony are important considerations across the critical theoretical traditions. The themes of discursive power and epistemological authority are also important; more specifically, questions about who has the right to speak and who is barred, and who is forced to listen while others are absolved of listening (McLaren, 2009). This *vita activa* is especially important for scholars in education given the centrality of *praxis* – the enactment of theory into practice – in the field. Critical theory, therefore, is used enthusiastically by many educators who wish to see theory applied in constructive and emancipatory ways in both their research and in their classrooms. For the White Settler teachers who wishes to decolonize their practice, critical theory is, then, particularly powerful. It illuminates the deeper structural issues that underlie the need to decolonize one's practice, while also providing tools with which to begin.

Educators who undertake this work will often identify themselves as *critical pedagogues*. Critical pedagogues challenge the 'taken-for-granted' nature of dominant ideologies and epistemologies, and are consistently reflective about the ways in which these ideologies and epistemologies are recreated in their classrooms in particular, and in systems of school more broadly (McLaren, 2009). Maxine Greene (2009) presents a concise interpretation of what it means to 'do' this kind of critical pedagogy when she states that we must, "defamiliarize our commonsense worlds" (p. 86). It is, therefore,

common for critical pedagogues to present oppositional dialogues and work towards

dismantling the epistemological hegemony of Western knowledge systems (McLaren,

2009). Questioning the traditional, Eurocentric *banking model* (Freire, 1970, 1974) of

education – one that centers the voices of teachers and the dominant society while

silencing students – is a central piece of working a critical pedagogy. For White Settler

teachers, this means understanding that they have spent a lifetime benefitting from the

alignment of their personal understandings of the world with the dominant way of

knowing (Biermann, 2011; Settee, 2011), and that 'doing' critical pedagogy means

ceding the center to new epistemologies and classroom participants. Critical pedagogues,

therefore, often focus on centering the languages, attributes, and cultural knowledge of

oppressed groups in formal classrooms in an attempt to change the perception of what

counts as 'real' knowledge (Delpit, 1995; Louie & Scott, 2016; Yosso, 2002). This is a

particularly common concern for critical scholars in education that work with Indigenous

communities and towards decolonizing classrooms.

A *decolonizing pedagogy* further challenges the hegemony of Eurocentric

knowledge systems, seeks to expose the ways in which Indigenous ways of knowing are

systematically marginalized, and works towards disrupting the assimilationist and

culturally insensitive incorporation of Indigenous cultures and histories in mainstream

classrooms (Battiste, 2013; Dion, 2007, 2009; St. Denis, 2011). An understanding of the

history of colonialism and its recreation in many mainstream classrooms is, therefore, an

important component of a decolonizing pedagogy. Teacher-researchers who claim to be

working towards decolonization need to, "question the nature of [their] historical and

social situation" (Settee, 2011, p. 435). This act of questioning requires White Settler

educators to consider the ways in which they are complicit in the continuing colonization of Indigenous peoples. They cannot claim ignorance of the benefits they reap as representatives of the colonizer class, and must be willing to listen – both critically and with respect – to the voices of their Indigenous students and colleagues. This kind of critical listening requires that White Settler educators are willing to decenter their own voices, and are able to accept the necessary discomfort that comes with an awareness of their own complicity in the reproduction of colonialism in the classroom (McGloin, 2015). Acknowledging complicity – or, the way that White Settlers are active (if, often unconsciously, so) in the continuing cycle of colonialism – is one of the first steps in decolonizing one's self and one's practice. Further, understanding the theoretical and practical constructions of Whiteness can help to conceptualize this complicity.

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS)

Understanding White Settler complicity requires understanding how Whiteness functions as both an identity and as a broader sociological construct. The field of *Critical Whiteness Studies* (CWS) concerns itself with both. The CWS field has, at its core, a challenge of the 'taken-for-granted' nature and invisibility of Whiteness (Owen, 2007). In marking Whiteness as a topic worthy of study, CWS scholars remove it from its place as the unconfronted norm of human existence and open it up to critical examination (McWhorter, 2005). Doing so unveils the deep and harmful connections between White racial identity, power, privilege, and oppression (Roediger, 2001). A critical study of Whiteness is, therefore, not just about White identity or just about how Whiteness functions at a structural level: it's about the connections between them, and how the power borne of this connection works to privilege Whiteness at the expense of the other.

The works of both Cheryl Harris (1993) and Ruth Frankenberg (1993) in the early 1990s

explore these connections and still influence much of the contemporary scholarship in

CWS, and are therefore particularly useful for White Settlers seeking to better understand

their social location and its implications.

Each author tackles Whiteness from a different perspective: Harris, as a Black

legal scholar, and Frankenberg, as a White feminist sociologist. In her work *Whiteness as

Property*, Harris (1993) discusses how property ownership, civil rights, and personal

freedom were, historically, contingent upon and deeply intertwined with Whiteness. The

power of Whiteness was, in the historical context, embodied in the White individual and

imbued with potency via the legal and educational institutions that defined Whiteness

against the other and through the universal exclusion of those who were defined as, "not-

white" (Harris, 1993, p. 1734). Lest the reader dismiss the relationship between

Whiteness and property as a historical relic, Harris (1993) shows that, "whiteness as

property evolved into a more modern form through the law's ratification of the settled

expectations of relative White privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline" (p. 1714).

Harris (1993) uses the legal reactions to affirmative action legislation and the

accompanying accusations of 'reverse discrimination' to demonstrate the very real anger

on the part of many Whites when their privileged status – or the value of their "property"

– is challenged (p. 1767). It is not surprising, then, that White Settlers – like me and my

Teachers' College classmates – become defensive when confronted with the truth of their

privileged positions, particularly when they feel that their 'rights' are being challenged,

and when they fail to understand that their assumption that fair access to education or

employment *is* a 'right' flows directly from their membership in the dominant racial group.

In an effort to challenge this resistance, White scholars like Ruth Frankenberg use CWS as a theoretical lens through which to understand how their communities, and the individuals in them, embody and reproduce the harmful effects of Whiteness. In her ethnography *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Frankenberg (1993) seeks to, "view White women's lives as sites both for the reproduction of racism and for challenges to it" (p. 4). Frankenberg's book is both an examination of Whiteness as structure and the unconscious complicity of even well-meaning White people in its oppressive effects, particularly when White racial identity remains an unchallenged norm. She charts both her own complicated feelings about her Whiteness and those of the working-class women with whom she worked. Speaking explicitly about Whiteness in this way, and engaging with it in a critical fashion, allows Frankenberg (1993) to show that, "dealing with racism is not merely an option for White people…, rather, racism shapes White people's lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life" (p. 10). White people are, therefore, not absolved from discussions about race due to their position as members of the racially normative group, and are responsible for interrogating the racist structures they encounter in their daily lives. Our unearned privilege exists *due to* the oppression of others, not in spite of it. Privilege and oppression are, thus, in opposition to one another and, as Frankenberg shows, White scholars must understand the implications of their privileged positions if they pursue work that seeks to remedy racial injustice.

CWS is used as a theoretical tool in educational research when the goal is to challenge White teachers' implicit biases. The use of this lens allows scholars to turn their attention to the dominant culture's role in educational inequity rather than the deficits of racialized students, communities, and cultures (Levine-Rasky, 2000). A frequent finding for CWS researchers working with both pre- and in-service White teachers is that participants shy away from discussions of race and racism. The particular defensive strategies used by White teachers to distance themselves, and suggestions to counter them, are explored in the work of both Picower (2009) and Case and Hemmings (2005).

Picower (2009), for instance, shows that White teachers demonstrate hegemonic understandings of race that flow from fear, deficit ideologies of racialized communities, and notions of White victimhood. Her participants used what she terms *tools of Whiteness* to distance themselves from complicity in racial injustice (Picower, 2009). Specifically, they possessed all the rhetorical tools necessary to be, "able to deny their place in the racial hierarchy" (Picower, 2009, p. 198) and used them to negate any complicity in reproducing racial injustice. Getting White pre-service teachers to critically examine race and privilege is, therefore, a complex and difficult process, one that, "must center . . . efforts . . . to challenge White student teachers to examine their racial biographies and hegemonic beliefs" (Picower, 2009, p. 211). Picower (2009) stresses that this cannot be done piecemeal, as a one-semester course on inclusive education, with a focus on social justice and critical pedagogies; it must be integrated throughout all teacher education programs.

This assertion is borne out in Case and Hemming's (2005) study of White women's reactions to an initial teacher education course on anti-racism. The authors observed that participants employed what they termed *distancing strategies* to avoid discussing race and racism. Like in Picower's (2009) study, participants, "fail[ed] to recognize and engage in self-reflection on race and racism" (Case & Hemmings, 2005, p. 607). The readings presented in the course forced participants to confront their complicity, as members of the dominant group, in reproducing institutional racism regardless of their perceived lack of overtly racist actions/attitudes (Case & Hemmings, 2005). The strategies used – including silence, social dissociation, and separation from responsibility – allowed the student-teachers to avoid the discomfort that arose from course readings, and allowed them to resist confronting the ways in which they were implicated in the creation of racial injustice (Case & Hemmings, 2005). Case and Hemmings (2005) propose that a meta-dialogic approach to anti-racist education can be helpful in addressing and dismantling the distancing strategies use by participants. They submit that talking about how *White people* talk about race will allow student teachers to more safely approach the difficult themes in anti-racist pedagogies (Case & Hemmings, 2005).

Epistemological Pluralism and Curriculum-as-Lived

The knowledge(s) valued in classrooms and the structures that reproduce and imbue them with power are key concerns for researchers and teachers working within critical paradigms – and even moreso if those same scholars are seeking to decolonize their practice. *Epistemological pluralism* (EP) is a theoretical notion than can help teachers and researchers to conceptualize knowledge production and validity. This

section of the theoretical framework will discuss EP, and how it connects to Ted Aoki's

(1993) notion of the *lived curriculum* or *curriculum-as-lived.*

Biermann (2011), in his discussion about how White teachers can work towards

decolonization, describes *epistemological pluralism* as the presence of more than one

valid system of knowledge in learning spaces. He shows that the epistemological

hegemony of Eurocentric Knowledge (EK) in mainstream schools is a fundamentally

colonial structure, and one that can be challenged through the introduction of EP

(Biermann, 2011). It is, according to Biermann, not enough to acknowledge that other

ways of knowing exist; we must challenge all, "frameworks of power and knowledge that

naturalize certain approaches to knowledge and define others as intellectually *other"*

(Biermann, 2011, p. 386). That there is only space for one way of knowing atop the

podium is, itself, an idea that flows from a Eurocentric epistemology, one that,

"position[s] knowledge as emerging from one site, the site of power and privilege" (Dei,

James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, & Zine, 2000, p. 45-46).

Understanding that the hierarchy of knowledge is a colonial idea, educators who

employ EP create classrooms in which the intrinsic value and academic significance of

non-Western knowledge systems are recognized, and where teachers and students work

together towards cross-epistemological dialogue. Perhaps, had I been in classrooms

where epistemological pluralism was valued, I may have completed formal schooling

better prepared to do the work of decolonization. In the same way that EK premises a

hierarchical approach towards the categorization of knowledges, Indigenous Knowledges

(IK) are often productive of learning environments where the opposite is true. Though

Indigenous ways of knowing are diverse, they generally "are open for public ownership

and public consumption . . . are not part of a privileged paradigm that speaks from only

one position of power . . . [and] speak to community and the open exchange of ideas and

perspectives" (Dei et al., 2000, p. 46). From this perspective, no one person owns and has

sole right to distribute and/or imbue knowledge with validity; knowledge is communally

owned and is meant to be shared. It is also all the more powerful and meaningful when it

is co-created and co-owned (Steinhauer, 2002). Viewing knowledge as a community

asset is a necessary component of a pedagogy that seeks to develop EP. This kind of

pedagogy also requires a democratic approach, one that privileges the voices and life

histories of students rather than holding the teacher as the ultimate epistemological

authority.

In his article "Legitimating a Lived Curriculum: Towards a Curricular Landscape

of Multiplicity," Ted Aoki (1993) introduces the concept of a *lived curriculum* in contrast

to the traditional curriculum-as-planned. The *curriculum-as-planned* exists as a single,

privileged, course of learning, prescribed by state-employed curriculum designers outside

the specifics of any particular school or classroom (Aoki, 1993). The *lived curriculum*,

conversely, can be seen as a, "multiplicity of lived curricula" (Aoki, 1993, p. 258)

embodied by each participant in a classroom and created via the interactions between

participants – interactions which are, in turn, influenced by each individual's life

experiences and particular personalities. Though his work was written over 20 years ago,

Aoki's (1993) assertion that the present curricular landscape very much, "privileges the

curriculum-as-plan" (p. 247) remains true. The lived curriculum privileges, instead, the

knowledge brought into the classroom by students and teachers alike, and that which is

produced via their relationships (Aoki, 1993). So, for Aoki (1993), the landscape of

multiplicity he seeks refers not only to the multiple lived curricula, but also to the presence of both a curriculum-as-planned and a curriculum-as-lived within the classroom. In this model, students, "do not conform to the curriculum . . . rather, they embody and direct the unfolding of the curriculum" (Magrini, 2015, p. 276). The curriculum-as-planned still has a role to play, but no longer does it operate as the singular curricular authority in the classroom: multiplicity and pluralism supplant curricular hegemony.

Aoki's curricular landscape, like so many Indigenous knowledges, requires communality and co-operation on the part of both teachers and students. It disrupts the notion that valid knowledge flows only in one direction from student to teacher, and also works against the notion that the only valid knowledge in the classroom is derived from the official curriculum-as-planned. A classroom that works in this way – that acknowledges the role and generative potential of the curriculum-as-lived – opens itself up to decolonizing pedagogies, and to the authentic co-creation of knowledge. It is also likely to be a better habitat in which to grow a pedagogy that centers and is productive of EP. The challenge for teachers is learning how to live within the, "tensionality that emerges, in part, from in-dwelling in the difference between two curricula: the curriculum-as-plan and the lived curriculum" (Aoki, 1993, p. 257). This challenge is always complicated by the particular identities of the actors in any given classroom, most particularly when White teachers engage with students of diverse backgrounds. It is, however, a necessary undertaking for those White teachers that work towards cross-cultural dialogue, who aim to bring their personal decolonization efforts into their classrooms.

Literature Review

With the study's theoretical framework firmly in play, I turn my attention to providing a review of the relevant scholarship, specifically in the areas of whiteness, teaching, and autoethnography, to provide recent research-based insights into the decolonizing efforts teachers have engaged in using this particular kind of methodology.

Whiteness, Teaching, and Autoethnography

Though it is sometimes critiqued for being too inward looking and self-serving, with the author's voice existing in a vacuum and without context (Anderson, 2006; Delamont, 2007), *autoethnography* allows scholars a unique opportunity, to "restor[e] and acknowledg[e] . . . the validity of personal knowing, and the social and scientific value of the pursuit of personal questions" (Wall, 2006, p. 152). It, therefore, is an especially valuable form of inquiry in fields that require deep levels of praxis, like healthcare, psychology, and education. In these fields, an understanding of an individual practitioner's personal and professional relationships with and between both theory, practice, and broader socio-cultural contexts can, "do what all good . . . research should aim to do: contribute to a body of knowledge to help inform practice" (Muncey, 2005, p. 70). In teaching, one of the most persistent, insidious problems of praxis involves how to teach in a socially-just, anti-racist, and decolonizing fashion – this is an especially complex issue for White Settler educators. There is a growing body of autoethnographies written by White scholar-educators that focus on various aspects of these issues. They share common themes around inherent prejudice and the reproduction of systemic inequities, and tend to focus on *critical incidents* in the authors' teaching or scholarly pursuits – incidents that lead them to a deeper interrogation of their White identity and its

implications for both their professional and personal lives (Martin, 2014; Shevock, 2016;

Vass, 2016; Wood, 2017). These authors seek to, "problematize whiteness" – to, "step

outside the boundaries of theoretical frameworks to explore broader narratives of

whiteness" (Martin, 2014, p. 239). Despite, however, the thematic similarities in their

work, each author applies different methods when presenting and analyzing their stories,

and they each approach the problem of whiteness in different ways.

     Both Vass (2016) and Shevock (2016) address Whiteness and teaching, but do so

from different temporal vantage points. Vass (2016) uses the extended metaphor of

education-as-railway to describe his efforts to work in more respectful ways with

Indigenous students and communities. He talks about, "traversing the educational terrain"

(p. 85) as a White Settler and his growing understanding of how the openness of the

landscape is implicitly tied to the colonizing project, namely that it is not equally open to

all, travelers (Vass, 2016). Like many autoethnographers, Vass points to a critical

incident that occurred during his time in graduate school: a panel discussion on 'making a

difference' in education. For him, it was the reaction of the audience to the Indigenous

speakers taking part. The audience took a passive-aggressive and subtly dismissive tone

that prompted him to look more deeply at his Whiteness (Vass, 2016). He describes, in

detail, how he (like me) felt unprepared to teach against racism and colonization, and

expresses frustration with resources he encountered that focused on un-closeable

achievement gaps and promoted essentialist ideas about Indigenous epistemologies

(Vass, 2006). His autoethnographic journey, therefore, was one focused on filling the

'gaps' in *his* knowledge.

Unlike Vass' work, which is largely forward-looking, Shevock's autoethnography about whiteness, music, and rurality is a retrospective view of how each influenced and continues to influence his teaching practice (Shevock, 2016). He frames his study of music education and rural identities, "around the central metaphor of 'roots'" (p. 32). Shevock (2016) argues that contemporary music education is an *uprooting* endeavor that encourages students to discount local musical traditions in favor of more, "cultured" forms (p. 30). He points to his own upbringing in a rural, largely White town as an instance where his own *rootedness* ultimately led to the *uprooting* of his marginalized students' musical traditions. Shevock (2016) traces how he sought to remedy this *uprooting* in his classrooms by prioritizing *school music* – things like the classics and big band standards – over *popular music* (Shevock, 2016). In each of these autoethnographies, narrative and metaphor are used to situate and analyze the authors' experiences. Other autoethnographers choose to be more explicit about the analytic tools they use when approaching their data.

The works of both Martin (2014) and Wood (2017) are solidly situated in existing theoretical and analytic traditions. For instance, Martin (2014) presents a series of vignettes, accompanied by an in-depth analysis grounded in CWS, in order to examine the implicit biases that came of his White, working-class background. He argues that, far from embracing color-blindness, his upbringing stressed differences between White people and people of color: he states, "Bigoted arguments formed my conceptualization of being a White male" (Martin, 2014, p. 239). Martin unpacks his experiences growing up, and as a beginning teacher, by layering his personal narrative with theoretical

commentary; each narrative/theory section builds upon the previous one, illustrating the cyclical and iterative process of learning about privilege.

Wood (2017) also approaches his project analytically, and employs Eisner's 4 qualities of the *educational connoisseur* to frame his analysis. He tells a story of an Indigenous student in his drama class, Sal, who declined to perform in a play written by Australian First Peoples playwrights (Wood, 2017). Wood reflects upon this critical incident, and uses it to draw out lessons regarding his ability and preparedness to teach to and about First Peoples. In using Eisner's qualities of the *educational connoisseur*, Wood (2017) attempts to assess his embodiment/non-embodiment of these qualities in his teaching practice.

Regardless of the analytic and narrative perspective from which they work, each of these autoethnographic accounts interweave broader analysis and narrative effectively, layering each upon the other and presenting strategies with which other White Settler educators might begin their own examination of similar issues.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY or MEMORY MINING

Where does this story start? Does it have an identifiable *departure point* – a place in time I can point to and say confidently, "Ah yes, that was the beginning!" I've come to see that the decolonizing process is not so much linear as it is circular and iterative, and so, I'd say the answer to those questions is less "yes" than "no." But, we're getting ahead of ourselves a bit; so, for the sake of easing in gently, let's point to April 2017 as a tentative departure point.

Like so many graduate students before me, I'd hammered away at a proposal for the kind of project I thought would help me mend my "good education" and attend to my lack of knowledge about how to teach respectfully both in Indigenous communities and with Indigenous students. My proposed project involved interviewing young Indigenous university students about ally-ship, Whiteness, and epistemological pluralism, and working with them to produce a guide for other White Settler teachers. It was a pretty good proposal, I thought. My research was thorough, my theoretical synthesis was solid, and my supervisor gave it her tentative stamp of approval. In April, 2017, it went off to the committee.

One member of my committee is Indigenous. This meeting was the first time we were properly introduced. I remember him sitting down at the brightly lit conference table and catching a glimpse of his copy of my proposal. It was covered in fine, tight script. His penciled notes tracked up and down the margins, across and in-between paragraphs, and were heavily populated by question marks. When it was his turn to address the other two committee members and I, he prefaced his remarks kindly: "I don't want you to be offended, there are some good things here" he began, "but there is a lot of

thinking you haven't done yet." He looked at me and asked, "Who are you?" He

continued, "You give me no idea where you come from, or why you want to do this work

– or what, if any, connection you have to Indigenous communities. If you've made an

effort to form these connections, I don't see any evidence here." He was right, of course:

I had very few of these connections aside from my experiences working in the

longhouses, a piece that was missing from the initial proposal, and the problematics of

which you have already read about.

He drew my attention to words and phrases that *seemed* neutral to me, and pushed

me to define what exactly I meant when I said I wanted to work toward decolonizing

schools and who, exactly, was I that this was important for me? Why did I care, and, even

more saliently, what relationships did I have with Indigenous peoples and communities

that would prepare me to do research ethically with Indigenous participants? I hadn't

even really thought about these things. The academic isn't personal for me – or, at least it

wasn't then. It became clear, though, that the personal is at the very center of any

decolonizing project and that, by neglecting it, I'd proposed a project that would do very

little to mend my "good education."

Many people talk about decolonization: politicians, policy wonks, educators,

radio hosts, university professors, and me in that first proposal. There's plenty of

discussion around decolonizing schools, decolonizing health care, decolonizing public

spaces, and decolonizing the arts. All these realms of public life need to begin the

decolonization project in earnest, that fact is not in doubt; but what do we really mean

when we use that term *decolonization*? We use it freely without really considering its

implications, especially White Settlers and, even more especially, White Settlers who

explicitly work towards decolonization. In speaking righteously about it, we so often still

present ourselves as *good Whites* (Picower, 2009; Vaught & Castagno, 2008) who are

happy to castigate the institutions we work within and eager to dedicate ourselves to

making the world better for the peoples our ancestors harmed. But, as I discovered, when

you take a close look at that word *decolonization* and you carefully examine what it

really means, doing the work gets a lot more complicated and deeply personal.

Below I will chart both the autoethnographic tradition that provided the

methodological framework for this attempt at understanding and experimenting with the

decolonization process, the research questions that attuned my focus, and the specific

methods I used to find my way through this experiment in decolonization. As it was an

experiment in the original sense of the word, the one that emerged along with the

scientific method, it is a process that will never really end. All true experiments are

iterative; as you move forward, you refine your questions while simultaneously

expanding the worlds you can explore. Just as we didn't stop and say, "Ah, yes, we

understand the atomic world!" when we took the first picture of an electron but asked

instead, "What else can we discover?", the snapshot outlined here is just that.

There will always be more to learn.

What Kind of Autoethnography?

Autoethnography is a particularly slippery form of inquiry, one that does not lend

itself to well-defined boundaries, nor one that offers concrete, well-trod routes for the

aspiring researcher. However, at the heart of all definitions of *autoethnography* is a focus

on the connection between self and culture, and the collapsing of the many binaries that

surround it (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Tami Spry (2001) defines it as a self-narrative that

critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts (p. 710), while Deborah

Reed-Danahay (2017) calls it, "a genre of writing that places the self of the researcher

and/or narrator within a social context [and that] provokes questions about the nature of

ethnographic knowledge" (p. 145). Sarah Wall (2006) defines *autoethnography* as, "an

intriguing and promising qualitative method that offers a way of giving voice to personal

experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding" (p. 38). From this

central tenet – the acknowledgement of the value of personal narrative in understanding

culture – the field then diverges. The extent to which an autoethnographer focuses on

self, to which they ground their project in traditional sociological analysis, and the

narrative form – for instance, prose, poetry, or performance – that they choose, will vary

widely.

The field's most vocal proponents, Ellis and Bochner, see the malleability and

adaptability of autoethnography, along with its focus on evocative and "heartful"

storytelling (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Ellis, 1999) as key to its usefulness as a way of

constructing knowledge. In contrast to their "evocative" school, Anderson (2006, 2011)

focuses, instead, on how autoethnography can inform/be informed by broader social

theory and analysis. Each perspective, both evocative and analytic, has its merits, and I

view my foray into autoethnography as a *moderate autoethnography* (Wall, 2016)

existing in-between the two, one that takes an explicitly *critical* theoretical and analytic

perspective (Marx, Pennington, & Chang, 2017 while exploring the personal and

transformational possibilities of self-study (Boyd, 2008).

Critical Methodology

As a methodology, autoethnography owes its existence and broader acceptance to the critical shift in qualitative research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This shift encourages, "research practices that [are] performative, pedagogical, and political" (Denzin, 2006, p. 422). Autoethnographic projects that claim a critical methodology must go beyond mere theorizing and make an honest contribution to the dismantling of injustice (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008. *Critical inquiry* is, thus, "embedded in a transformative paradigm that seeks to expose, oppose, and redress forms of oppression, inequality, and injustice" (Charmaz, 2017, p. 35). Qualitative research that merely describes the effects of colonization, racism, or any other form of oppression, then, falls short of this criterion. Inquiry that calls itself critical must, instead, be designed in such a way that it directly challenges oppressive structures and makes an attempt, however small, to remedy the injustices that arise from them. The goal, then, is not only the production of knowledge itself, but to what ends that knowledge is used. As a component of the focus on emancipatory goals, researchers participating in critical inquiry projects often broaden their notions of what counts as knowledge and as data. They, "use multiple epistemologies in their work . . . [and] value introspection, memory work and even dreams as important ways of knowing" (Foley & Valenzuela, 2008, p. 289). Autoethnography permits researchers to look more broadly here, to consider more deeply what counts as knowledge and data, and requires them to center their personal rationales for engaging with critical and contested topics of study.

Credibility and Ethics

The ability to tie larger socio-cultural analysis to one's personal, reflexive narrative is often cited as a key component of establishing the credibility of any autoethnographic work (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 2006). This is certainly important – but, I would argue that the strength of any autoethnographic analysis will also be predicated on the narrative strength and evocativeness of the writing. Wall (2016) also traces this middle ground between evocative and analytic autoethnographies – what she calls *moderate autoethnography* – and argues that an autoethnographer can best establish credibility by being clear, "about their purpose, provid[ing] a level of analysis, and attend[ing] to the ethical issues that arise in this form of work" (p. 5). It is also important for an autoethnographer to attend to issues of truth-in-memory (Freeman, 2015; Muncey, 2005) and the quality of their writing (Freeman, 2015). Without an honest accounting of how one constructs and constrains their recollections, the credibility of an autoethnographic work will suffer.

Though it would appear at first glance that ethical conflicts would be fewer and less difficult in autoethnographic work, uniquely thorny ethical issues arise when one researches the self. Additionally, in this kind of study – one that grounds itself in critical theory and attempts to do work towards decolonization – ethical considerations are intricately tied to the credibility of the project. The work of Indigenous methodological scholars emphasizes the importance of respect, reciprocity, and relationships when engaging in research that claims a decolonizing rationale (Steinhauer, 2002; Wilson, 2001).

Though the 'three R's' are often used to guide research done with Indigenous participants and/or in Indigenous communities, it can also offer a guide to the autoethnographer. For this project, *respect* means seeking out and including the voices of Indigenous scholars in one's analysis of their personal narrative. *Reciprocity* requires that final product is useful in helping other White Settler teachers begin the work of decolonization (Kwaymullina, 2016; Weber-Pillwax, 2002), and attending to *relationships* requires an acknowledgement that, "the process of knowing inevitably involves locating the self within the networks of relationships that comprise the world, and that also comprise the self" (Kwaymullina, 2016, p. 441).

This last 'R' – relationships – is perhaps the most salient. No one is an island, and any personal narrative necessarily includes the important people who populate our lives and memories (Muncey, 2005; Wall, 2008). How does the autoethnographer reconcile protecting the feelings and confidentiality of the people we love with efforts towards truthfulness and completeness? At what point does ethics board clearance become necessary? What about our relationships with community members, particularly those who come from marginalized communities? These are questions with no easy answers, but questions that still must be kept at the center of how the critical autoethnographer chooses to construct their narrative – what to include, what to leave out, and what to modify. Ultimately, the final product must be useful to people other than me, and must be accessible and credible; otherwise, I do a disservice to the loved ones I've included and to the decolonization effort I claim to be working towards. I must also be clear about the question of, "Who I am and why I am here?" – not only the, "Why does this matter?" but the, "Why does this matter *to me* [emphasis added]?" (Safstrom, 2011, p. 12).

"Who Are You and Why Are You Here?"

My first complete memory is of my grandfather. I'm sitting in his aluminum fishing boat as the sun rises, waiting, my line trailing in the water as we drift with the morning breeze. I think I was five, maybe six years-old. It was an important day: that morning I caught my first proper, edible fish. It was the day my grandfather showed me how to use a fillet knife and my mother showed me how to cook breakfast bass in flour and butter. It was, however, just one in a string of summer days that started in exactly the same way. The summers I spent in Sydenham Lake with my parents and grandfather followed a familiar pattern: get up, get in the boat, cast your line, wait, maybe catch something, swim, escape into the woods, build things, come home, go to bed. The moments that stand out to me the most, emerging in sharp contrast from the regular rhythm, are the ones my grandfather and I spent together. He was my favorite person. Gentle, good, wise, strong, and seeming very much like he had emerged, fully formed, from the wild landscape he loved so much. He was, and remains, my lodestone, the point to which all things return, and a true example of what it means to love the land you were born on, to remain connected to and draw sustenance from it, and of what it means to live an honest life despite hardship, poverty, and war.

His name was Neil Timmerman and he was born in 1923. A descendant of the first Dutch immigrants to New Amsterdam and a clan of United Empire Loyalists, his mother and father worked a small farm in the same region of Southern Ontario his ancestors had fled to at the close of the revolution. There they stayed until the first rumblings of economic depression forced my great-grandfather, in 1926, to the northern mines in search of a steady paycheck, first to Cobalt and then North to the gold fields of

Kirkland Lake. There is a story my great-grandmother, Susie, tells on a tape recording she made in 1963 about her journey to join him. It was cold, late fall. Susie did not want her husband to see her children dirty-faced and rumpled from the road. She cracked a hole in the ice in a roadside ditch, and cleaned all five up as best she could. This story is indicative of the life they would lead, a life of resourcefulness prompted by necessity in the face of hardship. They adapted to their life in the north by supplementing my great-grandfather's meager wages with what the land could offer. All of the children learned to hunt, fish, and gather summer berries. Their existence was not easy, but in all of the stories my grandfather, and then my mother, would tell, it was largely a happy one. It shaped my grandfather, and in turn, shaped the lessons I learned from him: lessons about how connected we are to the land around us, how to live as a part of it and not *apart* from it, and how joyous life can be when it is lived in harmony with the landscape that surrounds you.

He died when I was nine years-old. That was my first introduction to loss, and it was a profound one. I carry him with me, though. Through all stages of my life, he has been in the background. I think of all the things he taught me, of how he would judge my actions. My decisions to honour his, and my own, love of all the wild places has led me to live a life as closely connected to them as I can. I cannot conceive of myself as separate from the landscapes I love. All of these things form the backbone of who I am, and what I value.

Since I began this project, I've come to an understanding of the deeper implications my presence on this land holds for Indigenous people. Learning, even in the small ways that I have, about the devastation wrought by the colonial project – in which

my ancestors willingly participated – has forced me to re-conceptualize my sense of self, to question the very deep and profound role connection to land has played, and continues to play, in the outline of my life and of my identity. The privilege I've been granted to experience the beauty of, and spiritual connection to, my environment exists by virtue of the displacement and deaths of a great many people. *I owe a debt to them and their descendants.* I feel that very profoundly; I see it as the only way to honour the lessons I learned as a child, and my responsibilities as an inhabitant on this land.

This is part of who I am and of why I am here – to answer this section of the project's titling prompt. I have a responsibility, not only to my grandfather's memory, but to the people with whom I share this land, Indigenous and Settler alike. If I can, in some small way, work towards repaying debts owed, and provide a little nudge for others to do so as well, I've begun to attend to that responsibility.

Research Questions

The research questions for this project all stemmed from a larger, complex question: How can I teach towards social justice and against oppression when my Whiteness represents the very structures of marginalization I oppose?

I suspect that I will spend the rest of my teaching career wondering about – and trying to formulate solutions to – this particularly thorny question, for it is not really an answerable one. However, as I moved through this first attempt to tackle it, I realized that an ability to 'teach towards social justice and against oppression,' as I've conceived it, cannot be developed without first understanding how, 'my Whiteness represents the very structures of marginalization I oppose' – an understanding that cannot be reached without

an honest first attempt at self-decolonization. I, therefore, used the following three

questions to guide this project:

i.   How have I embodied/do I embody colonial structures in my personal and

professional life?

ii.   How does my understanding of Settlerness and Indigeneity change as I go

through the process of decolonization?

iii.   What can the decolonization process teach me about how to teach towards

social justice and against oppression?

Data Sources

The choice of what data sources to include in an autoethnography is a difficult

one. Traditional sources of data often do not suffice to construct a full and coherent

narrative and, therefore, the use of varied sources is often necessary. These data sources

may include artifacts such as letters, school records, health records, and pieces of art

(Muncey, 2005). Other scholars – particularly those who identify more closely with the

analytic school – will also include interviews with family members and friends as a way

of triangulating their recollections and bolstering credibility (Anderson, 2006). However,

during my foray into autoethnography, it was memory itself (Freeman, 2015; Reed-

Danahay, 2017) – both that was already committed to paper and some that existed only in

the mind – that proved to be the most important data source for me. I was also able to

capture the 'process as product' aspect of autoethnographic methodology by composing a

writing story (Wall, 2008) throughout the many stages and iterations of this project. The

writing story allowed me to analyze what I call the *memory mining process* alongside,

and in relation to, the memories themselves. This added depth to my analysis and made

visible the connections between my evocative personal narrative and the critical/decolonizing theoretical traditions that underpins this project.

Memory Mining

Ethnography is a complex endeavor, one whose strategies, goals, and underlying assumptions have been in consistent flux – and never more so than in recent years (Hammersley, 2018). Despite any ongoing debates, however, at the core of ethnography is the study of culture, done through the observation, recording, and analysis of whatever the context you have chosen (Walford, 2009). In my case, as is the case with many autoethnographers, the person (context) whose actions and thoughts I recorded and analyzed were my own. As, however, Tilley (2016) tells us, "researchers are [also] primarily instruments for collecting, interpreting, analyzing, and representing data" (p. 28). There are mind-bending implications of viewing oneself as a research participant through the tool of one's own psyche. It's a fun (or horror) house of mirrors, one that makes teasing apart the methodology and describing it in an accessible fashion all the more difficult.

Regardless, the same rules that guide rigor in ethnography, or any kind of qualitative research, apply and are joined by several criteria that are given unique meaning within the autoethnographic field. Tracy (2010) synthesizes the discussions around rigor in qualitative research and presents eight criteria to consider when evaluating the strength of qualitative work:

i.   Worthy topic;

ii.   Rich rigor;

iii. Sincerity;

     iv.   Credibility;

     v.   Resonance;

     vi.   Significant contribution,

     vii.   Ethical

     viii.   Meaningful coherence.

Le Roux (2017) offers a closer consideration of what criteria apply specifically to autoethnographic research. She lists subjectivity, self-reflexivity, resonance, credibility, and contribution. Though all these criteria were important considerations in the design and execution of this project, the particular complications of autoethnographic research – and the expectation that critical research be accessible and of use in working towards social justice and emancipatory goals – required a deeper methodological focus on *coherence*, *contribution*, and *subjectivity*. It is difficult to make a significant contribution to teaching practice (Le Roux, 2017; Tracy, 2010) if an autoethnography does not present a coherent account of how the research was done, such that, especially in the case of decolonization, it might be adapted and replicated by other practitioners. Furthermore, a consistent and explicit focus on, "self-awareness, self-exposure, and self-conscious introspection" (Le Roux 2017, p. 204), throughout the design, execution, and description of the methodological process ensures that the use of the research instrument remains visible. Therefore, this chapter will outline the steps that I took to collect, categorize, and interpret data, the rationale behind the choices that I made, and the challenges and limitations of those choices.

Research as "Bricolage"

Describing the methodological process of such a messy, iterative, and inward-looking research project required an ability to step back and look at the actions I took through a more flexible lens than is offered by any one methodological tradition. I took guidance from Denzin's (1994) and Kincheloe's (2001) view of the qualitative researcher as *bricoleur* and of the work they produce as *bricolage,* likening the qualitative process to forms of art that make a coherent whole of many different pieces. Kincheloe (2001) tells us of *bricolage*: it is, "concerned not only with multiple methods of inquiry but with diverse theoretical and philosophical notions of the various elements encountered in the research act" (p. 682). This *bricolage* concept was invaluable because it offered a way to construct a meaningful description of an inherently creative, non-linear methodological process. It allowed me to take a bigger 'birds-eye' view of what I had done/was doing so that I could see how the pieces fit and flowed together.

Forging the Tools: "Interview Questions"

When I began, I did not have a well-defined methodological pathway. I'd decided that my primary data sources were to be my research journal – my *writing story* (Wall, 2008) – and my historical journals. But, I had no idea how to approach them, or how to draw out the meaning I was looking for. The first step, then, was to figure out the contours of what I did not know and to form the questions I needed to ask of myself and my journals. So many of the educational experiences I described in the introduction to this document begin with me describing all the things I learned and all the things I knew, and then transform into a realization of the gulf containing all that I'd yet to – and needed to – learn. Given that such a circular pattern seems to be the way of learning when it

comes to any (baby) steps I'd taken towards decolonization in the past, it seemed only

fitting that I begin from a place of not knowing and trying to remedy that.

So, first, I read. I wanted to seek out the voices of White Settlers who'd attempted

to decolonize themselves while also getting an idea of what Indigenous peoples are

asking from White Settlers. First, I read blogs and online newsletters. Ted Hargrave's

Healing from Whiteness (healingfromwhiteness.blogspot.com) and Chelsea Vowel's

âpihtawikosisân (apihtawikosisan.com) were the two blogs I read 'cover-to-cover,' as it

were, meaning all entries from their inception to approximately August 2018. Hargrave's

blog served as a guide from the White Settler viewpoint, and Vowel's blog, particularly

in her "Indigenous Issues 101" section, offered a deeper introduction to Indigenous

issues, a debunking of colonial myths, and insight into how Indigenous peoples hope

White Settlers undertake the decolonizing process. I also wanted to understand what sorts

of stories were of concern to contemporary Indigenous communities: what were they

saying to each other, and not just for a Settler audience? I added *Indian Country Today*

(newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/news/) and *APTN News* (aptnnews.ca) to my morning

news round-up as a way of beginning to immerse myself in these stories. As I read, I also

wrote, tracking what I was thinking and how the process was changing the lens through

which I then continued to read.

At this point, I also began reading longer-form writing; memoirs, historical

fiction, and contemporary Indigenous fiction and non-fiction. I read the non-fiction work

of Indigenous writers like Thomas King (2013), Chelsea Vowel (2016), Lynn Gehl

(2014), and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011); the fiction work of Tomson Highway

(1998), Katherena Vermette (2016), and Richard Wagamese (2015); and historical non-

fiction by Wright (1992) and Dunbar-Ortiz (2015). This is not an exhaustive list, but rather, a list of the works that I read all the way through and that led me to other books or to especially important insights in my writing story. While reading Simpson's (2011) *Dancing on Turtle's Back,* and as a reaction to her description of the difficult work Indigenous communities must take on to heal themselves from the harms of colonization, I wrote the following:

> *You need to be comfortable with a certain amount of cognitive and emotional dissonance, reconcile it, deal with it, acknowledge that this is a necessisity (sic) and also that the journey is never complete, one can never receive a "Decolonized Diploma" and if you could it is not the job of marginalized people to give it to you, or to run the class/program for you. They need to prioritize care for their own communites (sic) You make it yourself, its independent study, it takes initiative, it is not a passive process.* (Journal excerpt, May 17, 2017)

Acknowledging that this process was neither passive, nor that it would lead to a discernable end-point, helped me better conceptualize the scope of the project I'd started out on and gave me more solid parameters to work within. As such, though I am still working through the book list I created for myself – a list that continues to grow even as I move to the final stages of this particular snapshot of the decolonizing process – there was a point at which I had to pause my reading and move forward. I used the sources I'd read through not as data, but as the sand from which I forged my interrogative lens. An expanded set of questions (I think of them like the interview schedule for an open-ended interview) related to my initial research questions grew out of this reading and the writing

story composed alongside it, with which I would collect data from my journals, They are

as follows:

i.   When were you complicit in reproducing colonial structures?

- How did you benefit from your part in this reproduction?

ii.   When were you resistant to confronting your privilege as a White Settler?

- How did you rationalize this resistance?

iii.   In what ways has your identity been formed by colonial structures?

- How did this effect your personal and family life?

- How did this effect your professional life?

I set about wading through my many shoeboxes full of old journals and my

endless stream-of-consciousness Microsoft Word documents with these questions in

hand. I was 'interviewing' the many past selves contained in those documents.

Interrogating the Journals: "Data Collection and Coding"

I approached my journals tentatively. Since I'd not composed them with any

thought to the questions posed above, I couldn't simply 'Control + F' my way through

them, nor could I make assumptions about which spans of time might be more

informative than others. Nevertheless, I started with my Grade 12 year and spanned out

from there, reasoning that it was then that I began writing with the kind of reflexivity and

skill that would allow me to pull meaningful data. As I waded through, I noted instances

that 'answered' my 'interview questions.' I then composed 32 three-to-five-sentence-long

descriptions of these events:

The summer of out-trip life and the long loop in Algonquin. It was freedom, it was wild, it was beautiful. But it was empty, why was it empty? Should it have been empty?;

Visiting New Zealand and Rotorua and the Maori settlement, feeling like I belonged there. We watch the Haka, we had traditional meals, we learned traditional songs. I bought my treasured whale bone necklace. What made this so appealing? Was it "indigeneity as commodity"?;

The week of writing all of the cover letters for job postings in the North. I was so sure that anyone would be lucky to have me. I got no responses. I felt so hard done by. Was it my lack of understanding and boastful "wokeness";

The archaeology of the Great Lakes paper, I got a 95 on that paper. I was so proud of it. There was such good research in that paper, it was so well written. It was also so removed, so austere, so lifeless. What relevance did it have? Why is it more valuable than story?; and

Initial reaction to idle no more…I was in Korea, it annoyed me. It seemed aggressive and non-sensical and not very effective. I didn't understand why such anger was necessary, it offended me. Why? What was it that troubled me so much?

It was both a collection of data and the first step in its organization. It was similar to the traditional qualitative coding in that it allowed me to, "[organize] text for subsequent interpretation" (Fereday & Muir-Cochran, 2006, p. 83) but, as is true for any reflexive inquiry, the organization and interpretation were not separate stages; rather, they often occurred simultaneously. I see this interpretation beginning to take shape in the

questions I pose at the end of each piece above. Patterns were emerging even in this early

stage. The next step, therefore, was to make those patterns explicit and to begin

extracting more concentrated meaning from the data.

Composing the Vignettes: "Categories and Themes"

I grouped the descriptions (codes) I pulled from my journals into five categories:

the woods, family, schooling, travel, and *teaching*. I took those five categories and

expanded on them, picking a pivotal memory from each and writing a longer-form

vignette with that memory at the center. All the while I continued to journal, to compose

my *writing story* (Wall, 2008), to capture the process I was going through while working

with these memories. Writing these vignettes allowed me to see more clearly how I could

answer the 'interview questions' – how each category was connected to my broader

research questions and to others. An excerpt from my writing story on August 22, 2017

shows that the process was confirming the complexities of these connections, particularly

those between colonial power and identity:

> *Unsurprisingly, one of the things that is emerging here is the fact that a lot of my*
>
> *most formative experiences have occurred in contexts that are steeped in colonial*
>
> *soupiness. How can I possibly find a way to acknowledge that without it*
>
> *challenging how I see myself?* (Journal excerpt, August 22, 2017)

Writing the vignettes also allowed me to distill the connections I was finding into themes

that ran through each of the pivotal events I'd chosen to write about. Some themes grew

out of the questions I was asking of my journal (*a priori*), while others emerged from the

writing itself (*emergent*). See Table 1 below for a differentiation of those themes.

Table 1

A Priori and Emergent Themes in My Writing Story

A priori Themes	*Emergent* Themes
• Resistance	• Divestment
• Complicity	• Richness
• Pluralism	• Undivorceability

The chart above, though instructive, again obscures the complexity and reflexivity of this part of the research process. The *a priori* themes took on added dimension as I wrote, while the *emergent* themes emerged not only from the writing, but also from the reading I continued to do; this was particularly true for *divestment*. I first noticed this word in reference to decolonization when I was re-reading some of my notes on Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012) – specifically, her definition of *decolonization*. She defines *decolonization* thusly, "once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological *divesting* of colonial power" (p. 14). I got stuck on that word; it got to the core of so much of what I was reading, writing, and thinking about. How could I divest myself of colonial power when it was so closely tied to my core sense of self; when it was one of the fundamental forces that shaped my identity? Was it even possible? These questions bubbled up as I wrote and, at the end of each vignette, I composed a list of them.

At this point, I needed to move beyond a simple description of the themes and categories I'd identified, and into an exploration of their meaning and an evaluation of how they could help answer my central research questions (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). I used the questions I'd posed at every stage of the process, including the ones that arose

from the vignettes, to help guide me in this deeper analysis. The five central categories

served as analytical 'jumping off' points. It was at this stage that I begin to put all the

parts of my *bricolage* together: my writing story, my vignettes, the lists of questions,

themes, 'codes,' and the processes tied to each of them. I took it all into account as I tried

to distill something meaningful, coherent, and accessible out of the pieces.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS or MEMORY METALLURGY

If mining my memories was the first stage, the gathering-of-data stage, and if I am to continue with the mining metaphor, then I think it would be good to call this analysis bit *memory metallurgy*. It's the process of melting down and mixing together all that memory ore into something solid and giving it a meaningful shape. The following sections are named after each of the theme-centred vignettes I composed. The vignettes appear immediately after their corresponding analytical sections for ease of reference.

The Deep, Dark Woods

The first category I tackled was *the woods*. It's the most important. It's the one I came back to the most, both throughout the process of this project and in my personal life in general. It formed the basis of my response to the question, "Who are you and why are you here?" and is the most obviously steeped in 'colonial soupiness.' Coming back to these memories with my newly constructed lens of *decolonization* and *divestment* made it possible for me to see the dissonance at the heart of my experiences in the woods. There is a startling juxtaposition between my understanding of these places and the colonial reality behind my access to and enjoyment of them. At the end of this vignette, I asked a question that would eventually appear at the end of each one:

> *What about how closely tied these rich and formative experiences are to colonial*
> *structures?*

The central narrative in this story was around my experience of summer camp in Central Ontario and on my subsequent excursions in to the north woods as I got older. This passage captures the pull I've always felt to those deep, dark, woodsy places:

> *If [I ask myself] what it is, specifically, about being in the woods that [gives me]*
>
> *that sense of freedom and connection, I don't know that I could fully explain it.*
>
> *What I can tell you is that the smell of pine-pitch baking in the late afternoon sun*
>
> *inspires feelings of great satisfaction; that diving down into the deep cold of a*
>
> *northern lake brings with it a sensation of equally deep cleansing; that the strain*
>
> *of muscle against current and wind makes me feel vital and alive*

As I composed this vignette, I noted the following in my *writing story*:

What about place names "Wabanaki, Algonquin, Muskoka"?

How is it that I was able to experience the wild places in such a way? At whose

expense was it possible

I'm wondering, here, about how dear these words are to me. *Wabanaki*: the name

of the camp where I spent childhood summers; *Algonquin*: the 'crown jewel' of Ontario

parks, a wide swath of almost-wilderness that remained my summertime refuge as I grew

into adulthood; *Muskoka*: the region in central Ontario where all of this outdoor

adventuring occurred. All of these place names, like so many we encounter daily, have

Indigenous origins. Settlers know this – I did, at least, growing up – and are comfortable

with them (in part) because these names invoke what Thomas King (2012) refers to as the

dead Indian (p. 15). Those names reference a White Settler idea of what it is to be

"Indian" – not real, not threatening, existing mostly in the past, and whose presence in the

present is inert, unchanging, and commercialized. That is especially true of the word

Wabanaki. That name belongs to a confederacy of five primary nations – the Mik'maq,

Maliseet, Passamaquody, Abenaki, and Penobscot – whose lands lie primarily to the East

of Ontario, through Quebec, most of the Maritimes including Newfoundland, and south

into Maine (Howe, 2012). So, how is it that it came to be the name of a summer camp in

Ontario for privileged (mostly) White kids? The camp traded on what a name like that

signified about the experiences it offered: true Northwoods experiences or the 'real deal.'

That name gave, "their product provenance and validity, along with a patina of

exoticism" (King, 2012, p. 34).

I'm also wondering about the perceived emptiness' of the land, or the 'wildness'

of it. I, and Settlers like me, have access to this land because it was taken, and at the

expense of the Indigenous peoples. The lands called Muskoka were named for

Mesquakie, an Anishnaabeg leader alive during the early 19th century who was an active

ally of the British during the War of 1812. The watershed, whose name was inspired by

him, was part of a large swath of territory that he, his nation, and his descendants lived,

hunted, fished, and planted on until the mid-19th century, when their treaties, stretching as

far back as the mid-18th century, were broken by the newly created Dominion

government (Watson, 2014). Now, in 2017, now the park appears on the map in bright

green – empty, but for the people who pay $12.43 per person per night to travel its

backcountry.

Vignette – The Deep Dark Woods

I was bullied in elementary school. Common enough story, I know. I was a quiet

and sensitive child. I had a propensity for crying that slapped a big, fat, juicy target on my

head – I imagine that harassing me was immediately and viscerally satisfying – and a

non-verbal learning disability meant that I had a very difficult time reading social cues

and behaving appropriately with my peers. Like many others who experience intense

bouts of bullying, I found solace in books. Hiding in the ravine behind the schoolyard and

reading became my go to recess/lunchtime activity. I wasn't, however, the kind of child who cared to retreat entirely into fantasy worlds; for, while I had heaps of difficulty making and maintaining friendships, I craved them. I wanted friends, I was a covert extrovert.

By the summer I turned eight years-old, I'd entered into a fairly significant depression. This was the first rumblings of what would eventually be diagnosed as bi-polar disorder but, at the time, my parents put it squarely down to the incessant bullying I was experiencing at school. I remember very little from that time in my life. Most of my memories of early elementary school include book reports I was particularly excited about, playing on the swings, and searching for garter snakes in the field behind my house. That my mother and father were worried is unsurprising. By that time, they'd tried all the usual avenues: speaking with my teachers and school administrators, convening meetings with the parents of the offending children, getting me tested for learning and emotional difficulties. They were met with limited success. As a child and young adult, my father had attended and worked at a summer camp on Beausoleil Island in Georgian Bay. He'd been encouraging my mother to agree to send me since the previous summer when I'd reached the minimum age to attend. By making the argument that it would help bring me out of my shell and heal some of the trauma from the previous school year, he managed to convince her to let me go.

In the intervening years, the camp had moved locations to Lake Vernon, just west of the town of Huntsville and smack in the middle of the Muskoka region. I remember getting on the bus in Kitchener and waving goodbye to my parents; I don't remember being particularly nervous, but I do remember thinking that the three-hour drive felt

impossibly long. That first summer at Wabanaki saved me, and I'm not sure that I mean

that entirely metaphorically. To this day, I'm not even sure what about the setting, the

counsellors, or my fellow campers so entirely healed me. Perhaps it was the general

lawlessness of camp life: no one particularly cared if you were weird, or a little bit gross,

or even if you had an irrational fear of cars. All that mattered was that you came willing

to participate fully, were open to new challenges, and that you were okay keeping

company with dock spiders, aggressive red squirrels, and the resident dump bear. When I

returned to school, the bullying continued until my family moved to a new school

catchment area the spring before I entered high school. Each summer was a respite from

that world, and it allowed me to build a sense of myself separate from how my

tormentors defined me. It showed me which parts of me were true and real, trained me to

deal with adversity and pain, and allowed me a space to explore, take risks, and be a

badass.

Those experiences were such a profound force in the formation of my identity in

large part due to the backcountry canoe trips around which the entire camp experience

revolved. They brought a sense of connection to the natural world, reminded me of my

grandfather and the lessons he had left unfinished, and induced an incredible feeling of

confidence that comes from crossing wide tracts of wilderness under your own power.

Even when I left camp, at the age of twenty-two, and after several years as a counsellor

and senior staff member, I still continued to head into the woods every summer, either on

my own or with a cobbled together group of willing ex-camp kids and adventurers. We

had all formed a connection to the wild places throughout our youth and could not stay

away: it was too important to our senses of identity and place in the world and, so, we needed to renew that connection as often as we could.

If you asked any one of us what it is, specifically, about being in the woods that gave us that sense of freedom and connection, you'd get different answers from each. Many writers more talented than I have waxed poetic about exactly that question. I don't really believe that it is possible to fully explain it. What I *can* tell you is that the smell of pine-pitch baking in the late afternoon sun inspired feelings of great satisfaction; that diving down into the deep cold of a northern lake brought with it a sensation of equally deep cleansing; that the strain of muscle against current and wind made me feel vital and alive. The whole experience of being out there was one of *flow*. The scary moments only made it more powerful, like when a massive storm cell cracked and rumbled above our group as we were crossing Lake Temagami, and the time I got swept down the wrong side of a stretch of fast water. Other unsettling moments, particularly ones with the local wildlife, brought with them a sense of the awesome. I mean that in the true spirit of the word – inspiring the doubled-up feeling of fear and euphoria that the word awe implies. Seeing the curious and confused faces of berry-picking black bears as we stumbled through a portage, watching moose dine on marsh plants as we paddled by in the early morning, hearing the eerie harmonics of loon calls and wolf howls as we sat by the campfire: all of them illustrated how fine the line between wild/not wild is and reminded me that we passed through the landscape safely by virtue of both the wild creatures' patience with, and fear of, us.

And, yet, there was also a sense of kinship and familiarity there, buried deep down, that kept me from fleeing in fear, and instead drove me back into the woods time

and time again. As I got older and ventured into the backcountry on my own more and more often, it became clear to me that, though I knew more and was more comfortable in the woods than a majority of the people in my community, the deep script of the forest and the lakes that I loved was largely hidden from me; I didn't speak that language, not in the way my grandfather and his family did. I had access to it piecemeal, in one-off trips for two or three weeks a year. But, even so, my experiences at camp introduced me to the existence of that way of knowing, to that language, and I've spent the intervening years chasing a deeper understanding of it. It is, to me, a healing language. It came to me at a time when I was immensely vulnerable and the process of seeking it out continues to allow me to 'hold the center' in times of emotional stress – which, for me, happen with predictable regularity.

It was on one of those moments, during the winter of my second last year of my undergrad, and as I was preparing to hand in my medical withdrawal paperwork to the Registrar's Office, that I cold-called the office of the local conservation authority. In the throes of a manic episode, I hadn't been sleeping, was barely grasping the edge of sanity, and knew I needed something to anchor me once I moved home. The conservation authority seemed like a good option. I could be outside, I'd get to interact with people on a daily basis, I could teach: all things I knew I needed. As luck would have it, they were hiring in preparation for the upcoming maple syrup season; they had a working sugar bush on one of their sites, and I started shortly thereafter. The authority also had a property with a reconstructed Wendat village, built atop an archaeological site dating to the early 1400s. I'd been there as a child, on field trips with school, and had always loved it, been drawn to it. As soon as I was able, I requested a transfer. I had several reasons for

doing so, but one of the most important was my assumption that taking a job in the village would somehow allow me to learn more about that wild language, the one I was always chasing. I thought I could learn more there, in the longhouses, stay steeped in it, become more authentically a 'person of the woods.' That some wisdom was to be found there.

How is it that I was able to experience the wild places in such a way? At whose expense was it possible? Why did I assume teaching in a reconstructed longhouse would somehow impart 'mysterious wisdom' upon me? What about the names 'Wabanaki, Muskoka' of the places so central to this identity formation? What about my disconnection from landedness, even as I immersed myself in it? **What about how closely tied these rich and formative experiences are to colonial structures?**

Family Functionality

The second category I looked to was *family*. My family is very important to me; I am aware of how deeply I am defined by them. Examining the ways in which our relationships with each other shaped both them and me adds yet another dimension to my efforts to answer the, "Who are you and why are you here?" question. In retrospect, after composing this analysis, it occurs to me that perhaps this section should have come first, but there is something to be learned from my intuitive approach to what is the most important. My individual experiences in the woods seemed, somehow, more important, but I'm not sure that they were. My attraction to those places and to that life, my sense of ownership over and freedom in them, sprung from a very particular way of looking at the world; a perspective that was shaped by growing up in a family that was nurturing, safe,

and devoted to personal growth and courageousness. The following excerpt from my

vignette, *Family Functionality* sums it up nicely:

> *My parents filled my childhood with richness, the kind that comes from*
>
> *considered exposure to the wider world and from parents who were invested in*
>
> *raising children who could follow their own path. I am grateful to my mother and*
>
> *father for teaching me to embrace unconventionality, to be brave, to question*
>
> *everything, "to boldly go" forth into the world and to make of myself whatever I*
>
> *wished.*

There is a sense of invincibility and endless possibility that comes with this kind

of White Settler middle-class girlhood: a sense that a fulfilling and secure life is your

due; that the university education, happy marriage, home ownership, and secure

retirement you're told to expect are all inevitable and normal stages of life. That I chose

to use the word "richness" in the paragraph above reveals how deeply this taken-for-

grantedness runs. "Richness" is, in fact, a theme that runs through many of the

experiences I wrote about over the course of this project, and it is important that I first

took notice of it while drafting this vignette. My *writing story* says:

> *The richness of my life, all of it, comes indirectly from systems of oppression*

I read in this small sentence a recognition: that the cherished influence my family

and upbringing had on my identity and my way of seeing the world was, itself, a kind of

colonial power. I go on to say,

> *Reconsidering taken for grantedness is the fundamental first skill in*
>
> *decolonization. When did I know this? What about auntie?*

The "auntie" I am referring to is my uncle's first wife and the event that brings her into this story occurred during my Grade 5 year. My class was asked to speak with someone about Canada's official multiculturalism policy and Auntie, being the daughter of Sikh immigrants, was the only person of colour I knew well enough to consider interviewing (which is, itself, telling). While I was writing the pieces about my mother, father, and my very privileged childhood, the recollection of this discussion with my aunt was hovering in the background, persistent and irritating. I knew I needed to write-it-through to understand *why* it was so insistent. This is how I describe our sit-down in my vignette:

> *We sat at the kitchen table in my childhood home; I had a list of prepared questions and an ancient tape recorder set up and ready to go… At some point, I asked her a question with the phrase "those people" thrown in somewhere, referring to immigrants and people of colour. I do not remember what I asked, but that is ultimately insignificant. I remember she paused, frowned, sighed, and spoke to me sternly enough that I was genuinely surprised. "I am one of 'those people,' Sarah", she said "and life is different for us than it is for people who look like you…the world is not as kind."*

When I initially compiled my list of 32 important events, I did not include this conversation, even though it eventually formed the core of my vignette about family. As I wrote, its importance became more apparent – but, I doubt I would have come to that understanding had I not already moved a small step forward in my *divesting of colonial power*.

I can see this understanding coming into focus throughout my *writing story*:

The memory of auntie is so important. I wonder why it took so long for me to connect it to the decolonization piece? It seems obvious now that it's on 'paper'. Now that I see it in black and white I'm remembering the gut-punch that was that moment and how often its re-emerged over time. Isn't it interesting that it took until the end to get to the point? To get to her. It is as if I had to write it to uncover the most important aspect.

The key phrase in the paragraph above is "gut-punch." The memory of that day with my aunt is embarrassing: one of those events that make you cringe when they emerge into conscious remembering, one that makes you want to push it down, away, and out of sight as soon as possible. I didn't want to think about it. It challenged my perception of myself as a *good White* (Vaught & Castagno, 2008) in a very personal way. It's a lot easier to talk about the ways Whiteness and colonialism affect your professional life and your interactions with colleagues or peers than it is to realize how it can damage relationships with people you love. I needed a good number of months, many hours of reading, and lots of writing to understand that embracing the discomfort that came parceled with that memory of my Auntie was a necessary part of this *divestment* I was attempting.

Vignette – Family Functionality

My father and I have always disagreed. A staunch and proud conservative, he was unlucky enough to have a daughter, his eldest child no less, who came out of the womb a degenerate, intractable liberal. He didn't help his cause though. He came from a politically active family with a diverse set of views, and the holiday gatherings we attended always included raucous debates: debates that he encouraged me to take part in from a very early age. He challenged me; staring mischievously over his après-dinner

whiskey and asking, provocatively, "Well, what do you think Sarah?" He was never easy on me, I never got a pass for a weak argument because of my age, and I was never scolded for having 'wrong' ideas. Though he disagreed with me, I always knew he'd rather I fight my corner valiantly and well than capitulate to please him. My father built in me an intellectual resilience and an ability to disagree respectfully that has enabled me, as I've grown, to see more clearly the complexities of the world, to see the shades of grey rather than the black and white. He's helped me become a deep thinker, but not a dogmatic one. From him, I also inherited my fiery and passionate temperament – so, in many ways he is responsible for nurturing my passion and devotion to progressive causes, his own passion and devotion being my model.

My mother, on the other hand, is most people's definition of a bleeding heart. A social worker from a working-class family, her world is one in which the need for social change is an immediate and fundamental fact of life. She has a deep capacity for compassion, kindness, and empathy, and an abiding love of the written word. She is the most intelligent and insightful person I've ever known; one of those unsung philosophers of the suburbs. Our home was always filled with books, and my early memories are populated of images of her reading both by herself and to my brothers and I. Once I was old enough, I raided her bookshelves compulsively. There I discovered Atwood, King, Mistry, Berton, and Camus. Talking with her about books was, and remains, a cherished part of my life. Like my father, she challenged me. She'd often bring me with her to the city to spend time with her friends, an incredible group of feminists made up of lawyers, psychologists and artists – women whose intelligence, poise, and independence I admired and tried to emulate. And, so, the sharpness, fire, and 'never-back-down-ness' I learned at

my father's dinner table was tempered by the slow, careful, considered thoughtfulness my mother taught me.

My parents filled my childhood with richness, the kind that comes from considered exposure to the wider world and from parents who were invested in raising children who could follow their own path. I am grateful to my mother and father for teaching me to embrace unconventionality, to be brave, to question everything. There were, however, other lessons I learned from my parents. Lessons taught less explicitly than those I described above: lessons about what it meant to be a white, middle-class, Canadian woman, and things about what the world owed me, what my future would look like, and the supports and rights I was entitled to. There was an expected trajectory for people 'like me.' My life would follow a typical pattern: graduate high school, go to a top university, get a plum job, get married, buy a house, buy a cottage, have kids, and the cycle would thus repeat ad infinitum. The certainty of these things was something that was rarely questioned in my household. They were 'givens,' things my parents could expect of their children now that they had built and sustained a successful middle-class lifestyle. Both of them worked hard to achieve that dream. Both have advanced degrees and successful careers; my father as an accountant with his own practice, and my mother as a social worker and therapist. Despite divorce, remarriage, financial setbacks, tragedy, and familial conflict, they managed to give my brothers and I the foundation upon which we should be able to build our own version of the middle-class dream.

I remember the first time that that particular narrative was challenged, the one that said the world was safe, that the world owed you something, that everyone felt equally accepted and supported. It was sixth grade, or maybe seventh, I'm not entirely sure. My

teacher had given us an assignment about multiculturalism. Again, the specifics aren't

that clear, but part of it involved interviewing a member of the community to get their

opinions on the official policy and how it had impacted their lives. At the time, I was

obsessed with a career in journalism, so this assignment excited me: it was a chance to

practice and to feel like a very grown-up writer. When it came time to decide who to

interview, I called my aunt. She is the daughter of Sikh immigrants and was, at that time,

the only person I could think of who might have something interesting to say about what

it was like to live in a multicultural society. We sat at the kitchen table in my childhood

home; I had a list of prepared questions and an ancient tape recorder set-up and ready to

go. I should say, first, that my aunt was an exceptionally warm woman, easy to laugh and

always smiling, and as patient with her niece and nephews as she was with her own son. I

was devastated when her and my uncle divorced and though, at this point, I've neither

seen nor spoken to her in many years, my memories of her are almost universally happy

ones. So, when I chose her as my interviewee, I assumed it would just be like a regular

conversation with a much-loved family member. We spoke about her parents, the

circumstances surrounding their decision to emigrate, what it was like growing up on the

East coast – all stories I was familiar with. At some point, I asked her a question with the

phrase 'those people' thrown in somewhere, referring to immigrants and people of

colour. I do not remember what I asked, but that is ultimately insignificant. I remember

she paused, frowned, sighed, and spoke to me more sternly than I'd ever heard her speak

before. "I am one of 'those people,' Sarah", she said, "and life is different for us than it is

for people who look like you…the world is not as kind." Her scolding, gentle though it

was, shocked me. I felt very embarrassed and upset that I had offended my aunt. Did that

mean that I was a bad person? A person who discriminated against other people because of how they looked? I didn't think I was, but I'd been caught out by someone I respected, someone I loved, someone whose experiences with, and opinions about, discrimination were more valid than anyone else I knew. She went on to talk about how people treated her and her parents when she was young, how well-meaning people had said and done things that were deeply offensive. She told me to think carefully about the words I chose.

That was the first time I became fully aware of the fact that other people, especially people of colour, experienced the world differently than I did. It was the first chink in the armor of white middle-class-ness I'd grown up with. I do not mean to suggest that after that one conversation I became a fully 'woke' 12-year-old but, rather, that it was my first lesson in reconsidering a taken-for-granted aspect of my life. It's sat with me, that small interview, in the intervening years. There is a reason I remember it so vividly all these years later. It resurfaces when I talk to my cousin, my aunt's son. I often wonder about how he experiences the world; I've never had the gumption to ask him, directly, but I do wonder. It resurfaces whenever I hear a close friend or colleague make comments similar to my 'those people' gaffe. It resurfaces with particular urgency during my ongoing arguments with my father over the very same issues my aunt and I discussed so many years ago.

And so, I've come to think about that long-ago conversation with my aunt as the departure point. The point to which all the percolating thoughts about colonialism, identity, and privilege come back to. In thinking through the stages of my life, the experiences that have shaped me the most and the most profoundly, among the various threads and themes that connect them, lies the power of colonialism, of settler-ness. It

weaves itself through the heart of so much of what has made me *me*. It's shaped my

family, my schooling, my work, my ways of living and being in the world, and my aunt's

lesson was the first in how to recognize its workings. A beginner's lesson, but one that

takes on more meaning every time I come back to it.

> *Why did I not write about Auntie sooner? Were the lessons I learned from my*
> *parents a contributor to my 'good' education? How would the lessons I learned have*
> *looked different if I'd grown up exposed to more diverse communities?* ***What about how***
> ***closely tied these rich and formative experiences are to colonial structures?***

Resistance is Agile

The vignette I wrote for the third category, *schooling,* focused on the year I spent

at Teachers' College. I went back and forth between this piece and the previous one on

family often and they are, more than any of the others, a pair. While it took me a while to

write honestly about my aunt and how our relationship was implicated in the process of

divestment, I'd been thinking for quite some time about the key figure in *resistance is*

agile. At the very beginning of the writing process, when I was brain-dumping the

beginnings of what would form my list of 32, I noted in my writing story:

> *What about R. and "the ways in which we party"?*

R. was a Professor of mine in Teachers' College. "The ways in which we party"

refers to the name we gave to our class Christmas party on Facebook. I wrote this about

the justification for the naming:

> *"Anyone who is familiar with the discourse of critical scholars and social justice*
> *activists knows that the phrase "the ways in which…" is a common one in that*
> *particular corner of academia. The professor for our philosophy of education*

class had made his career in that corner and the phrase was one of his favorites.

He, however, was most certainly not one of our favorites."

I go on to describe R., and the feelings my classmates and I had about him, further on in my vignette:

The first lesson he did with us was a "privilege wheel" … the goal was to get us

to see how closely we sat to the "center" of privilege; the center being straight,

while, cisgender, middle-class, abled men… I remember thinking he was a smug

know it all. What did he know about my life? About my struggles? I wasn't racist,

how dare he imply that! He wasn't in my head, didn't know that I'd decided to

dedicate my career to working against racism and colonialism…I was offended by

so much of what he had to say, and I was not alone… My very intelligent,

sophisticated classmates agreed with my assessments. We must, therefore, be in

the right.

I'd mostly forgotten about R. in the years between graduating from Teachers' College and beginning graduate school. But, even before I'd begun working on this project, the readings I did in my classes forced me to reconsider my feelings about him and the things he had tried so hard to teach us. I reflected on this in my *writing story*:

Oh R. I feel so bad about R. He tried so hard and we were so mean to him. I acted

just how all those teachers in the pieces by Picower and the rest acted and yet I

felt so much more "woke" than them and was so judgmental when I read that

research. Like, how could they be so awful…I would never do that! Cognitive

dissonance is a hell of a drug.

Thinking about my behavior toward R. during those first few months of graduate

school was the first time I was able to seriously reimagine my past through a lens of

decolonization without giving into the impulse to turn away. It made the readings I was

doing seem real to me; I understood that those teachers quoted as examples of *how not to*

be could have easily been my classmates and me. We viewed the path of decolonization

that R. so gently tried to urge us down as a zero-sum proposition: one where you were

either good or bad, racist or not racist. At that time, the subtleties of intersectionality,

implicit bias, and Settlerness were lost on me. I was *resistant* and, more than that, I was

possessive. I recognized this possessiveness in my *writing story*:

> *Writing about R. Possessiveness, holding onto something not wanting to let it go.*
>
> *Like a wolverine or another kind of stubborn mustelid. We erected a castle and*
>
> *we guard our possessions against all foes. We were a little army.*

I was possessive over my privilege, over my White Settler identity: things that had value

due to the colonial nature of both the broad (Canada) and specific (the Canadian post-

secondary classroom) environment I was in, and things that gave me power and agency.

It is important that I used that word *possessive* since it implies ownership. Here, I see

echoes of Harris' (1993) analysis in *Whiteness as Property* clearly at work in my

resistance to my Professor's challenges. That anyone else should have a right to mold the

outlines of my identity was absurd. It was *mine*, I *owned* it. That they – specifically, my

non-White professor – should seek to define my identity as something with negative

implications was even more absurd. I failed to realize the impossibility of that kind of

ownership. None of us are entirely in control of our identities, and my very insistence that

I was in control – and that I alone possessed this power – is a product of that same

'colonial soupiness': for a colonial mindset is one that values individual agency and that tells White Settlers that they are the masters of their own fate.

And yet, I could not divorce these realizations from the *richness* of that year and the relationships that I built with my classmates, many of whom have become my closest friends and confidants in the intervening years. My nostalgia for that time is obvious:

> *We spent many hours together; in class, at a collection of local pubs, at each other's cramped Toronto apartments… family cottages and music festivals. The subject of conversation, whether out for lunch or indulging in a boozy evening around the campfire, eventually looped back to teaching, learning and working through the topics we were encountering in class.*

I enjoyed that year so very much, and a big part of the enjoyment was the sense of community and group cohesion I experienced. A cohesion achieved, in part, by making R. into our primary adversary. Whiteness, Settlerness, and Colonialism allowed us to create a sense of belonging that fostered personal strength and professional growth: things that I, to this day, believe have made me a better educator and colleague. So, as I noted in my writing story:

> *I cannot disavow those experiences as wholly bad*

To *divest myself of colonial power*, therefore, requires a more nuanced understanding of what calling myself *Settler* means about my personal connectedness to the larger colonial structures that govern the world I live in and the extent to which a true *divestment* is possible. The good and the bad bits of a Settler identity are, in many ways, *undivorceable*. *Divestment*, therefore, looks less like a throwing-away-of and disavowal of memories shaped by colonialism and more like an *acknowledgment* of that shaping

and an openness to allowing ways of knowing and being from outside my Settler fortress

to act on the way I conceive of myself and my place in the world.

Vignette – Resistance is Agile

My most vivid memory of my first day in teachers' college was of eating a piece

of pizza on the floor. I'd arrived on that first day very early, a consequence of taking

poorly timed public transit, and wasn't eager to wait inside the classroom alone. So, on

the floor I waited for the rest of the 30-odd members of my cohort to arrive. At the

University of Toronto, you moved through the key courses with your cohort: it was

intended to function as a community of learners. When you registered, you had the option

of choosing a location-based cohort – so that you would be in a group of students who

would be doing their practice teaching in the same area of the GTA – and choosing this

group placed you higher up on the list when it came to divvying up placements. Or, you

could choose a theme-based cohort that would allow you to specialize in a particular area.

There was a cohort for those wishing to specialize in urban education, one for teachers

who wanted to work with students with disabilities, and another for that ambitious group

who were gunning for leadership positions. The one that stood out to me, that I placed at

the top of my list, was the global and international cohort. It seemed a perfect fit. By this

point, I knew I wanted to teach in cultural contexts different from the one I grew up in,

and that I wanted to work for social justice through education. Consequently, I knew I

needed exposure to a particular kind of pedagogy – not that the word *pedagogy* was

actively in my vocabulary yet, nor did I really know what this way of teaching would

look like. I was aware that there were big gaps in my knowledge, but didn't yet know the

contours of those gaps: I simply knew that I needed some substantial help and guidance if

I was going to become the kind of teacher that I hoped to be. I'd been, frankly, surprised to be accepted to this particular specialization and this particular university. UofT, at that time, was notoriously difficult to get in to and many people, once accepted, applied to the global cohort only to be registered in their second or third choice. It was one of those rare instances when what you've been working for pans out exactly as you hoped. So, though I was very pleased with myself and incredibly excited for the year to come, I had a healthy dose of imposter syndrome as I sat there on the floor, munching on my fresh piece of pizza and scanning the hallways for my new colleagues.

After I'd been there for 10-ish minutes, a very tall, very broad, very bearded man ambled up to the pizza table. He grabbed his food and walked his Paul Bunyan-esque self towards me. "You in the global group?" he asked. "Yup", I replied. He sat down on the floor with me and it seemed like we immediately had a thousand and one interesting things to talk about. Eventually, enough new arrivals had gravitated to our little floor conference that we felt it necessary to move ourselves into the classroom. It became apparent in fairly short order that this particular group had some great social and intellectual chemistry. We had self-selected so it wasn't, perhaps, all that surprising that we got along so well, but I was, and remain, very grateful to have known all of them. It was in those classrooms that I learned the value of a true community of learners: how the people you learn with often teach you more than the readings on the syllabus or the research papers you write. We spent many hours together: in class, at a collection of local pubs, at each other's cramped Toronto apartments, and as the year progressed, we took trips together to family cottages and music festivals. The subject of conversation, whether out for lunch in the middle of the day or indulging in a boozy evening around the

campfire, eventually looped back to teaching, learning and working through the topics we were encountering in class. Many a lightbulb moment occurred during those confabs, topics that led into long discussions about the injustices of the school system, about how we would go about fixing everything when we graduated, about global inequity, about politics, the economy, history, philosophy, about sexuality – everything under the sun. We had an interesting diversity of perspectives. Our group included both an avowed Marxist and a card-carrying member of the Wild Rose party; an outspoken atheist and a devout Christian; several professionals changing careers and a few just out of their bachelors; those who had already travelled the world and those eager to begin. But, and this is one of the most important lessons I learned from my cohort, though we often disagreed on fundamental issues and were influenced by different life experiences, we all respected each other and enjoyed spending time together. The diversity and difference is what made it all so rich. But, and this is also very important, that diversity was not one of colour. With two exceptions – both women of South-Asian heritage – we were all white.

Apart from our deep and fascinating discussions we, like so many students of any age, spent a lot of time either heaping praise upon or moaning about our Professors. We even started naming our Facebook events after them, either as an approving nod to how much we admired them or as a snarky, contemptuous dig. The one I recall most clearly was named, "The Ways in Which We Party." It was a holiday celebration and one of the biggest we held during the year. It was a snarky, contemptuous dig. Anyone who is familiar with the discourse of critical scholars and social justice activists knows that the phrase. "The ways in which…" is a common one in that particular corner of academia. The Professor for our Philosophy of Education class had made his career in that corner,

and the phrase was one of his favorites. He, however, was most certainly *not* one of our

favorites.

He was the only Professor of color I'd ever had, and was also the only Professor

I'd ever had who made privilege, oppression, and colonialism the centerpiece of his

instruction. The first lesson he did with us was a privilege wheel: I'm a little fuzzy on the

particulars, but the goal was to get us to see how closely we sat to the 'center' of

privilege (the center being straight, while, cishet, middle-class, abled men). Using himself

as an example, he explained a lot about the intersectional elements of privilege. He

pointed out that, though he was a gay man of color, the fact that he and his partner were

quite wealthy and that he had come from a prominent academic family in South America,

meant that life was likely easier for him than a gay white man from an impoverished

background. It was, in retrospect, a nuanced and challenging lesson and, again in

retrospect, the discussions he engaged us in around affirmative action, meritocracy, and

implicit bias were similarly nuanced and challenging. At the time though, I bristled. I

remember thinking he was a smug know it all. What did he know about my life? About

my struggles? I wasn't racist, how dare he imply that! He wasn't in my head, didn't know

that I'd decided to dedicate my career to working *against* racism and colonialism. He was

a *moron*. I was offended by so much of what he had to say, and I was not alone. Many a

lunch hour was spent railing against him. We attacked his methods, complained about

how narrow his viewpoint was, how he stifled debate and did not lend validity to any

opinion other than his own, how he scolded us and categorized us as racists because of

our white skin – something over which we had no control! Those conversations were

cathartic. My very intelligent, sophisticated classmates agreed with my assessments. We

must, therefore, be in the right. It's not that we dismissed the presence of systems of

oppression and privilege. It was quite the opposite: many of us identified as progressives

and were active in political communities where the facts of inequity between groups were

givens. It was, rather, that we objected to the implication that we, personally, were

wrapped up in privilege, were influenced by it, and had materially benefitted from it.

It was a very strange time for me, Teacher's College. At the same time as I was

sputtering furiously about my 'reverse-racist' Professor, I was beginning to engage more

in issues around colonialism and learning more about the suffering it creates for

Indigenous peoples. The fire in my belly continued to grow; the fire that said, "This is

wrong, you need to help fix this." Part of it stemmed from my experiences working in the

long houses: I was immersed weekly in a world that fascinated me but that I knew so

little about. Part of it was the classes about the residential schools, the state of education

on northern reservations, and the particulars of the Indian Act. It all made me angry. I

was angry about the injustices experienced by Indigenous students in schools, angry

about the systems that shored up those injustices, and keyed up to do something about it.

While I was, at the same, resisting any acknowledgement of my personal stake in colonial

or racist systems. It was a master class in double-think.

Why was I unable to see the contradictions in my own thinking? What about my

Professor made it so easy for us to dismiss him? Would it have been different with a more

diverse group of students? ***What about how closely tied these rich and formative***

experiences are to colonial structures?

Bye Bye OCT, Hello ROK

I've asked myself what made me able to see the dissonance at the heart of my interactions with R. before I'd started the decolonization process in earnest. Even if I couldn't yet name it or theorize it, I knew it was there and was able to acknowledge it. The vignette I wrote for my fourth category, *travel*, charts my experiences living abroad in Korea and offers an answer. Part of this piece focused on the experience of living as a member of an ex-pat community in an ethnically homogeneous society. I explain it in the passage below:

> *As a foreigner, therefore, you stand separate from Korean society, regardless of how earnestly you might try to become a part of it. Equally, most members of the ex-pat community I encountered embraced their outsider status and the freedom from social expectations and censure that it provided.*

That is a much gentler way of saying what I initially jotted down in my writing story:

> *The awful, offensive behavior of many of my fellow expats, our disrespect for the culture and traditions of Korea illustrated our feelings of white immunity.*

I'd decided to go to Korea as a way of expanding my ability to teach in diverse classrooms, assuming that being an outsider would allow me to experience a little bit of what students of color in Ontario must deal with. Though I certainly felt 'othered,' it took some time for me to realize that this 'othering' was of a fundamentally different kind. The "White immunity" I referenced in the piece above shielded us from all but the most surface level consequences of becoming the 'other' and, in some cases, had the opposite effect from the one I'd hoped for. Instead of forcing me to live and adhere to different

socio-cultural norms, being in Korea reinforced some of the more harmful aspects of

White-Settler identity. I describe this in my *writing story*:

> *I go in to the world assuming that everything is going to work out okay because I*
>
> *am a White woman. People want to take care of you. I can generally count on the*
>
> *kindness of strangers. Though there are more concerns about travelling safely;*
>
> *I've never been to a country where those outweighed the extra consideration my*
>
> *femaleness and my Whiteness afforded me.*

I was only able to experience the world this way *because of* the legacy of colonial rule

the world over. We were forgiven our bad behavior in part because of the homogeneity of

Korean culture, but also because we were teachers of English, the lingua franca of the

modern world *due to* colonialism and, therefore, of value to a nation hyper-focused on

becoming and remaining a power broker on the world stage. I can see myself coming to

this realization in my *writing story* when I state:

> *the demand for English instruction and the openness of that particular nation to*
>
> *foreigners, their weird fetishization of us are all colonial artifacts.*

Ultimately, being in Korea was a lesson in the nakedness of unearned privilege.

Never was it so apparent to me than when I was living there. It has become even more

obvious the further removed I am from my time abroad and the more deeply I've

considered the intimate and personal nature of colonialism and privilege. At the end of

my vignette on Korea, I again wrote:

> *What about how closely tied these rich and formative experiences are to colonial*
>
> *structures?*

It didn't seem to matter how far away from home I travelled, these parts of me remained, as I've noted over and over, *undivorceable* from my core sense of self.

Vignette: Bye Bye OCT, Hello ROK

During the winter of 2010, I sat down in a lecture hall at the University of Toronto for a seminar on how to apply to the Ontario College of Teachers. The facilitator impressed upon us the seriousness of the profession we had chosen and exhorted us to not take lightly the high personal and professional standards required of college members. She then spent 30 minutes describing, in detail, the finer points of filling in your personal information and answering questions about your teaching background. The questions in the application had been so poorly designed and were so chock full of indecipherable bureaucratic language that many teachers who were qualified ended up accidentally 'falsifying their records' and getting their applications rejected. I remember sitting there, as she went through each stage of the application, thinking how absurd the whole situation was. Looking around at my classmates, I saw faces that were at once earnestly excited and clearly anxious. The application was the first step towards employment as a teacher in Ontario; something we all, presumably, were working towards. And, yet, all of us knew that our chances of finding full-time jobs within even three or four years were vanishingly small. The market was flooded, competition was fierce, and both the College and the big school boards had introduced increasingly more complicated, rigid, and time-consuming application processes. Processes that, everyone knew, could be somewhat circumvented if you had the right connections and greased the right wheels. Excellent, dedicated teachers languished in the wings waiting for supply and long-term occasional jobs, unable to even get their names on eligible to hire lists, while others, those whose

parents, relatives, or family friends worked as administrators got fast-tracked into full-time positions. I do not begrudge friends and classmates of mine who took advantage of these connections. If I'd had them, I probably would have, too. In a broken system, you work with what you can get and, in teaching, when getting a job represents, for many, more than a paycheck but the fulfillment of a life-long dream, the 'by-any-means-necessary' attitude towards employment is understandable. Nevertheless, sitting in that stuffy lecture hall, it all seemed impossibly unfair and hypocritical. I've always had a bit of an 'eff-the-man' and 'you-can't-tell-me-what-to-do' attitude (often to my detriment) and I bristled at the high moralizing of the College as compared to the rampant favoritism and mismanagement that seemed so obvious to me. So, I opted out. I wanted to teach, I felt ready to do so and wasn't prepared to wait. I saved my $300 application fee and applied for a Korean work visa instead.

I got on a plane in early August of the same year. A close friend from high school who had also just finished her teaching degree came with me. We. Were. So. Excited. We'd both gotten jobs at the same school and had spent the previous two months preparing lessons, materials, and researching all the things we thought we needed to know about Korean culture. We'd even made some early attempts at learning Hangul, the Korean alphabet (they went very, very poorly). It was to be my first grand adventure, the one I'd been dreaming about since I was young, one where I would go boldly into a foreign land to experience a new culture and, thereby, inevitably become more cultured and worldly. I hoped that teaching in a different cultural context would make me a better teacher, that I could build empathy for future students from marginalized communities by living, for a time, as the 'other.' My motivations weren't all noble and professional. No,

certainly not. I also thought about how fun it would be to go see live video game competitions, travel around the rest of Asia, climb lots of mountains, and meet handsome strangers from around the world. My sense of wanderlust sent me overseas just as much as my desire to work and to become a better educator.

I spent three years there. When I first left, I intended to stay only for one, but as my first contract wound down, I found myself unable to leave. To say I'd fallen in love with Korea would be easy, but inaccurate in its simplicity. Korea and I had a complicated relationship. It is a beautiful country filled with interesting and aggressively friendly people: one that offered me a sense of freedom and independence that I loved. But it is also a conservative country, with values around female beauty and feminine identity that I would never fully understand nor condone. Working there exposed me to a philosophy of education than ran contrary to my own in many ways but that, nevertheless, made me a better, more open-minded teacher. The most difficult thing, the implications of which I still wrestle with and that have the most bearing on this journey of decolonization, was the experience of living in Korea as a white woman and as part of an ex-pat community. Koreans do not deal with foreigners in the same way that Canadians do. It is not an open nation. When I say that I do not mean that Koreans are unfriendly, or unwelcoming; it is quite the contrary. Rather, they do not hold with the notion that anyone not born in Korea, to at least one Korean parent, can ever really become Korean (this was a really difficult thing for many of my foreign-born Korean friends). As a foreigner, therefore, you stand separate from Korean society, regardless of how earnestly you might try to become a part of it. Equally, most members of the ex-pat community I encountered embraced their outsider status and the freedom from social expectations and censure that

it provided. It was a weird experience, being a part of that community. There was a

certain feeling of impunity and immunity from social censure. We didn't have to

assimilate, we didn't have that sense of urgency, of it being required; not in the same way

that a Korean moving to Canada, Australia, the U.K., New Zealand or the U.S. would

have. And, so, we felt a certain permission to throw off the yoke of cultural expectations

and good behavior.

As a consequence, we behaved *so badly*. Like absolute nutcases. Knowing that

our loutishness, loudness, and general vulgarity would be excused with a shake of the

head and a "Pshhhhtt…waygukin" as if to say, "These silly foreigners just don't know

any better." On one trip over the lunar new year, a group of my friends and I boarded a

bus full of fellow expats and headed to the northern county of Pyeongchang for a

snowboarding/ice-fishing/competitive drinking excursion. We wore animal onesies the

entire trip (actually a fairly common practice among both foreigners and Koreans while

snow-sporting) and took full advantage of Korea's liberal attitude towards public

drinking, imbibing on the chairlifts and as we tore down the slopes. I was reckless on

those hills in a way I would have *never* been at home, yelling, shouting, cutting in line,

showering slower riders with snow as I cut sharp turns around them; and I was by no

means the worst offender – that title falls to two of my South African friends who were

notorious partiers and risk takers. At night, we took all of our rolling suitcases and

'curled' them down the hallway of our hostel – an idea, I am both ashamed and slightly

proud to say, was mine. Imagine the most obnoxious group of adolescents you can, and

that's what we were like; despite the fact that most of us were otherwise mature

professionals in our twenties and thirties. In fact, when people ask me to describe life in

Korea, one of my standard responses is, "It was like a second adolescence." While in Korea, I made an absolute and utter fool of myself. I'm sure I inspired many a frustrated dinner table rant about the general barbarity and obnoxiousness of the waygukin population; I'd certainly faced some tough questioning regarding that topic while visiting with the families of my Korean friends.

But, even though thinking back on that trip – and it was one of many – makes me cringe, it also makes me laugh and brings with it a feeling of tender nostalgia. It's hard to admit how *good it felt* to ignore the rules with a diminished fear of consequence. It made me bolder, inspired me to take risks, to try to new things, to learn new things. While in Korea, I learned and practiced a new and difficult language, began training in Muay Thai, joined an Ultimate league, studied Buddhism and meditation, and volunteered with an amateur theatre ground as a sound and set technician, something I'd never even considered doing. Though my spoken Korean has suffered from disuse, my passion for martial arts has only grown and I continue to hone my frisbee skills during the summers. The meditative practice I began in Korea has continued and has added to the richness of my life. Like my experiences at camp and in the woods, living overseas shaped me in profound ways. It is an undivorceable part of my identity. But, like so many other events that have 'shaped me in profound ways,' my time in Korea was, itself, shaped by my whiteness and by colonial structures.

What did I think gave me permission to throw off the yoke of cultural expectations and good behavior? How is it that I was able to work in Korea as a white woman with no knowledge of the Korean language? Why were we, as mostly white foreigners, forgiven

our transgressions? **What about how closely tied these rich and formative experiences are to colonial structures?**

Professional Undevelopment

The final category I tackled when writing my vignettes was *teaching*. It came last partly because of the place in time where the critical memory took place, immediately after I returned from living abroad, and partly because it was the most uncomfortable for me to analyze. It was uncomfortable because it was still a very fresh, very real memory – I was not protected by reams of time. It is also the category that illustrates most directly the second of my 'interview questions': When were you resistant to confronting your privilege as a White Settler and how did you rationalize this resistance? When I returned from Korea, I was elated. In my vignette, I describe it like this:

> As much as I'd loved living in Asia, after a time it began to feel very
> claustrophobic. There were so many people, so little in the way of wide-open
> spaces and hidden away wilderness; coming home felt like bursting out of a very
> pleasant, but too small room.

I also felt adrift, and like I needed to do something that would be more useful and meaningful than the 3 years I spent teaching and tutoring wealthy Korean high-schoolers. Deciding what to do next was informed by a desire not to repeat that experience, but to, instead, do something different and exciting. Again, in my vignette, I write:

> [M]aybe I should go North, I thought, to teach on a reservation… The pull to
> finally become the activist teacher I imagined myself to be, to work, actively,
> against all the forces of inequity I'd so long despised, was powerful. But, and this
> is important, the pull to go North, to go to where the wilderness was closer at

> *hand, that was equally as strong. Wasn't I still chasing it? Hadn't I never*
>
> *relinquished the mission to know it better? Again, what better place to get closer*
>
> *to that knowledge I still craved than a remote, Northern, reservation?*

In my *writing story,* I am hesitant to dig deep into the problems with this vignette. I see that, from a pedagogical perspective, I am probably unprepared to go teach in the North. I note:

> *So bold and so confident that I knew what I was doing. I didn't, I knew even less*
>
> *than I thought. Just a novice teacher filled with a novice's ego.*

The same sentiment is apparent in the latter paragraphs of the vignette itself when I describe the meeting I had with a colleague of my mother who works as a social worker in a Northern Indigenous community. I summarize her advice to me and my reaction to it thus:

> *Her message to me was very simple, "doing this will change your life but don't go*
>
> *if you aren't sure, don't go if you can't make a commitment to stay". The*
>
> *seriousness with which she took her duty to her community, the way her*
>
> *profession was truly a vocation, a calling, impressed and intimidated me.*

My *writing story* is, other than the small piece above, very similar to what I wrote in my vignette: it is largely silent about the deeper issues at play. Focusing on my unpreparedness to go North and live the "White savior" vision I so clearly outlined in both pieces, I did not consider whether or not I was welcome there, whether my presence would be helpful or harmful and, if by going, I might continue to perpetuate the structures of marginalization I opposed. I also, during the time I was composing both pieces, did not see the deeper connection between the first piece – the woods – and this

piece. In both, I refer to my desire for wide-open spaces, to be on the land, and in both pieces, I fail to consider *how* and *why* I felt entitled to unfettered enjoyment and use of that land. Northern communities are, in particular, places where access to land remains hotly contested, and where the disconnection from land has had devastating effects on the physical, spiritual, and mental health of the people who live there.

Though I did not go to teach in a Northern community, the decisions not to was part of what prompted me to seek out more knowledge on how to work against colonialism and with Indigenous communities. It is what lead me to this project and so, like so many of the other events I analyzed, is both representative of how I have embodied colonial structures and instrumental in moving me closer to a place where I can see those instances clearly and learn from them. In the following section, I discuss the contours of those lessons and give others a brief guide to how they might begin their own process of personal decolonization.

Vignette – Professional Undevelopment

Coming back from Korea was an odd experience. I'd heard friends talk about 'reverse culture shock' and how tough it was to re-adjust to life in North America. That seemed like a not-very-likely outcome in my case. Every time I'd come back for vacation, it felt as though a weight lifted as the plane touched down. As much as I'd loved living in Asia, after a time, it began to feel very claustrophobic. There were so many people, so little in the way of wide open spaces and hidden away wilderness; visiting home felt like bursting out of a very pleasant, but too small room. It was different when I came home for good. The first two weeks were fine, visiting old friends and reconnecting with family; but after that, things got weird. I remember going to the

grocery store for the first time, and being confused into near paralysis by the sheer amount of food and number of choices available: six brands of ketchup! What utter nonsense, two would suffice. On transit, I was a menace: rushing the door, standing too close to other patrons, making liberal use my elbows and knees when making my way to the exit. I missed the noises, the bustle and busy-ness of my old neighborhood, the quiet was unsettling. There were no more early morning produce vendors shouting *YANGPA, GOGOMA, SAGWA* to wake me up, no more cicada buzzing and feral cat mewling to put me to sleep. I felt like a foreigner in my own hometown and it was unsettling. The solution, it seemed to me, was to just keep moving. Something about being away for so long had turned home into not-home, turned staying still into something intolerable.

And so, I came back to an idea I'd had before I left for Korea, one that I ultimately did not follow through on: maybe I should go North, I thought, to teach on a reservation. We'd had presentations from various placement organizations during the final days of Teachers' College and the idea had stuck with me. I liked the notion of putting into practice the lessons I'd learned while at OISE. Teaching in a place where I felt like I could 'make a difference' appealed to me: where else could anti-racist, anti-colonial teachers be more effective than in a context like that? Even so, I'd not seriously considered it at the time, as Korea was a more attractive option. It was more foreign, more exciting, seemed like it would be less of a challenge for a newly minted teacher. In the dreary days after I came home, though, it became a more and more tempting option. I had three years of active practice under my belt, in a cultural context widely different from my own. It seemed like that should enable me to go and feel confident that I could tackle what, by all accounts, would be a challenging teaching environment. The pull to

finally become the activist teacher I imagined myself to be, to work, actively, against all

the forces of inequity I'd so long despised, was powerful. But, and this is important, the

pull to go North, to go to where the wilderness was closer at hand, that was equally as

strong. Wasn't I still chasing it? Hadn't I never relinquished the mission to know it

better? Again, what better place to get closer to that knowledge I still craved than a

remote, Northern, reservation?

I prepared many applications in the months I spent languishing in my mother's

basement. Writing cover letter after cover letter, I tried to make the case for why I could

do a most excellent job teaching in remote Indigenous communities. I've gone back and

looked at them since then, and was surprised to find that they were actually pretty good

cover letters. I presented myself to school administrators as someone who could hack it,

someone who was legitimately invested in improving educational outcomes for students

in their communities. I knew all the right words to use and did so convincingly.

Convincingly enough that, around Christmas time, one of my top choices finally asked

for an interview. It was a school in Northern Saskatchewan, in a community sat between

a river and a string of low hills. It looked beautiful, and the school's profile was

encouraging. I set up an interview with the Principal for after the holidays and began to

prepare.

In an effort to help me prepare for both the upcoming interview and the possibility

that I would get a job in one of these communities, my mother invited a friend of hers

over for dinner just before the New Year. She, like my mother, was a social worker from

white, working-class roots. She lived and worked in a remote Indigenous community in

the Yukon and had agreed to come and speak with me about making the decision to go

teach in the North. We talked about many things at that dinner. Though she'd gone

initially intending to stay only one year, she'd been there for over fifteen. She clearly

loved her life there, was completely dedicated to the community she served, and had

many rewarding experiences, but also many devastating and traumatic ones. In her

capacity as a social worker, she saw both the worst outcomes of generational trauma and

also the good that could come when the cycle of trauma was finally broken. Her message

to me was very simple: "Doing this will change your life but don't go if you aren't sure,

don't go if you can't make a commitment to stay." The seriousness with which she took

her duty to her community, the way her profession was truly a vocation, a calling,

impressed and intimidated me. I didn't know for sure that I would be ready to stay, to

make that kind of commitment. I knew after that conversation that I still didn't know

enough, that maybe I never would. I cancelled my interview

    The job I finally did land was at an independent school. I went in feeling

optimistic. The schools I'd taught in while overseas were all private and I'd enjoyed the

freedom of teaching with fewer bureaucratic restraints. It was a disappointing experience.

The year I was there, all I could think about was my decision not to go North. I felt as

though I had let myself down, that I had let my principles down. What did it mean that I

wasn't ready to commit myself to going and helping communities that needed dedicated

teachers? What did it mean that I instead chose to teach at a school only the wealthiest

few could attend? Was I not doing a disservice to my professional obligations? In short, I

felt like a hypocrite. But, my conversation over Christmas had illustrated to me that I

needed to know more, to really know what I was getting myself into, to prepare myself

more fully so that I could do the work justice. That is what led me to graduate school and to the writing of these very words.

It seemed a logical conclusion for someone who was really good at school. Need to learn more? Go back to grad school! I'd get to ask my own questions, design my own research, get ready to go teach in Indigenous communities. I'd find answers! It would be wonderful! But, of course, it's not been that straightforward. Like all of my professional and educational experiences post-Korea, it's been one of unlearning.

What made me think I had to go North to teach in Indigenous communities? Why was it so easy for me to assume I was ready to work in Indigenous communities when I had never before done so? Why was I so attached to the idea of 'Northern-ness?' Why was graduate school such an immediate solution to the 'needing to know more' conundrum? ***What about how closely tied these rich and formative experiences are to colonial structures?***

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION or WHAT DO I DO NOW?

The point of this project was to learn how to teach toward social justice and against oppression when my Whiteness represents the very structures of marginalization I oppose. I dealt deeply with the second half of that question throughout this study, exploring how Whiteness and colonialism shaped my identity. Once all the analysis was written, I felt that I had said very little *out loud* about the second half of that question: the *"how do I teach now"* part. However, the bulk of the subtext of my analysis actually does answer that question. The answer is hidden in the subtext, in part, due to the Western way of silo-ing knowledges, of separating the personal, the professional, and the practical. Decolonization of the self and decolonizing one's teaching practice are not separate endeavours: they are connected, but because I still – and, to some extent, probably always will – operate in a mind-space where there must be a separation, it is very hard to see the connections without some philosophical and theoretical help. In this discussion, I outline how the work of Ted Aoki (1993) and Michelle Fine (1994) helped me to collapse the boundaries between personal/professional life, and self/other, and to see how the lessons learned from a personal effort at decolonization could inform my teaching practice (and vice-versa). I also outline how this project gave me a better understanding of the role that *epistemological pluralism* plays in the decolonizing project and how it has changed my approach to my role in said project. Finally, I present some guidelines for teachers like me who want to undertake their own project of decolonization.

Where to Find the 'Good Stuff'

Aoki (1993) and Fine (1994) both believe that the space-between is where the 'good stuff' happens. Therefore, their work has helped me discover and define the place

that was the most instructive for me in teasing out answers to the *how to teach now* question. Fine (1994), in her influential piece, "Working the Hyphens," posits that the most productive space for qualitative research – especially that which aims to work towards social justice – is at the *hyphen*: the space between self and other, researcher and field. In her conclusion, she instructs researchers to, "[erode] fixed categories and [provoke] possibilities for qualitative research that is designed against Othering, *for* social justice, and [pivot] identities of Self and Other at the hyphen" (Fine, 1994 p. 81). Aoki (1993), similarly, posits that the curriculum-as-lived is the most productive of teaching and learning spaces, telling his readers that the lived curriculum is, "the more poetic, phenomenological, and hermeneutic discourse in which life is embodied in the very stories and languages people speak and live" (p. 261). In the world of binaries and of delineated spaces, the world that Fine and Aoki both wish to deconstruct – the personal and the professional, self and other – do not overlap: they exist as separated disciplines or spheres in much the same way that Aoki describes the disciplines present in most educational institutions – necessarily apart from one another. Though my attempt at decolonization began as a bid to deconstruct my understanding of the colonial (Western)/Indigenous binary, it also allowed me to see and work on collapsing the self/other and personal/professional binaries, to find the 'nice, juicy stuff' in the space-between.

Exploring and collapsing the self/other binary was the most difficult part of this entire process. Aoki (1993) describes how Western epistemological traditions often construct the self, saying, "in our everyday understanding of self/other, the self is often understood as an individualized being bestowed with the self's rights and freedoms" (p.

265). But, if we do not acknowledge and accept the influence of other on self and vice-versa, we miss the most productive and important aspects of a dialogue across difference. So, if what is 'good' and productive is what is in the middle, and the middle should be shaped in equal parts by self and other, then to have access to this space, you must accept the shift in identity that comes from allowing yourself to be seen and acted upon by the other. In other words, you have to *cede the center.*

I have come to view the time I spent exploring the idea of divesting colonial power as an exploration of this need to *cede the center*. Understanding how, exactly, to define *divestment* in this context helped me to see ceding the center as a necessity and allowed me to view it as a productive rather than reductive process. In its Oxford English Dictionary, *to divest* means both, "to rid and free from" and, "to strip or deprive, especially of rights or property; to dispossess." This definition has a transactional feel; a sense of known, discrete quantities. It says you divest yourself of colonial power – you are decolonized. However, when you divest in this manner – when you throw away, when you get rid of – what do you then fill yourself up with, and what do you move towards? Viewing divestment solely though this zero-sum, transactional lens feels like a very profound loss. Not only does it imply a loss of control, a ceding of the ability to hold on to the rich experiences that form a sense of identity and self, it implies that a hole will necessarily be left behind.

This is, however, a very epistemologically Western way of viewing the process of divestment; a notion that holds identity as fixed, quantifiable, own-able, and whose outlines are fully in control of the individual. Indeed, this concept of identity as singular, autonomous, and owned is a privileged one; a privilege not extended to those in

marginalized communities, and one that is taken for granted by those in dominant social positions, particularly White Settlers. Aoki, again, offers a path forward, one accessible through pedagogy and co-constructed learning. He asks us to, "consider identity not so much as something already present, but rather as production in the throes of being constituted as we live in places of difference" (1993, p. 260). Viewing the process of divestment as an action and a learning experience that makes space in the middle for this production to happen allows me to see that divesting is not a net-negative loss. It is, instead, an acceptance of the necessity of letting other ways of knowing and being to influence who I am and how I act in the world. It showed me how working the *hyphen* changes the self. By reconsidering my identity and the forces that shaped it, I have also changed the contours of the teacher who enters the learning spaces I work in. Both this change, and the unique view of both curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived I had access to throughout the research process, allowed me to break down that second binary: the personal versus the professional.

Autoethnography, like all research methodologies, is a great choice for certain goals and a poor choice for others. When I began, I chose autoethnography as an acknowledgement that I needed to attempt a personal decolonization as a first step towards teaching towards social justice and against oppression. What I did not foresee was how illuminating the autoethnographic process itself would be in realizing the connections between this personal effort towards decolonization and my professional pedagogical understandings. The entire process turned the phrase *the personal is professional* from more than anemic Edu-speak, and instead, into something real.

As both the designer of the research process and the only 'participant' in it, I both created the curriculum-as-planned (the research plan) and lived it through. This project gave me an opportunity to enact and observe a sort-of 'lived curriculum' from start-to-(semi)-finish, in a sort of curricular petri dish. Interacting at the center were the words and experiences of selves past, of friends and family, and the voices I sought out in the blogs, novels, biographies, and research I consulted throughout the process. The analogy is not perfect; the voices and stories of Indigenous people were textual and were, in a certain sense, inert. They couldn't talk back to me, couldn't correct or redirect me in real time. Importantly, however, the influence those works had on me grew stronger at every successive point in the decolonization process. The more space I made at the center, the more these voices acted on my sense of identity, and the more open I became to seeing and engaging with the multiplicities that, as Deleuze and Parnet (1977) tell us, grow from the "between" (p. viii). I had become a student in a classroom of my own making, able to see the blind spots in my plan, able to work through and see how the changes I made worked in real-time and to real, profound effect. All of this took what was initially theoretical and made visible how it could work both on the ground and at a very deep, very personal level.

Describing the interplay of curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived I experienced is not easy. Contradictions and messiness abounded. There was – and remains – a conflict at the heart of the 'Who creates the curriculum?' question. It is not the responsibility of Indigenous peoples or their communities to mend my 'good' education. The work needed to be my own, regardless of how much 'colonial soupiness' still influenced my understanding of things. So, I began. I created a plan, trying to use a

decolonizing lens. At the beginning, since I had not yet lived my plan through, that lens was flawed. However, the plan I created changed as I moved, lived, through it. It continued to spiral closer to the goal of divestment, and learning, and making space at the center. More refining happened in each successive revisit to the curriculum-as-planned, refining informed by what was lived. I found that as the process continued, I more often changed my plan not in ways that felt intuitively right, but instead, in ways that felt uncomfortable – because that was the guidance I received from the Indigenous voices I read and listened to. Just as Fine (1994) encourages researchers to sit in and accept the discomfort and uncertainty of the *hyphen*, I also had to sit with and experience the discomfort and uncertainty that exists at the interplay of curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived. The discomfort and uncertainty that comes from a recognition that *I cannot* separate the personal and professional if I want to work towards decolonization. Seeing how intimately connected identity and curriculum and learning are in real-time has shown me that this is an impossibility. It has also shown me that I must accept the changes in the contours of my identity that comes from a divestment of the privilege to be its sole definer.

I still interpret the world through a lens tinged by 'colonial soupiness.' I do not think it is possible – or, even productive – to expect that that will ever change completely, but I like to think that as I continue living through and spiraling back to this plan-for-decolonization, I am able to get closer and closer. What I don't want to do – what I live in fear of – is falling into the trap Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) call "*the settler colonial project of replacement* [emphasis added], which is intent on relieving the inherent anxiety of settler dislocation from stolen land" (p. 78). I read in their work a

warning to remain consistently and critically reflective of how I apply the lessons I've learned – and to continue to learn – about decolonization as a warning that it is all too easy to begin to take up space in the center if I cannot remain at ease with the discomfort of becoming 'unsettled.' I remind myself of the necessity of this discomfort when I need to reground myself with what is really important: not puffing out my chest and calling myself a *good White,* but being quiet, listening, and ceding space to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Adopting an approach to teaching, learning, and living as a Settler Canadian that embraces epistemological pluralism has helped me to see practical ways to do so.

Epistemological Pluralism

In a decolonizing context, epistemological pluralism (EP) allows for both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems to exist in the same space, both exerting equal influence on each other and producing an epistemological framework that is greater than the sum of its parts (Biermann, 2011). Throughout this project, and as I put the finishing touches on it, I have seen the influence of EP at work in the changes in my own epistemic lens. Since systematic implementation of the lessons learned from these changes was not the goal of this project, I cannot say anything definitive about the impact of EP in a classroom environment. However, I can discuss how I see it at work throughout the decolonization process, and how it has informed how and where I should be teaching for social justice and against oppression.

In his analysis of Western knowledge systems, Francis Akena (2012) concludes that, because Western knowledge grows from a community that holds imperial control as a central need, the production of Western knowledge necessarily, "[justifies] imperialism

and domination" (p. 607). The practical outcome of this is often a 'knee-jerk reaction' on

the part of White Settler educators that, "regards efforts to address inequality and

diversity as a rejection of, and even and intrusion into, broad understandings of self and

nation" (St. Denis, 2011, p. 315). I recognized this reaction at work in my memories of

many of the experiences I analyzed above. Gone unexamined, it made it extremely

difficult to work meaningfully toward my goal of teaching for social justice and against

oppression; I held tightly and defensively to that one way of seeing and understanding the

world, unable to see that my defensiveness was a necessary production of an

epistemology that *requires* hierarchies of both peoples and knowledges. However, the

process of binary deconstruction described above showed me that letting Indigenous

epistemologies influence your worldview does not require letting go of and dismissing

the ways of thinking and being that shaped your Settler identity. It means, instead,

understanding that those ways of thinking and being exist within a plurality of thinking(s)

and being(s) – and that, within this plurality, none should have supremacy.

Though supremacy or hierarchy of knowledge is precluded when one takes an

epistemically pluralist view of the world, it does not necessarily follow that having taken

this view, one can claim to have equal claim to all epistemic traditions. I have to

acknowledge that Indigenous Knowledge systems are deep, complex, and axiologically

different from the systems in which I was raised (Cardinal, 2001 Smith, 2012; Weber-

Pillwax, 2002). Though I can see how exposure to Indigenous voices, histories, and a

considered effort to decolonize have led to differences in my way of viewing the world, I

cannot say that I deeply understand or have mastery of Indigenous knowledges. To claim

to do so would to be a form of cultural appropriation (Haig-Brown, 2010), and would run

contrary to one of the central axioms of Indigenous epistemic traditions the world over: that knowledge cannot be mastered or owned, but is instead a communal resource (Weber-Pillwax, 2002). The role, then, that I see for myself as a White Settler teacher working an epistemically plural practice is not to enter teaching and learning spaces as an 'expert' on Indigenous peoples, communities, and knowledges; my understandings are without context and lived experience, and will always be mediated by the silencing effect the privilege of my White-Settlerness affords me. I must, instead, support the re-appropriation of the power to define, disseminate, and grow Indigenous knowledge by Indigenous peoples and communities – a central goal of the entire decolonizing process (Battiste, 2013; Pidgeon, Munoz, Kirkness, & Archibald, 2013; Rains, Archibald, & Dehyle, 2000; Simpson, 2016).

That is not to say that I cannot contribute to conversations about what it means to be an ally to Indigenous students and colleagues, or that my opinions and viewpoints have no value. Rather, the value of my opinions, viewpoints, and experiences lie in the effect they can have on prompting other White Settlers – teachers, students, friends, family, and colleagues alike – to re-examine their positions of power in a colonial society. Because seeing the world through an epistemically plural lens is so rich, instructive, and hopeful, I see its development as a very powerful argument in favor of taking on this kind of personal attempt at decolonization. It has allowed me to articulate an identity that acknowledges my personal role in harmful colonial paradigms, but does not require a disavowal of that identity. Instead, epistemological pluralism teaches me that discomfort, fluidity, dissonance, and de-individuation can be productive and transformative instead of terrifying and confusing. And, so, I must work alongside those

with whom I share context and outline a sketch of how to do this kind of personal

decolonization project – one that can, hopefully, lead them to similar understandings.

What If I Want to Try?

At the beginning of this document, I spoke about my very 'good' but, ultimately,

inadequate education. I reflected on how I learned so little about colonialism, Indigenous

peoples, and Settler complicity during my years of formal schooling. What you did not

read about – because I had not thought about it yet – was my *in*formal education. It

should have been a big hint that, when I was asked to answer the question, "Who are you

and why are you here?" my first instinct was to write about my *in*formal education: the

way I was socialized, the memories so fundamental to my identity.

For those who want to try, my most important piece of guidance is to start with

the personal. That being said, I cannot tell you exactly how to do this. I can give you tips:

but, really, it's up to you. I think of the decolonization process a little bit like my eating

disorder recovery. When I was sick, no amount of cajoling from my family to 'eat like a

normal person' would have an effect. It had to come from me, it had to come from a

place of earnest urgency for change, one that quiets all the voices of doubt and fear, and

forces you forward. The urgency for change, in my case, came from both internal and

external forces: the internal being that constant and evolving desire to teach for social

justice and against oppression when my Whiteness represents the very structures of

marginalization I oppose, and the external being the conversation I had with my

committee member and the discomfort it provoked. Regardless of how you come to the

urge to change, and your individual circumstances, there are several steps and

considerations I identify as crucial to the process. I outline them below in broad strokes

for those who want to try.

Step 1: Don't wait to engage. Start reading, listening, attending events in your

community and do it now. Don't worry if you feel out of place, if what you're reading

makes you uncomfortable, or if you sense that 'kneejerk reaction' of, "They don't know

me!" Don't ignore it: ask yourself where it comes from, examine it, sit with it. And, take

notes, without judgement, in whatever form best suits your way of working through your

thoughts. I wrote prose, but you can dictate, or draw, or use verse.

Step 2: Take an honest accounting of your experiences. Specifically, reflect in

relation to this question: "How have I embodied/do I embody colonial structures in my

personal and professional life?" To do this, you need to come to an understanding of

"colonial structures" (this is where the reading comes in): how do you define them, and

what have they looked like in the context of your personal experiences? Your process is

your process. I was lucky, I had my journals, but you might need to rely on memory

alone. This is okay: I recommend the 'word vomit' or *stream-of-consciousness* technique.

Just write and see what comes up. If you find it difficult to reflect on yourself at first,

that's okay, too. Start external. Look at colonial structures broadly first, then ask yourself,

"How did I participate in this?" and, "What could I have done differently?"

Step 3: Compare your impressions of what you've read and engaged with to

your answer to that second question. Use the set of 'interview questions' from this

project as a guide:

    i.   When were you complicit in reproducing colonial structures?

- How did you benefit from your part in this reproduction?

      ii.   When were you resistant to confronting your privilege as a White Settler?

- How did you rationalize this resistance?

      iii.   In what ways has your identity been formed by colonial structures?

- How did this effect your personal and family life?

- How did this effect your professional life?

You can also consider these questions: How closely do the themes in your readings and experiences hew to your personal understanding of colonial structures and your role in them? Are there commonalities? Differences? What surprised you? What made you uncomfortable? What made you excited?

      Step 4: Distill and refine your conclusions. Try and come up with one or two 'takeaways.' These can take the form of statements about how you have embodied colonial structures or questions you still have. Decide on a course of action, even if it is small, that you will take in your personal or professional life that allows you to make more space at the center for Indigenous voices.

      Step 5: Repeat. This is an iterative and cyclical process; each repetition teaches you more.

      An analogy that has helped me conceptualize the process is to see the experiences I analyzed as a series of beautiful and ugly dresses, or suits, or whatever your fancy dress preference is. You buy them and you think, "I'm going to look great in this, it's just, so, *me*!". A few years later, you've forgotten all about it – but then you take it out again, take a look, and think "My *goodness*, what was I thinking?" Your perspective and values have changed, and the way you see yourself and your role in the world has changed, so that dress/suit/fancy outfit no longer means what it once did. When you allow yourself to be

changed in ways that acknowledge that, "our accounts of ourselves are bound to the other" (Zembylas, 2015, p. 169), the same sort of thing happens to your experiences of your memories. They take on different shades, teach different lessons, and perhaps do not inspire the same feelings of uncritical joy and richness. That does not, however, make them unimportant or inherently bad; it instead makes them useful rather than destructive tools in learning to teach toward social justice and against oppression.

What's Left to Do

Settlers who live on this land have a long way to go before we can claim to have made significant progress along the path of decolonization, and I include myself among them. There are a lot of very dedicated people, both Settler and Indigenous, who are working tirelessly to move us along that path – but individual effort, and individual consideration of what it means to decolonize, is still a hard sell among White Settlers like me. Unfortunately, it is likely that until a critical mass of White Settlers choose to do so, the progress made will continue to be incremental and slow. Though you read above one example of how it can be done, more research needs to be done that looks at how to scale this process up and adapt it to speak to those who do not have an earnest desire for change. It will not be an easy task given that this earnest desire appears to be an important pre-requisite for beginning the process; however, I take heart from the interest in this project I've seen from colleagues, friends, family, and students.

The scope of this project also did not allow me to consult the Indigenous communities where I live in the amount of depth and detail I'd have hoped for. The realities of University ethics committee processes and the deep lack of knowledge I had about doing so either respectfully or productively limited the kinds of conversations I felt

I could ethically engage in. As I repeat and refine this project long into the future, I must take steps to begin doing so in more meaningful ways; as a member of my community, a teacher, a student, and a Settler continuing to mend my 'good' education.

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