

PLANTING SEEDS THROUGH INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGY: PICKING UP THE RECONCILIATION BUNDLE IN THE ACADEMY**Rachel Ariss**

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Abstract

Ontario Tech University is both small in student size and young in relation to the Canadian academic landscape. With its emphasis on technology well established, the university is shifting some of its attention to address the need to include Indigenous knowledge and history through course offerings. This paper illustrates contextual details of the university, the process of the first Indigenous Studies course creation, and our work in listening to the stories of the students. We explore the demographics and history of Ontario Tech University and Durham Region, where it is situated. We describe the formation of the community group that created the course, and review our methodology addressing Indigenist research and Indigenous pedagogical approaches. We include some of the conversations we had during the writing of this paper, demonstrating layers of story and relationality. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the stories shared by the students, noting some of the signs for hope and for caution.

Resumé

L'Université Ontario Tech compte un nombre modeste d'étudiants et est de création récente dans le contexte canadien. Vu que son emphase sur la technologie est déjà bien établie, l'Université concentre certaines de ses ressources sur le savoir et l'histoire autochtones et la nécessité d'en traiter dans l'offre de cours. Cet article donne des exemples de détails contextuels de l'Université, du processus de la création des premiers cours en études autochtones, et de notre propre entreprise d'écoute des étudiants. Nous explorons la démographie et l'histoire de l'Université comme de sa région (Durham). Nous décrivons

la formation du groupe communautaire qui a créé le cours, et revoyons la méthodologie dont nous nous sommes servis (recherche indigéniste, approches pédagogiques indigènes). Nous y incluons certaines des conversations que nous avons eues lors de la rédaction de cet article, qui laissent transparaître des couches d'histoires et de liens sociaux. Enfin, nous terminons l'article par une discussion des histoires que partagent avec nous les élèves, y trouvant quelques notes d'espoir et quelques précautions à prendre.

The highest form of knowledge is empathy, for it requires us to suspend our egos and live in another's world. It requires profound purpose larger than the self kind of understanding.
Plato, *The Republic*

Preparing the Ground We Walk On...

Rachel: My family arrived from Ireland and Scotland between 1830-50, settling on Anishinabek land in Treaties 27 and 45 ½. I have researched and written on Indigenous rights, Canadian law and mining, and I teach a 3rd year course, Indigenous Peoples, Law and the Canadian State, at the university. In 2016, my colleague, Dr. Thomas McMorrow, and I were asked to write a report on how our institution could respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). We collaborated with Jill Thompson, the university's Indigenous Cultural Advisor and member of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation. Elder Shirley Williams provided invaluable guidance throughout the process. Student Development Specialist in Indigenous Programming Chris Grol and student researcher Rhea (Boettcher) Stronach contributed also. In 2017, Jill, Tom and I received a small internal university teaching innovation grant to develop an Introduction to Indigenous Studies course with community collaboration. Our goal was to develop a first-year elective course in response to the TRC Calls to Action in Education (2015), centering Indigenous ways of learning and knowing, that would eventually be available to students from all faculties at the university. Jill recommended several community members with experience and knowledge in education. Eventually, a group of five community members, Elder Shirley Williams, Art Beaver, Mary-Anne Hoggarth, Laura Colwell and Nancy Hamer Strahl, and four university members (Jill, Tom, Sarah Rasile and myself) began this work .

Nancy: Shé:kon. Boozhoo. Greetings. In keeping with Indigenous protocols, I want to situate myself in relation to this work. I am a woman

of Mohawk and European descent. My birth family's roots in the Six Nations of the Grand River prior to the imposition of the Indian Act, when my ancestral Kanien'kehá (Mohawk) grandmothers were deemed "not Indian" because they married non-Indigenous men. As an adoptee, I was not aware of this history until adulthood. I have spent most of my working life in Anishinaabe territories, learning from Anishinaabe friends, colleagues and teachers. As a mother, it has been vitally important to me that my children (and grandchildren) know who they are culturally, despite fragmented family stories and knowledge. These imposed disconnections are mirrored in what has not been taught in the education system. Learning is a pathway to healing from colonization for Indigenous peoples, just as much as for non-Indigenous people as they pick up their bundles of responsibilities on this reconciliation journey.

In 2018, I accepted the inaugural Indigenous Studies Dissertation Completion Fellowship at Ontario Tech University. It included teaching a brand new introductory Indigenous Studies course. Awareness of several issues is critical to the success of teaching this type of course. Students' degree of knowledge of Indigenous histories, cultures and current social issues is inconsistent. Motivations for taking an Indigenous Studies course vary, but can include the misperception that it is a "bird" course, with little work involved. The subject material is intense and deeply troubling, requiring a safe space that balances open inquiry with respectful discussions. Lastly, bringing significant experiential moments into the learning process enables the students to step outside of the typical academic frame, but can be challenging from a resource perspective. An Indigenous pedagogical approach is critical to shifting students' learning from focusing only on the intellectual to the (w)holistic. This enables students to critically think about what they have, or have not been taught about Indigenous cultures and histories. Students are challenged to build empathy, to consider what it means to be treaty people, and how they might take up the responsibilities of reconciliation throughout their lives.

This paper illustrates contextual details of the university, the process of the course creation, and our work in listening to the stories of the students. We include some of the conversations we had during the writing of this paper, demonstrating layers of story and relationality. We explore the demographics and history of Ontario Tech and Durham Region, where it is situated. We describe the formation of the community group that created the course, and review our methodology addressing Indigenist research and Indigenous pedagogical approaches. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the stories shared by the students, noting some of the signs for hope and for caution.

Demographics

At Ontario Tech, located in Oshawa, Ontario, the student population is largely non-Indigenous, and many are new or first-generation Canadians. Oshawa originates from the Anishinaabe term “aazhaawe” meaning crossing to the other side, or crossing-place. This population is also urban and suburban, largely residing in Durham Region or the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In Oshawa itself, there are few publicly visible Indigenous spaces. The closest First Nation community is the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation (on-reserve population of 50). Alderville First Nation (on-reserve population of 313) and Hiawatha First Nation (on-reserve population 204) are an hour to the east; further north lies Curve Lake First Nation (on-reserve population of 800). To the northwest, Georgina Island First Nation (on-reserve population 210) is a 90-minute drive. A grass-roots organization, Bawaajigewin, located in Oshawa and established in 2015, advocates for the Indigenous community in Durham Region, but there is no Friendship Centre or similar gathering space to foster a sense of community. There are also some Indigenous-specific services: Nijkiwendidaa Anishnaabekwewag Services Circle, which is based in Peterborough and includes Durham Region in its catchment area; and the Youth Mental Health program provided by Enaahdig Healing Lodge and offered at Carea Health Centre, located in the south end of Oshawa. According to Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2019), Oshawa had a total Indigenous population of 8,965 in 2016, with the majority identifying as First Nations (with or without status under the Indian Act). Toronto, easily accessible through commuter links, has the largest reported Indigenous population in Ontario, at approximately 46,315 in 2016, a 25% increase over the previous census (City of Toronto, 1998-2021). Organizations that provide support to the Indigenous population in Toronto, however, estimate the population to be closer to 70,000 (City of Toronto, 1998-2021).

Historical Context of Ontario Tech University

Ontario Tech is, with 10,000 students, quite small in comparison to other universities in the GTA. The closest university geographically and in population size (9,000 students) is Trent University, located in Peterborough. Ontario Tech is also a young university, founded in 2002. As the name suggests, the university has invested significant energy into technology-based programs (e.g., engineering, information technology) and professional streams (e.g., nursing, education), along with sciences, social sciences and humanities. Initially, a partnership between Ontario Tech and Trent allowed students to directly enroll in Indigenous Studies courses at Trent’s Oshawa campus. That

option, however, was ending in 2019. As a result, and in response to the TRC Calls to Action (2015), Ontario Tech developed a Task Force to spearhead an institutional response to the Calls, and began the process of developing in-house Indigenous Studies courses.

Growing Relations: Community Collaboration and Course Development

We began our community collaboration with sharing food and visiting to help us get to know each other. Shirley Williams shared her experiences as an Elder and as a professor, providing cultural and academic guidance. The group focused on overall pedagogical priorities and the challenges of teaching such a course. The collaborators articulated several key conditions for an introductory course that would fulfill the TRC Calls to Action (2015). These included providing opportunities to ask questions and engage in guided conversation, to engage with Indigenous histories and perspectives, and to foster critical thinking to challenge students' assumptions about Canadian history and current society. Additional aspects of Indigenous epistemologies considered vital included land-based and experiential learning opportunities, self-reflection exercises, along with more conventional academic assignments. The collaborators felt that it was only through open discussion that (w)holistic personal learning would occur and the anti-racist outcomes of the TRC Calls to Action could be fulfilled. They recognized the difficulties inherent in grappling with new knowledge, especially where it might challenge students' identities or pride as Canadians. The group emphasized that building empathy and relationships were necessary for reconciliatory education even though this is often not seen as academically relevant.

The collaborators offered their own experiences with land-based assignments and their knowledge of local Indigenous land-based histories. In Oshawa, however, land-based learning is challenging, especially at the institution's urban downtown location. Although the downtown campus is a fifteen-minute walk from Oshawa Creek, which connects Lakes Ontario and Scugog, it has been straightened and its banks altered in many places. The city bumps up against the creek, along with a few homeless encampments. With the lack of natural growth, the area no longer resembles the rich ecosystem the Anishinaabe people were reliant on. Some resources, such as a sweat lodge, are available at the institution's suburban location but are only reasonably accessible by car. Land-based education in more intact ecosystems is available only at a distance, impacting accessibility and cost.

The TRC Report (2015) speaks of education as one of the ways in which the rifts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews can be healed. The TRC calls on Canadian society, as a

whole, to build respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples; this is the purpose of reconciliation. Such relationships are best nurtured through empathy that acknowledges past harms and understands why respectful relationship is necessary. Rupert Ross, retired Crown Attorney in northwestern Ontario, contrasts Indigenous and Western perspectives on the very meaning of relationship. He notes that Western ideas suggest relationships are something we have. Indigenous concepts, alternatively, position us within the relationship – we are relationships (Ross, 1996). The goal of creating respectful relationships can only be fulfilled in the course of interactive, critical self-reflective engagement. This engagement is difficult to assess, let alone measure, within the constraints of standardized course descriptions and learning outcomes. This academic expression of learning outcomes does not fully do justice to the fundamental goals of offering an introductory Indigenous studies course. Yet, this did not deter the collaborators. Belief that the university could contribute to healing the deep rifts between peoples and within communities was fundamental in bringing the course into being. Its final description reads:

The course will address the history and legacies of residential schools, perspectives on treaties, and the impacts of the Indian Act and 'Indian policy' on Indigenous peoples; promote critical reflection on the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada; and challenge students to appreciate Indigenous ways of knowing. Demonstrating a local focus but fanning out to recognize how colonialism has displaced people and displaced their sense of identity, the course will take past, present, and future relationships to the land on which Ontario Tech stands as the departure point for inquiry and instruction. The course incorporates Indigenous pedagogies, experiential and self-reflective learning, and anti-racist approaches to foster the development of respectful relationships and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, both at Ontario Tech and in students' future careers.

The collaborators emphasized the significance of learning from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other Indigenous guest speakers, and the requirement for honoraria, which the faculty committed to covering. The collaborators emphasized that having an Indigenous instructor was vital. This would demonstrate commitment to valuing the presence of Indigenous people and perspectives within the university, and provide role models for Indigenous students. The university, however, had no self-identified Indigenous faculty members.

This challenge was met by Art Beaver's recommendation to reach out to the Indigenous Studies Ph.D. program at Trent Universi-

ty for doctoral candidates who might be available to teach as sessional instructors. By the following spring, this inspiration was realized in a new two-year Indigenous Studies Dissertation Completion Fellowship. The Fellowship embodied a mutual benefit approach – doctoral students continuing past their four-year tuition support limit received some funding towards writing time, in addition to payment for teaching, and the university benefitted from being able to offer the course with an instructor experienced in teaching in Indigenous Studies. The Fellowship also addressed, in part, the exploitation that can arise when universities rely on one-course, one-term sessional instructors without providing job security.

Growing Seeds, Nurturing Relations

During the first semester the course was taught, we decided to explore the students' perspectives on and perceptions of the course material over the semester. The goal, as articulated by the collaborative group, was to: 1) create a safe space for non-Indigenous students to ask questions; 2) maintain a safe, anti-oppressive space for all students, and; 3) have learning outcomes demonstrated in the students' assignments and in-class discussions. While we did not expect a single semester course to induce radical changes for students, we did hope that students would be able to take the seeds of knowledge from the class and nurture them into fuller growth. We felt we might glean some sense of that impact through the reflection assignments each student completed. We submitted this project to the institutional Research Ethics Board (REB) for review. We obtained permission from students from three of the four semester cohorts that the course was taught for a total of twenty-one students. All students quoted were given pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

We considered many layers of story as we listened for themes. Each cohort was assigned four reflection papers of one to three pages each, spanning the semester. The expectation of each of the reflections was as follows:

1. The student is to provide a self-assessment of their current knowledge of Indigenous history and current issues in Canada.
2. Based on the readings and in-class discussions, the student will reflect on the impacts of colonial policies, particularly focusing on the impact of residential schools. The student will explore how this awareness (or lack of awareness) influences their perceptions and the perceptions of people around them of Indigenous peoples.

3. Based on readings and in-class material and discussions, the student will reflect on what they have seen in the media (including social media), explore how the public representations of Indigenous peoples contribute to or detract from the student's perceptions and experience of Indigenous realities in Canada.

4. The student is asked to explore what they have learned through this semester, what has been difficult, exciting, frustrating, etc., and how they will use this learning going forward on personal and (later) professional levels.

There were additional reflection options for students. Each semester, the class participated in a workshop conducted by Indigenous Education and Cultural Services staff. They shared a smudge as part of the process. The presentation created space to discuss stereotypes, and staff shared their own experiences. There was also an exercise enabling the students to experience a glimmer of the emotional impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples. At the conclusion of the exercise, the class participated in a talking circle to process some of their thoughts and feelings. As well, two cohorts had the opportunity to meet with Elders in circle, so they could share some of their stories and teachings, and the students could ask questions.

The students were directed to not simply summarize the material, but to fully engage with it on an intellectual and emotional level. We listened for common content, for emotional expression and personal reflection. Students wrote in the first person, and this encouraged us to bring a perspective of listening to their voices in the written words.

Indigenist Research

Indigenous scholars have been cultivating a growing body of Indigenous-centred research methodologies which we are using to guide our research here. We began this research story by introducing ourselves because within an Indigenist framework, researchers have a responsibility to share who they are, their social locations, positionality and relationships with the research (Singh & Major, 2017). Michael A. Hart writes:

[A]n Indigenist is usually, but not exclusively, an Indigenous person "who combines the abstract and theoretical thinking involved in the creation and transmission of Indigenous knowledge" (p. 38). These

thoughts are then acted upon as the basis for daily living. As such, “the Indigenist is clearly a thinker and practitioner of Indigenous knowledge” (p. 38). From this perspective, Indigenism is not only a stance, process, and discourse; it is a way of life. (D’Arcy Rheault, 1999 cited in Hart, 2007, p. 113)

In his expression of Indigenism as a way of life, Hart (2007) shows how Indigenist thought and research methods are deeply intertwined with Indigenous worldviews and ways of being. This is, in part, why researchers’ abilities to reflect on their positionality and cultural perspectives, as well as their institutional locations, matters. It shows the extent of our understandings of and connections with Indigenous worldviews (Kerr & Adamov Ferguson, 2020). This locating of self also positions us in relation to the research in a way that embraces the subjective nature of our knowing (Stevens, 2007; Wilson, 2008). Rather than assuming a stance of objectivity, or disconnection, Indigenist research is fully relational and subjective. As has been noted by others (see for example Blackstock, 2011; Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2008), we can only know through our interpretation of our perceptions; our perceptions are only formed through our experiences and our relationships to all things.

Core to the purposes of the course, this research story, and Indigenist methods “is the recognition that Indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews are legitimate ways of knowing and, along with Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous research paradigms, must inform the research process” (Singh & Major, 2017, p. 13). The collaborators wanted to ensure the university was committed to giving all students opportunities to experience Indigenous ways of knowing on equal footing with Western ways. The presence and application of Indigenous epistemologies in the classroom allows students to frame Indigenous perspectives and knowledge as legitimate, challenging the colonialist discourse on what is considered valid.

We are learning from Indigenist researchers about Indigenist methods – how to apply them, the reasoning that supports their use, and their deep connections with Indigenous worldviews. Approaching this research as story is one way we try to honour Indigenous epistemologies. “It is the sharing of story, the witnessing of story, and the learning from story that the Indigenous Elders know hold the potential for shifts in consciousness” (Kovach, 2018, p. 51). Jo-ann Archibald (2008) developed the term “Indigenous storywork” (pp. 3-4) to show that stories are worth taking seriously, and to research and describe “making meaning” (pp. 3-4) with stories. The sources of knowledge in this research story are the stories of the collaboration, our experiences as teachers and researchers, and the stories the

students told through their reflection assignments. These are personal stories and are significant sources of knowledge (Archibald, 2008, p. 83). We recognize that there are many truths, layers and emphases in these stories, and that every time we discuss and share them, different understandings will surface (Archibald, n.d.).

Rachel: Reviewing the recordings of our conversations, I hear many personal stories - about our own learning, teaching and experiences with students, and research and writing. I am struck by the amount of laughter side-by-side serious engagement with the concepts and theories we rely on, and the purposes of our work. For me, storytelling provides both a broader context to the work, while helping me to recognize that the students' reflections, and my own, are stories of a moment in time. Our understandings will, no doubt, change as we reflect and new seeds of experience sprout. Bringing a storytelling approach to academic research is freeing - because it frees me to accept where I am now.

Nancy: It doesn't become this place of vulnerability. It becomes this place of human reality. We have foibles. We have our idiosyncrasies. And they lead us to make imperfect decisions. But it doesn't mean that the work that we're doing is any less valid and it doesn't mean that the stories we share are any less important. It's kind of like those Coyote stories, which are usually very funny. The stories teach about serious things, but through shared humour and frailty. Coyote is the avatar for human foibles and human frailties and the fact that often-times we're not as humble about ourselves and the place we occupy in the world as we ought to be. Being reminded through humour of our place in the work and world enables acceptance of ourselves.

It is helpful to think through (w)holistic and practical means of keeping Indigenous ways of knowing central to a research story conducted and experienced largely in the context of a Western post-secondary institution. Here, we summarize Indigenist research principles as articulated by Shawn Wilson (2007) and some of our discussions on how each principle surfaces in this research story.

Wilson (2007) begins with "[r]espect for all forms of life as being related and interconnected" (p. 195). Nancy embodies this approach in her teaching by beginning the course with creation stories, telling of an expansive animate world in which all beings are connected, exemplifying the significance of relationships, roles and responsibilities in Indigenous worldviews across time. Listeners become future storytellers; stories and relationships connect the generations. This interrelationship can be seen in assignments wherein students are asked to sit quietly on the land to consider their own connection. Students are also asked to consider home and homelessness, land and

relations, through stories of Indigenous displacement and dispossession (Thistle 2017). They were required to create a photo-essay that explored dimensions of Indigenous homelessness in their communities. Nancy and guest speakers invite students into the living present of Indigenous cultural practices, rather than presenting them as relics of the past. In this way, the course acts to demonstrate “that the languages and cultures of Indigenous peoples are living processes” (Wilson, 2007, p. 195). This creates space for students to hear different worldviews, to understand the reasons why people think in various ways, and to respect these differences. Indigenous worldviews are brought into the classroom with relationship and interconnection underpinning the pedagogical intent and method of the course.

The next principle encourages kindness and honesty in all our actions and interactions. This applies to this research story by engaging with students in class and reading their reflections generously, with compassion for what they know and do not know; for what appears to be time pressures, communication, or other challenges; and with kindness for their emotional responses throughout the course. The ability to extend kindness and compassion is undervalued – and in a strictly academic Western perspective, it is not often understood as worthy of cultivation. Honesty is about being as clear as possible in our positions as part of a collaborative education community, teacher and researcher, Indigenous and settler, and what each of us struggle with, to learn and celebrate in this story, understanding that these change over time. Honesty is also integral in sharing our stories of understanding through the way we commit to researching with integrity and sharing our locations within that research work.

Indigenist research reflects the value of community in Indigenous worldviews, as the locale and source of knowledges, and the necessity to reflect and develop Indigenous knowledge (Hart, 2007; Wilson, 2007). Hart (2007) explains that Indigenous relational worldviews emphasize spirit and spirituality as linking relationships between people and the whole of Creation. Wilson (2007) notes that Indigenist “research and the discovery of knowledge is an ongoing function for the thinkers and scholars of every Indigenous group” (p.195). The collaborators’ expertise and willingness to contribute to the course design is evidence of their grounding in this approach.

Wilson (2007) expresses the centrality of community in the principles. The research questions must be grounded in the Indigenous experience and its purposes must benefit Indigenous communities. The benefits of this research arise from how the course centres Indigenous knowledges and worldviews in academia. As well, bringing these perspectives into the university creates space for Indigenous students in a place where they are otherwise often invisible. Further, Wilson (2007) anchors Indigenist research in the role of Indigenous

community as knowledge holders, practitioners and developers by advising that “researchers work as part of a team of Indigenous scholars/thinkers and with the guidance of Elder(s) or knowledge-keepers” (p. 195). Ensuring the community collaborators’ participation in reviewing our work keeps our perspective grounded, and ensures it reflects community integrity.

Indigenist researchers carry several responsibilities: to use process-oriented methods, “to be...cognizant of his or her role as one part of the group in process [and] to assume a certain responsibility for the transformations and outcomes of the research project(s)” (Wilson, 2007, p. 195). We have been attentive to interpreting what the students are saying with integrity. In the way we constructed the research project, we assumed responsibility for the compassionate understanding and interpretation of student experiences in sharing these stories. It was also our responsibility to reflect on the relationship between the course collaborators’ pedagogical and epistemological approaches and the students’ stories in a way that furthered the goals of the collaborators and the Reconciliation Task Force. This process also highlighted the tensions that arise in using Indigenous pedagogies and epistemologies within the academy. We hope that our learning through this research story can be shared as an example for others to consider.

Resonating with relational worldviews, Wilson (2007) states “[i]t will be recognized that transformation within every living entity participating in the research will be one of the outcomes of every project” (p. 195).

Rachel: When considering this principle, I realized I had a strong desire for immediate student transformation as a result of this course. My personal hopes for this result arose from my earlier work responding to the TRC Calls to Action, my perception that now was the opportunity for change, and my reluctance to learn from failure. Through our conversations, I realized that looking for student transformation in reflections was out-of-scale with the roles of the course and instructor. I do see some change in myself, as I experience different ways of grounding and doing research, in conversing with Nancy about our sources and methods, and in reflecting on my own pedagogical and research practices, assumptions and epistemologies. I found that the depth of reflection during this work was unexpected – and a better place for attention to ideas of transformation.

Nancy: Our conversations about looking for evidence of student transformation and those expectations, a desire for evidence of “success,” to push forward, diverts attention away from the quality of relationships, potentially upsetting balance and the need to respect all

beings where they are, including ourselves. Focusing on the quality of relationships in the process of learning and change, rather than pushing forward to fulfill a goal, is more reflective of and respectful of a relational worldview. The guiding thought for analysis, here, then, is that our purpose is to plant seeds - in full recognition that we cannot control what will take root nor how quickly. The seeds may sprout and grow quickly, or not for some time. This growth, however, is fully the responsibility of the student.

Sowing Seeds through Indigenous Pedagogy

Indigenous pedagogy is an approach that is rooted in the timeless practice of transmitting knowledge through the relational and experiential activities of daily life of Indigenous peoples. Knowledge transmission, the act of preparing younger generations for necessities of surviving and thriving, was a collective effort of family and community (Ireland, 2009). Parents, aunties, uncles, grandparents, and Elders, all had a responsibility and role to play in the education of the younger generations (Cajete, 1994). Indigenous pedagogy in Western institutions has been slowly gaining traction as a result of the hard work done by many Indigenous educators over the last few decades. The final reports of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) both speak to the importance of education being situated within Indigenous cultural contexts and reflecting cultural knowledge bases, practices, values, and worldviews.

Gregory Cajeté notes that “[t]here is a shared body of understanding among many Indigenous peoples that education is really about helping an individual find his or her face, which means finding out who you are, where you come from, and your unique character” (Cajete, 2000, p. 183). He goes on, noting it is intended to help the student uncover their passions and unique gifts, and that in its most authentic form, education is “about learning relationships in context” (Cajete, 2000, p. 183) that begin with family and extend outwards to all of Creation. Similarly, Lambe (2003) explains Indigenous pedagogy is a relationship where the educator-mentor guides, rather than directs, creating space for the learner to come to their own understanding, to fully become a human being connected to land, culture, community and Creation. Styres (2017) states “The sharing and creation of knowledges has always been and continues to be a social and relational activity...grounded in Land and experienced as self-in-re-relationship” (p. 84). Relational learning is premised on the principle of reciprocity – learning how to serve the community in a good way supports the community in its ability to look after its members.

Art Beaver aptly expresses how knowledge, its source in the land, and ways of teaching and learning deeply intertwine in Indigenous perspectives as “Indegogy” – affirming the particularity of Indigenous ways of knowing while disrupting the Western cultural implications of the term “pedagogy” (Art Beaver, personal communication). At its core, Indigenous pedagogy practices provide opportunities to learn through experiential and self-reflective activities, fostering dialogue and deeply valuing diverse views, experiences and relationships. The approach is centred in (w)holism, connecting heart, mind, body and spirit learning to contexts beyond the individual (Anuik & Gillies, 2012). Baskin (2016) states that “[s]pirituality within Indigenous worldviews also includes one’s connection to the land. Throughout history, the place of learning has most often been within the community and on the land” (p.24). Thus, discussions on Indigenous health, for example, must not only include individual health, but also the health of the land, the health of the spirit, and the health of one’s relationships with others. Johnston notes “to understand the origin and the nature of life, existence and death, the Ojibway speaking peoples conducted inquiries within the soul-spirit that was the very depth of their being ... they elicited revelation – knowledge that they then commemorated and perpetuated....” (1982, p. 7). Approaching the teaching-learning process from this perspective often brings students out of their comfort zone, introducing them to a different way of viewing themselves within the world.

Nancy: You get students whose families have been here maybe three, four, five generations and they see themselves as Canadian but not necessarily as settlers. Some do. Many haven’t had to grapple with that idea of what it means to have ancestors who came over and were part of the land grabs. And then you have students who are just coming to Canada – the new “settlers,” so to speak. They’re bringing stories of Canada as a multi-cultural country, as a country that is equitable, diverse, whatever...so, in the course, the mythology of Canada as this wonderfully tolerant country starts unraveling.

Rachel: Students who have been here a while might be holding that mythology and holding what they see, stereotypes and exclusion of Indigenous peoples at the same time. Then questions are raised and it starts to unpack. But for students who arrived recently, the mythology is perhaps more believable because they haven’t had to hold the other part of it – continuing colonialism. They have not yet seen or heard those things that would push them to ask the question.

Nancy: Many students understand the creation stories I begin the class with as “myth.” What they eventually have to grapple with is

the idea, as Leroy Little Bear suggests, that along with the myths of equity and tolerance, Canada as a nation is itself a myth (Little Bear, 2016). This is a very challenging perspective that reverberates in different ways amongst students, connected to their family histories and sense of identity. It is so challenging because it frays the edges of what they believe to be real, and makes them question what is valid.

Picking Up Our Bundles: Reading Students' Stories

Picking up our bundles refers here to assuming our responsibilities. Indigenous metaphors of planting seeds, such as within the Haudenosaunee story of the Three Sisters, or the Anishinaabe traditions of nurturing plants in different locations in their territories, all point to the idea of nurturing responsibility (Wall Kimmerer, 2013). In picking up the bundle of responsibilities that come through learning, through sharing of knowledge, we are carrying those responsibilities forward to the ones who come after us. The act of reading the students' stories places the responsibility on us of doing so with honesty, respect and compassion. Beyond that, we are also connecting the bundles to the knowledge seeds given to the students through the class. In planting these seeds, we share the bundle of knowledge that will empower the students, enabling them to expand reconciliation efforts across Canada, enhancing opportunities for healing the rifts resulting from ongoing colonization.

A wide range of themes arose in students' reflections. In this article we focus on: emotional responses and connections to class materials and events; responses to Elder, Indigenous guest speakers and Indigenous ways of knowing; and recognition of the importance of relationship. Emotional responses are important because emotional learning is part of (w)holistic learning, creating the conditions for empathy. Highlighting emotions in learning also counterbalances academic worldviews, which tend to value rationality and objectivity over emotional, spiritual and relational connection. Engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing and recognition of relationship and spirituality are important because they support critical thinking and deeper understandings of Indigenous perspectives. This emphasis on spirituality demonstrates how meaning can be made, healing can flow, and balance can be restored from sharing and hearing emotionally difficult stories.

Students' previous knowledge varied, with many having a basic understanding of what residential schools were. Typically, students said their knowledge of Indigenous history, perspectives and cultures was "very slim" (Bekki):

If I were to say what I have been taught in school about the Indigenous people of Canada, I am afraid I would be unable to meet

the required one to three pages of this assignment which in itself is sad to say. (Delores)

Some students had absorbed a notion of the significance of Indigenous roles in history, but understood little more than news headlines and stereotypical representations:

I was taught that Indigenous people are the first people of Canada, and they have played an important role in the development of the country. However, I do not know the difference between First Nations, Inuit, and Metis and I do not have any knowledge of how or where they live in the country. I have this pictured representation of Indigenous people. I have always imagined them to be dressed in animal fur coat, wearing feathered earrings, have a stick [i]n hand, the women stay home, men are the breadwinner, highly culture oriented, they do not reside in cities, they live north of Canada, have low level of education, do not receive equal health care, live in a very crowded with inadequate housing conditions, low income level, higher unemployment, high death rate, and higher suicide rates. (Parmita)

For some students, an important source of learning came from personal engagement with Indigenous individuals, communities and resources:

Up until I began my current undergraduate degree in political science, all of my knowledge of Indigenous peoples, history, and issues came from my own reading and interactions with Indigenous folks. In elementary and high school, I was not taught about the colonial role the Canadian state has enacted throughout history. Education on Indigenous issues consisted only of learning about Louis Riel and a shallow interpretation of the role Indigenous peoples played in the war between English and French colonizers. (Joseph)

As a child, I was fortunate to have shared education with many indigenous children. Growing up in a small town in northern Ontario many of my childhood, and adult friends are Indigenous. Although I had only to walk a mile to school, many of my [Indigenous] friends were bussed every morning and night to attend class. On the weekends we would spend time together in the local arena as my dad played hockey...along with many of their fathers. (Delores)

Several students were critical of the fact that Indigenous histories and perspectives, and the impacts of colonial policies were left out of their secondary school education:

Prior to this class, I am disconcerted to admit that I had no knowledge about the hardships Indigenous people suffered through the Residential School era. I believe that the majority of the reason for this was due to the way I was raised in the...schooling system. We did not learn about Indigenous history, traditions or culture in any capacity throughout elementary school and high school. (Taylor)

Why are we taught that Germany was the only [country] who

performed [ethnic] genocide in world history where many of these ethnic cleansing happened in countries that [claimed] "democracy" or "right to freedom"? (Kavi)

Some expressed a sense of betrayal, as well as suggesting that failing to discuss such issues maintained social ignorance and allowed injustice to continue:

The concept of residential schooling is one that completely shattered me. This was an open and public case of injustice and ethnic cleansing, yet nothing was done about it.... This also goes to prove that some schools fail to educate their students on the mass torture that the people of the land went through, which provokes the thought that traits of injustice continue to exist even today. (Jazil)

I wonder why the devastating events of the Holocaust have been universally taught and engrained in us but not the events related to residential schools. The amount of comparisons between the two are astounding. Perhaps because the federal government wants to continue the perception of Canada's identity being unique from others and 'multicultural', or perhaps because its citizens do not want these perceptions to change either. (Maureen)

I feel like in school we should be taught indigenous culture like how Shakespearean writing is still being taught. Shakespearean books are taught on their storytelling, so I feel like indigenous writing also shows storytelling and we should be exposed at a young age, so we can preserve their stories. (Kavi)

When students discussed aspects of residential schools in their reflections, it was almost always accompanied by emotional expression. Learning about the treatment of children in residential schools was "heartbreaking", and "made me sick" (Bekki, Jessica). Students were "shocked" and "dishearten[ed]", "disgusted", and "sadden[ed] and anger[ed]" by the assimilationist purposes and abuses of residential schools (Delores, Meghan, Linda). Further:

I feel that all of these [punishment for speaking language, separation from siblings, haircuts, inadequate nutrition] were implemented in order to break the children's spirit and to ensure that they were not strong enough to pose a threat to those in power. I was very upset to come to this realization and I feel a lot of sadness for the abuse that these children experienced. (Bekki)

One of the facts about residential schools that elicited strong responses was how recently the last residential schools closed: How or why these facilities were still functioning that late in the twentieth century (and at all) was upsetting for me and mind boggling. (Margaretha)

I find it very unsettling to know that the extreme abuse, culture shaming, and punishment that the children and their families endured continued into the late '90s. (Bekki)

Some students demonstrated empathy in their self-reflections by connecting Indigenous experiences with personal experiences, such as a student whose family had fled civil war dividing ethnicities in her country:

We escaped our own country because the...government wanted to eradicate...people and erase our culture, and ethnicity. Similar to the residential school's objectives, the...government eradicated the....minorities....Learning about the residential schools in Canada and how it ill-treated the aboriginal children relates back to how we still are treated in our own country. (Parmita)

In response to critical work on the portrayal of Indigenous peoples in film and news media, a few students commented on their own experiences as visible minorities seeing their communities portrayed stereotypically in media:

Personally, as a visible minority, I empathize with Indigenous people and understand that media portrayals are often just one false side to a story that has a significant amount of depth and history behind it. Overall, we need to promote public awareness of the deception and falseness of these Indigenous narratives in the media. This could be a step towards reducing racism and discrimination towards Indigenous people in the future. (Taylor)

Being a black woman, I acknowledge the struggles of other minority groups and with my slowly developing understanding of how the Canadian government has treated the owners of this land, it makes me upset. However, it also makes me want to know more so I can do more as not just a woman of colour but as a citizen of this country to help the community around me and become educated on the people who were here before I was. (Jessica)

The concept of relationship was seen in a range of guises. For many students, these relationships were stories of personal connections to other people – neighbours, classmates, colleagues and families.

In elementary school they teach us about the provinces and Canada's history with the world wars but the text books always veer off from speaking about the true land owners, the [I]ndigenous people. Currently a large amount of my learning has come from high school when a boy I knew named...explained his heritage to us and led an assembly for the missing [I]ndigenous women and [a] smudging ceremony...for the retreat leaders. (Jessica)

One elderly neighbour who I had grown around, was a survivor of a residential school. My mom relayed a story to me that he shared. He could remember organizers of the school he attended forcing him and other children to look at human cadavers. Relating these personal stories heard outside of school back to lecture content left me feeling deeply saddened, disturbed and guilty. (Margaretha)

Currently, I am on the Board of Directors of the [County His-

torical Society] in which we manage and operate [Museum]. Through this involvement, in which we currently have a First Nations display, I have learned much about Indigenous issues and history in a local context specific to the [County]. I have obtained this information from my research and from our museum's collaboration with [local First Nation]. As many museums like to portray Indigenous culture from an archeological approach, it presents the culture as "dead" rather than teaching visitors of the past and of the people that took care of our earth before it was colonized. Over the past few months, alongside our curator, our board has learned a lot about our local Indigenous leaders and community that was not accurately displayed. One thing that I have learned was about repatriation of cultural property with the Huron-Wendat Nation. It is a process that I had no idea existed until a few months ago and it has allowed me to appreciate their property and their desire to have it returned to their community for proper burial. (David)

Others articulated relationships between arenas of knowledge and what is considered valid knowledge within the academy.

It is this...connection between the personal and academic that I hope to continue to develop in this course. The most valuable knowledge I have gained is from listening to, and having conversations with, Indigenous folks, including those who I have interacted with in radical and anarchist spaces, as well as visiting elders and guest speakers who have spoken at Ontario Tech. I hope to continue to develop knowledge, not just as a collection of facts, but as experiences that I can apply in my personal practice and future work. (Joseph)

In a similar vein, the relationships, or connections made between the social spheres, media and visibility of Indigenous peoples struck a chord with students:

Another thing that I wanted to touch on was something that I never considered before when dealing with media. That was when we discussed in class Google Maps. I had no idea that Indigenous lands and reserves were not even mapped out on the program... Those are the simplest things to do in regards to educating the community. Instead, we have reserves only being known because they have cheaper gas and cigarettes. (Nihal)

Engaging with the idea of relationships with land through assignments and class discussions led to further insight:

While taking the photos for my presentation, it was a truly eye-opening experience for me. I say that because it actually got me out into the community and to actually think about the colonial impacts that settlers had on Indigenous peoples. The one that really stood out the most was the photo that we did of Leslie Frost's former house....because while governments, both provincial and federal, committed terrible crimes against Indigenous peoples, yet they got to

go home to a comfortable house and practice whatever faith, culture, and have any worldviews they wanted. While they lived in luxury, they made others live in agony ... I found [this assignment] to be a very beneficial exercise.” (Nihal)

To be honest, I’ve only just recently started thinking about the land I live on because I’ve been privileged enough to believe that I didn’t have to. Knowing that I benefit from the exploitation of Indigenous peoples is uncomfortable, to say the least, and it’s much easier to ignore that fact than confront it. (Sarah)

Knowledge transmission through sharing of personal stories of Elders and guest speakers, videos and other media, laid a foundation for understanding the Canadian myths and stereotypes that have been critical in maintaining the marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

When I saw one of the Indigenous speakers reduced to tears by the talk about the effects of the residential schools, I saw the depth of the trauma first hand. We are a long way from reconciliation, and healing and discussions are just a tiny step in that process. (Linda)

I feel that because I have now received an education in the traumas experienced by Indigenous people it is partially my responsibility to share the message in hopes that others will be as affected as I was, and I believe that by doing this it will hopefully allow the Indigenous people to continue the healing process. (Bekki)

In my opinion, the way Indigenous stories are presented to the public through media sources gives me a sense of burden. I feel the weight of what different Indigenous communities go through. I feel an urge to help them in ways that I can, primarily through a health care setting, working as a nurse. (Margaretha)

Some students demonstrated sophisticated insights into how stereotypes become embedded in society:

I was and remain surprised by the negative attitude that many Canadians seem to hold towards Indigenous people. I have heard many concerning comments from people within the nursing programme about holistic healing and Indigenous health overall, I have listened to speeches about Indigenous people getting everything ‘handed to them’ (Linda).

For non-Indigenous Canadians who have not learned about these experiences, whether from the education system or from stories told by Indigenous folks, there is no context for the conditions or actions of Indigenous peoples. Particularly in a capitalist society, which feeds us the lie of meritocracy, Indigenous folks who are poor and criminalized are often seen as simply lazy criminals. Furthermore, the fact that Aboriginal status gives certain benefits that non-Indigenous Canadians do not have access to perpetuates the impression that Indigenous folks are given handouts by the government. Without the knowledge of colonial history and the discourse of reconciliation, there is no context for these practices. (Joseph)

Knowledge transmission connects to the shifting of beliefs and understandings, creating more nuanced views of historical and contemporary issues. Shifting beliefs, however, is not always easy, nor straightforward:

I was going to say that my perceptions and experience of Indigenous realities haven't changed since reflection 2, but I guess they do change the moment I take in new information from the news, class lectures, media you present, and from the course readings? I'm just not really good at reflecting. I don't think I've grown or become more personally aware. (Samuel)

Knowledge transmission also takes the form of emotional learning, which is not easy:

I did find the more personal nature of the course to be difficult to work through at times, and I believe this comes from a lack of emotional connection in learning generally. If we were exposed to personal stories more often in our learning, and drew upon emotion as well as rationality in the academy, I would have been better prepared for the more personal nature of this course. (Joseph)

I was surprised and slightly embarrassed of such an emotional response because a typical class would not incite such a reaction for me. (Maureen)

It was difficult to listen to the struggles of Indigenous people and I struggled most particularly in the contact lesson where we had to discuss trauma and see for ourselves how colonisation has impacted Indigenous people. As a British person, I feel disgusted with my country for not teaching us such an important part of our own history, for not holding us all accountable and having the much needed discussions. I know that if I had not studied in Canada, I would have no idea about the Indigenous people or the impacts we had on the world. This makes me angry and I hope to bring back the knowledge I have learnt to make people more aware of how we impacted history through colonisation. (Linda)

The significance of the course to the students was articulated in many ways. Many expressed their changing perspectives, knowledge and emotional resonance: the first day of this class arriving I thought to myself, I need an elective and that is the only reason I am taking this course....and when I told a few of my friends I am taking this course for my elective, they laughed at me and said "why did you not choose a more useful course." At that time, I also thought the same. Not only that, on the first day when professor Nancy sang a song with her drum, I had the thought in my head "why did I take this course and that it is going to be a long 6 weeks."...This class is not another history class or any other class where I just came for the marks, this is a class that I am highly proud I chose to study and I have learned so much. Going on personally and professionally, the

judgement I held before Indigenous people is totally gone, now I have more respect towards them and the rights they are trying to fight for. Not only that, I now share this knowledge that I have learned in this class with my friends and families to educate them more on the history/present of this country. (Parmita)

The weekly reflections gave me the opportunity to not only think about the content but to ask questions that I felt needed to be asked. These personal reflections gave me the opportunity to voice how I was feeling, and how I was impacted by the subjects that we had been learning about. The photo essay was an eye-opening assignment that brought me to the most desperate areas of our city, acknowledging the residual effects that are to this day being felt by Indigenous people in our region....To say I have learned a lot would be an understatement. (Delores)

I did take this course for my own personal interest and was not fully aware of the clinical significance. As I am training to become a nurse, I am learning about all different types of disease and how to treat them (usually with medication). But there is also another side to nursing. A strong loving side. A holistic side. And it's the best part. I am here because I care for others. What better way to care for a vulnerable population than to educate yourself about that population? Not just what struggles they face but why? Who are they? Where do they come from? This will allow me to approach and care for the people in a most respectful and understanding manner. (Emily)

Many students also expressed their desire to see this course continued, expanded, or perhaps even made mandatory across the university:

Indigenous Studies created a safe space in which I felt comfortable enough to ask questions regarding Indigenous culture and history, to mention views I have heard from Canadians which are uncomfortable and have discussions on them without feeling judged or pressurised into thinking or feeling any specific way. I think this class should definitely be a mandatory one for international students to learn more about Indigenous history in a positive environment. (Linda)

I realized that other than the initial European colonization of Indigenous territories, I have little knowledge regarding Indigenous history. I believe all non-Indigenous Canadians should have this knowledge as we are all living on Indigenous land and using their resources. (Taylor)

I will definitely remember this class and will tell my friends to take this course because it honestly changed my views on the Indigenous community and Canada. Thank you for helping me see better on Indigenous issues and this is my first class where the teacher asks how do you feel while all of my classes were just information thrown at us. (Kavi)

Bringing the Bundles Together

As the students' stories unfolded, there were many points of resonance with our own. We had several conversations just about the process of Indigenous pedagogy. For example, we talked about how some students articulated their desire to fight for Indigenous rights as allies as a result of their learning. We were cautious, however, because this sentiment may play a role in upholding a 'helping' perspective that subtly reflects colonial tropes of Indigenous inferiority. It may be a heartfelt reflection of newly acquired knowledge, and a true desire to support change, but without necessarily understanding the difference between being an ally and a rescuer. At other times, we discussed the path of learning, which is rarely simple and straightforward. In our own experiences as one-time students, and now educators and researchers, we recalled how the complexity of life weaves into the work of student-academics. They are faced with multiple points of tension: Are they ready to learn? Do they have the resources to learn, and the capacity? Assumptions, stereotypes and uncritical thinking can impede the ability to learn as much as any other life events (such as a sick child, or losing a job). The instructor needs to be able to meet students where they are at, each day. Learning about peoples and histories that have been dismissed by political, educational and other systems, is most possible through facilitating open, honest, respectful conversations that honour the diverse places that students occupy within their daily lives. None of this can be done effectively within conventional academic systems.

Rachel: For me, it's the story of...what you see, maybe in a technical sense or a bureaucratic sense, there's a new course on the books aiming to centre Indigenous perspectives and reveal and contest ongoing colonialism. You see all the technical things, like the year level and the course credits. But what you don't see – and what I think we've processed a lot of – is the whole context, the community collaborators, the creativity in that collaboration, the willingness to participate in this large bureaucratic institution, and to give those gifts. And then the creativity of the dissertation completion fellowship, our willingness to each play our parts – and I would say to learn, for me especially, to learn how to play our parts...

Nancy: So basically, learning how to pick up those bundles.

Rachel: Yes, very much learning how to pick up those bundles. But also, to reflect on how much is not seen in 'the result.' And that process, telling the story of the process, thinking of it as a story allows you to include all that instead of [just] 'the results.'

Nancy: For me, the story becomes that...we're passing on that bundle of responsibility to the next people who are going to be taking that on, whether it's faculty or students, or the institution as a whole. It is a learning process. Being able to share those stories repeatedly over time means that people will be picking up new thoughts, new learnings from each iteration of that story. And even if the course doesn't stay, but a different course does or several different courses, then it expands on that story and enables more people to pick up those bundles of responsibility, nurturing the relational responsibilities that everybody has.

The (w)holistic approach is foundational to the ways in which we considered the students' stories. The relationality of the process – of teaching and of this research – grew in prominence. Student accounts pointed to connections between each other, guest speakers and the assignments they completed on the land, despite it being suburban. Many of these connections arose from emotional responses to disturbing facts and personal stories. In the best of community traditions, having conversations and sharing stories bring us closer together, creating common understandings and building empathy. In this way, we plant seeds that we hope students will nurture and grow into their own bundles of knowledge for the future. At the same time, we recognize that the institution has a responsibility to pick up its bundle in order to strengthen its relations with Indigenous peoples, lands, and knowledge. "We all must remember the journey of Truth and Reconciliation is far from over. It is possible that the second chapter will highlight the Institution's commitment to establishing the relevance of Indigenous "Indegogy"the place (Ontario Tech) that the crossing of western pedagogy and Indegogy comes about." By planting these seeds, we help each other claim our bundles of responsibility in the larger efforts of reconciling relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island.

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