Constructing Ethical Learning Spaces Through Interdisciplinary Dialogue

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Abstract: First piloted in 2017, MacEwan University's Interdisciplinary Dialogue is a collaborative teaching and learning project that addresses topics relating to social justice across disciplines. In 2019, in collaboration with kihêw waciston Indigenous Centre, the Dialogue expanded its intercultural learning through a partnership with University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills and explored truth and reconciliation through a focus on Indigenous research. Building on Willie Ermine's concept of 'ethical spaces', this article highlights how ethical learning spaces were created through Indigenous-led educational forums followed by an online student Interdisciplinary Dialogue. The Dialogue positioned students to explore histories of colonial relationships and their attendant harmful research practices; and to centre Indigenous knowledges and methodologies as foundational to Indigenous research. Students questioned oppressions in western pedagogy, and they envisioned a pedagogy of mutual respect for Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing. This article focuses on the online discussions conducted by students in the 2019 Dialogue. It shows how students understood that they were participants in disrupting colonial discourse in academia, reframing education for reconciliation, and expanding the construction of 'ethical spaces' across the University and beyond.

Key words: Ethical space, Interdisciplinary Dialogue, Ethical learning spaces, Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous research, Reconciliation, 'Pedagogy for reconciliation', Reciprocity, Indigenous oracy

> The 'ethical space' is formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are poised to engage each other. It is the thought about diverse societies and the space in between them that contributes to the development of a framework for dialogue between human communities.
>
> Willie Ermine (2007: 193)

Introduction

Indigenous knowledges reveal epistemological and ideological differences in contrast to Eurocentric or western knowledges, and historically, Indigenous knowledges have been suppressed under the forced assimilation policies of settler colonialism. Eurocentric knowledge has been privileged, leading to Indigenous communities being examined by non-Indigenous academics, pursuing western research on western terms (Kovach 2009), thus reproducing colonial relationships. Education is a process by which a culture transmits its reality and values to each generation. As Marie Battiste explains, the modern curriculum is the 'organized portion of education through which the state sanctions and standardizes not only what counts as knowledge but the ways of knowing they will adopt and prescribe', and the state recognizes one 'culturally imperialistic stream that ignores or erodes, if not destroys, other ways of knowing'. There is a broader need for 'a serious and far reaching examination of the assumptions inherent in Eurocentric curricula' (2013: 104).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)[1] was the culmination of a series of steps taken by the Canadian government from 2010 to 2015 to address the historical trauma inflicted upon Indigenous peoples in the country's residential schools, where

[1] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada website http://www.trc.ca/about-us/our-mandate.html

approximately 150,000 Indigenous children were incarcerated in government-overseen, Church-run residential schools between 1880 and 1996. To begin the process of reconciliation, the TRC published 94 calls to action that urged all levels of government to work collaboratively to address the harm caused by the residential schools, and called upon postsecondary institutions to include Indigenous content, including ways of knowing and histories of colonisation. (Of the TRC's 94 calls to action, almost one fifth focus on education-related matters.) In response, universities have developed a variety of approaches to Indigenising courses and programs, often focusing on the addition of Indigenous content and Indigenous faculty. These developments offer potential for renewed, respectful, and reciprocal relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, as university campuses are not only bastions for the conservation of the colonising culture's traditions but are also learning spaces where new discussions occur, and new ways of framing knowledges are introduced and practiced. As part of the emerging reconstruction of education for reconciliation, Indigenous knowledges are being reconsidered as equals to the hegemonic western epistemology. Indigenous scholar Margaret Kovach notes that a shift is taking place in the contemporary academic landscape:

> With an increasing Indigenous presence, there is a desire among a growing community of non-Indigenous academics to move beyond the binaries found within Indigenous-settler relations to construct new, mutual forms of dialogue, research, theory, and action. (2009: 12)

Attention needs to be given to how these changes are carried out. Although teachers use culturally approved resources and speakers from Indigenous communities, they 'often do so without having to consider the power dynamics involved or their lack of agency in repeating the serious past omissions'. They do not reflect on 'why Indigenous content was not included in the first place, or what biases they themselves bring to the lessons' (Battiste 2013: 106). One cannot

simply embed Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing within a Eurocentric knowledge system. Beyond simply adding more courses that examine Indigenous histories, languages, or cultures, shifting the framework of university teachings is seen as a core part of reconciliation for many Indigenous scholars. As Shelly Johnson, the first Canada Research Chair in Indigenizing Higher Education and an Associate Professor at Thompson Rivers University states,

> Indigenization really has to recognize the validity of Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing, being and doing. It has to recognize our knowledge and perspectives … Education was a weapon used against us to remove language and culture and traditions. What about putting back oral tradition, including elders as sources of knowledge, and recognizing Indigenous writers and scholars? (Treleaven 2018, para. 14)

Therefore, adding Indigenous content to mainstream curricula is not enough. From a critical education perspective, there is a need to challenge Eurocentric assumptions underlying curricula and disrupt the colonial narrative. There is a need for a new space where this disruption, as well as dialogue, can occur.

As Battiste (2013) explains, the idea of *ethical space* was initially theorised by Roger Poole (1972) and then applied by Willie Ermine (2007) to the two sets of intentions confronting the in-between space that connects Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge systems. Rather than a merge or a clash, it is a 'new, electrifying, and even contentious' space that has the potential for an interchange or dialogue about the assumptions, values, and interests held within each system. Adding ethics to this space makes 'one consider the limits of the boundaries one chooses, and reconsider how what one chooses may infringe on another's space or standards, codes of conduct, or the community ethos in each community' (Battiste 2013: 105). An ethical space, therefore, is one in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can begin a dialogue to

speak candidly about the challenges and issues each confronts, the values and interests each holds, and the criteria and guidelines each represents.

By focusing MacEwan University's Interdisciplinary Dialogue on the theme of Indigenous research, students and faculty from MacEwan University and University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills focused the project on two purposes: first, to examine the histories of colonial relationships and extractive, appropriating research practices; second, to explore contemporary efforts to support community-led research, to ensure Indigenous ownership and control of data, and to centre Indigenous knowledges and methodologies. By attending three Indigenous-led panels or educational forums and participating in an online interdisciplinary dialogue after each, students learned how the latter approach to Indigenous research fosters respectful and reciprocal relationships between Indigenous communities and academic scholars. This article focuses on the online discussions conducted by the students in the 2019 Dialogue in order to show how the students understood that they were participants in disrupting colonial discourse in academia, reframing education for reconciliation, and expanding the construction of ethical spaces across the University and beyond.[2]

The General Structure of the Interdisciplinary Dialogue

The Interdisciplinary Dialogue, first piloted in 2017, brings together MacEwan University faculty and students from a variety of disciplines during the winter term of an academic year to explore topics relating to social (in)justice and diversity. Participating faculty

[2] Positionality statement: Both authors have been participants in several Interdisciplinary Dialogues (LD is a founding member of the Dialogue). As non-Indigenous, long term faculty at MacEwan University, the authors witnessed the powerful teachings of this Indigenous-led Dialogue and wanted to share the insights, excitement, and deep learning of our students.

members incorporate a module into their courses, reflecting the theme of the Dialogue, for students to explore as discipline-specific. The project begins with a launch, involving an activity relating to the theme of the Dialogue, and allows students an initial opportunity to meet face to face. Through three educational forums featuring an array of speakers, students collectively learn about a series of topics relating to the theme of the Dialogue. Educational forums are live-streamed and recorded (with the speakers' permission) via Blackboard (a learning management system) to permit distance students to also participate, and are also open to the greater MacEwan University and Edmonton communities. Following each educational forum, students engaged in online discussions responding to open ended questions about each forum. Online discussions were chosen over face-to-face discussions as the means for students from different disciplines to interact with each other. As an asynchronous method, together with the streamed/recorded educational forums, this allowed for more students (including distance students) to participate, alleviated scheduling issues for a large cohort of participants, and allowed time for students to reflect on what they learned in the educational forums. Although faculty members read and monitored the online discussions, they did not participate in the online forums. Faculty developed open-ended questions for students to discuss online following each educational forum. Conversations were student-led because the organizers considered it important that the students establish their own sense of community and not be guided by faculty comments. As this article shows, the students took the ball and ran with it, exploring the ideas of the Indigenous presenters in a respectful and inventive way.

Students can choose among three levels of participation. First, after completing their discipline-specific assignments, attending the educational forums, and engaging in the associated online discussions with students from other disciplines (hence the title of "Interdisciplinary

Dialogue) through Blackboard following each educational forum, students receive a letter acknowledging their participation. Second, after completing additional extracurricular activities relating to the annual theme of the Dialogue, they may receive a co-curricular record to accompany their transcripts.[3] Third, students may present their academic and creative assignments at a Celebration of Learning Symposium, part of the university's annual Student Research Day, and, in turn, have them published in proceedings hosted by MacEwan Online Journals (https://journals.macewan.ca/inter_dialogue/home).

2019 Spirit Bear Dialogues

The Winter 2019 Interdisciplinary Dialogue: ᐊᐦᒑᐦᐠ ᒪᐢᑿ ᐅᓯᐦᒋᑫᐃᐧᓂ ᐚᐢᑲᐦᐃᑲᐣ (ahcâhk maskwa osihcikêwina; Spirit Bear Dialogues), under the direction of kihêw waciston, MacEwan University's Indigenous centre, and in partnership with University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills, explored truth and reconciliation but with a specific emphasis on Indigenous research. The name for this year's Dialogue was received by Cree Elder Bernie Makosis in a sweatlodge ceremony. Over 100 MacEwan students and 16 faculty from Allied Health and Human Performance, Anthropology, Arts and Cultural Management, Business, Child and Youth Care, Design, English, History, Nursing, Psychology, Social Work, and Spanish participated in the Dialogue, and University Blue Quills students and faculty joined the educational forums via live stream. Students had the opportunity to interact across disciplines and learn about topics relating to Indigenous research from multiple perspectives. The launch of the Dialogue began with a land acknowledgement statement and with a discussion of why we

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[3] Students may use the letter or the co-curricular record to demonstrate their participation in this extra-curricular project and their awareness of Indigenous issues when applying for future programs or graduate school.

give this acknowledgement, to begin the process of having students reflect on their place within Canada's colonial history and ongoing settler colonialism. This was followed by drummers, smudging, and an opening prayer by kihêw waciston Knowledge Keeper Roxanne Tootoosis, who explained the significance of prayer, ceremony, and spirituality in relation to the event and the creation of respectful relationships. Students and faculty then participated in an exercise designed by kihew waciston, MacEwan's Indigenous Centre. This exercise is similar to a Blanket Exercise[4], allowing participants to explore Indigenous colonial experiences, and introduced students in a profoundly emotional way to the devastation inflicted upon Indigenous communities by colonisation. After the exercise, participants were offered the opportunity to debrief.

As the 2019 Dialogue was an Indigenous-led project, concerns about cultural safety were fundamentally addressed. Students (and faculty) were learning about Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous research through Indigenous teachings, emphasising the importance of respectful, reciprocal relationships. Within this context, ethical learning spaces were created grounded in cultural humility. Because the Indigenous presenters were Elders, scholars, educators, facilitators, and cultural advisors, they were able to clarify essential points in a diplomatic manner. An example of this sort of diplomatic clarification of an essential point emerged during the 2019 Dialogue when, during one of the forums, the speakers decided to emphasize the importance of protocol. First, they appreciated the way in which protocol was handled by the organizers; then they explained the place of protocol in building respect for Indigenous knowledges and establishing healthy relationships. This key point in the proceedings

[4] More information about the Kairos Blanket Exercise can be found at https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/

was remembered by students at the end of the Dialogue, when they stressed Indigenous protocols as the starting point in building an 'ethical space' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Throughout the Dialogue, students showed respect bordering on reverence for the Indigenous presenters as they revealed to the students an important new (for the students) way of seeing the world and voiced a just call for the re-structuring of Canadian academe.

Following the launch, students identified their disciplines and responded to introductory questions in an online forum. Students stated a variety of reasons for participating in the Dialogue. Indigenous students expressed interest in furthering their knowledge about their cultures and getting more involved with community; they also wanted to learn more about factors impacting Indigenous peoples. Several students stated their excitement about sharing Indigenous knowledges with their non-Indigenous classmates to help close the gaps between them. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students felt they were part of something bigger than just an extracurricular activity: they commented on learning more about the journey to reconciliation and how to be a part of that process, as a form of activism as well as an opportunity for relationship-building. Non-Indigenous students expressed interest in learning about Indigenous cultures, histories, and contemporary issues impacting Indigenous peoples; some wanted the opportunity to share new knowledge and to educate others. Several students wanted to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing, and to be a part of integrating Indigenous knowledges into education; they wanted to learn about Indigenous perspectives on research, and to promote the validity of other knowledges. Students in specific disciplines, such as Social Work and Child and Youth Care, expressed a desire to learn how to better respect and honour Indigenous cultures within their professional practice. Overall, non-Indigenous students wanted

to listen to what Indigenous peoples have to say and to hear Indigenous perspectives, not just colonial narratives.

Through three educational forums, students and faculty explored themes relating to strengthening Indigenous research: Indigenous ways of knowing and being in our community; Indigenous perspectives on research; and Indigenous methodologies. Each educational forum began with the land acknowledgement statement and hosting faculty sharing what the land acknowledgement statement meant to them, as like those of many universities in Canada, MacEwan University's land acknowledgement statement is far-reaching in its implications[5]. By stating their personal connection to the land acknowledgement statement, faculty allowed students to see that their teachers were also on a learning journey, exploring reconciliation, decolonisation, and Indigeneity. This is a core principle that applies throughout the Dialogue. Protocol (tobacco and prints) was offered to our Indigenous speakers to respect the Indigenous process of knowledge sharing, and to signify the speakers' commitment to the process. We were grateful to have the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous scholars originating the Dialogue as their presence and perspectives not only shared knowledge, cultural beliefs, and traditional practices, but allowed for students and faculty to learn from Indigenous teachings based in Indigenous ways of knowing. This fostered inclusion, rather than simply the addition of Indigenous content, thereby supporting the creation of ethical learning spaces and our journey to reconciliation within the education community.

To begin to assess the effectiveness of the Dialogue as a collaborative teaching and learning strategy, we reviewed the students' online responses to the open-ended questions

[5] MacEwan University's Treaty 6 Land Acknowledgement Statement
https://www.macewan.ca/wcm/CampusLife/kihewwaciston/index.htm

provided after each educational forum. As we did not request informed consent from the students at the start of the 2019 Dialogue, this is not formal, evaluative research but rather a descriptive summary of key ideas discussed by the students. Accordingly, no identifying information (other than broad discipline) is provided, or any inclusion of direct quotes. The following are summaries of many statements made by different individual students in their contributions to the Dialogue, as noted below.

Educational Forum 1: Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being in Our Community

In the first educational forum, focused on Indigenous ways of knowing and being in our community, speakers Bernie Makokis, President of Iyiniw Education Institute, and Darin Keewatin, an Indigenous consultant, discussed differences between Indigenous and western perspectives on research and the relationship between language and culture. Following the educational forum, students participated in online discussions answering the following questions.

The speakers shared a variety of ideas and stories. What stood out to you the most?

Students were drawn to the idea that ceremony is essential to pass on knowledge respectfully. Many students discussed how the use of Indigenous knowledges is driven by ethical protocols, including treating knowledge with respect, plus an understanding that knowledge is to be shared to benefit others. Students connected emotionally to the power of the speakers' stories. They highlighted differences between Indigenous ways of knowing and western scientific knowledge. They also recognised that Indigenous cultures and histories have been excluded by a colonial emphasis on the rational and empirical, and they emphasised the need to accept Indigenous knowledges as valid and as part of reconciliation. The speakers' words about how

Indigenous ways of knowing and being should not just be tolerated but accepted resonated with the students. Students with some background in Philosophy were particularly interested in epistemology and epistemicide. In contrast to western or scientific knowledge, students noted the holistic, non-linear and relational nature of Indigenous ways of knowing, and the importance of story. Engaging people in story creates a relationship between the storyteller and the listener, centring the importance of relationships and, therefore, the importance of building respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities. Students of print literature were especially interested in the holistic values of oral storytelling, such as the co-existence of sacred stories alongside others in which truth is relative, cyclical, humorous, and profane. One key difference students discussed was the need to move beyond the individual, as stressed in the western approach to knowledge acquisition and research, to involve family and community. Students realised that to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing, one must be involved in a directly experiential way, not only through the intermediary medium of the text. One must use personal experience to explore the connections between language, culture, and worldview. Many stated this is necessary to improve research and develop a closer relationship with Indigenous peoples and their communities. Several students were drawn to the idea of the value of listening to our intuitive knowledge, and felt they needed to deconstruct what they had been taught in the Eurocentric educational system about giving reason and empirical evidence primacy over intuition. Students discussed the importance of the relationship between language and culture. Students of languages especially recognized that language is key to the transfer of Indigenous knowledges; they questioned what is lost in translation, particularly the spiritual connections between words in Indigenous languages. Students criticised the centrality of written language in the western academic tradition and recognised the need to centre oral tradition as part of the

reclamation of Indigenous identity, tradition, and culture. Students found it refreshing, exciting, and morally right that western academe accommodate Indigenous knowledges in these ways. Some became adamant about the valuation of intuition or the oral delivery of knowledge through means such as song or oratory. Students then applied these ideas to how we can decolonise research within academic settings.

How would you describe the connection between Indigenous ways of knowing and being and decolonising research and research relationships?

Students applied what they learned in the educational forum to how they believed research could be decolonised. Reflecting on their own experiences, some Indigenous students were encouraged that their cultures can prevail within, and in collaboration with, the western system of education. Indigenous and non-Indigenous students emphasised that Indigenous oral knowledge must be accepted as valid. Many stressed respecting protocol while resisting harmful and intrusive western research practices. Non-indigenous students noted how we need to acknowledge that there are simply differences in worldviews and that Indigenous communities have strengths that already exist and could be utilised. Many emphasised that research relationships need to be mutual and respectful and that non-Indigenous people need to stop expecting Indigenous people to accommodate their ignorance. Through building respectful relationships, and acknowledging relational responsibilities, the quality and value of research would be enhanced, and it would become mutually beneficial for everyone involved. Several students commented that after hearing the speakers' stories and experiences with and within academia, they were inspired and saw their generation as one that could effect change. They wanted to work towards reconciliation through decolonising research and respecting Indigenous

knowledges; they wanted to be active participants in reconciliation, not just observers. Further, students felt that official government apologies such as the Canadian federal government's 2008 apology for residential schools are meaningless without efforts to (re)build relationships with Indigenous communities, including research relationships. Students concluded that they were excited and looked forward to learning more in the future educational forums.

Educational Forum 2: Indigenous Perspectives on Research

The second educational forum explored the topic of Indigenous perspectives on research. The speakers, comprising Dr. Sherri Chisan, President of University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills; Kevin Lewis from University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills and First Nations University; and Chris Scribe, Director of Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan presented their own personal experiences with conducting research through an Indigenous lens. Following the educational forum, students participated in online discussions, answering the following questions:

The speakers shared a variety of stories about their experiences with western research approaches and structures. What stood out to you the most?

The students were shocked to hear the challenges the speakers faced in their attempts to conduct and present their research through an Indigenous lens and believed these restrictions needed to be addressed and lifted. The focus on written work, typical of western approaches, denied Indigenous ways of knowing and of transmitting knowledge, such as song or dance; in particular, students saw the restrictions of a western ethics policy as constituting a colonial denial of an Indigenous ethics framework, reflecting a framing of Indigenous knowledges and

education systems as lesser or invalid. Students recognised that the western emphasis on the empirical, with a basis in analysis of facts and measurements, denied or silenced any other approaches, specifically Indigenous emphases on the relational and the land. Applying ideas introduced in the first educational forum, and reflecting the deep learning they were experiencing in the Dialogue, students came to view the currently dominant western academic approach as reinforcing colonial relationships.

Students emphasised the relationships between non-Indigenous researchers and the Indigenous communities within which they want to conduct research. The need to develop relationships before conducting research was recognised as respectful of the knowledge being shared. It was seen also as a necessary means of countering the oppressions that Indigenous people face in western academia. Considering the Indigenous expectation of an ongoing relationship with researchers, students were unsettled by the western practice of coming into the community, conducting research, and then leaving, to never return. Although students had previously functioned within this western paradigm, they now recognised that, in view of the Indigenous perspective, it was inappropriate. Students stressed that respectful relationships, including honouring protocol and ceremony, are essential, and need to be properly developed and maintained with communities. Students came to recognise that, in Indigenous contexts, knowledge has spirit: it is not, as in a western worldview, simply an immaterial or conceptual thing to be obtained; thus, students were drawn to the Indigenous interrelationship between knowledge and ceremony.

What Indigenous research approaches resonated for you and why?

Students of literature and music were especially intrigued by the uses of story and song to transmit knowledge and by the idea of ceremony as a place of learning. As students discussed ideas around songs and stories as ways of teaching, they came to understand the Indigenous passing down of knowledge in a way that promotes respectful and reciprocal relationships. Further, students were connecting the role of ceremony and protocol (e.g., giving tobacco) as establishing a respectful, reciprocal relationship to the responsibility that comes along with knowledge. In this context, students saw knowledge as not solely an individualistic way of proving something, as in western academia, but also as a conferral of trust involving community and relationships, as in Indigenous worldviews. The contrasting view of Indigenous knowledges as communal was also seen in the students' discussions around sharing circles. Many students were drawn to the idea of everyone being on equal footing and working together to find consensus, emphasising the ideas that knowledge is relational and that each person is necessary and beneficial to the whole. These ideas constitute an immense shift in epistemology that excited students who are attracted to critiques of knowledge systems and to 'thinking outside the box'.

The idea that within Indigenous perspectives, knowledge has spirit and needs to be approached in a sacred way, was intriguing to most students, and they discussed the relationship between knowledge and ceremony, as well as spirituality. Students who had had restricting religious backgrounds were especially attracted to a form of spirituality that struck them as open and unmediated. Again, students reflected on what they learned in the first educational forum about Indigenous ways of knowing and how the ideas around protocol and respectful relationships must be understood, respected, and followed so that respectful research can be conducted. Students extended these ideas to knowledge sharing and the responsibility that comes along with knowledge. Sacred knowledge, or the idea that there are topics or practices that

should not be researched, shared, or publicised, was a new concept for many students. Also new and surprising for students was the idea of how knowledge needs to be referenced, not so much in terms of citations, but rather to maintain its sacredness and its connection with ceremony and community, so that it does not lose its spirit and simply become reduced to words without context. Rather than a publication or anonymous interview, the 'sources' are Elders and community members, embedded in relationships, guided by ceremony and protocol. As guest speaker Chris Scribe stated, 'Keep it sacred, not secret'. Ultimately, students discussed the need to assume a greater sense of responsibility for the different ways in which knowledge is defined, exchanged, and received in western versus Indigenous worldviews. They recognised that this greater responsibility would help them in understanding that the western approach to knowledge is relative rather than absolute; also, this new responsibility could be implemented in conducting Indigenous research in their professional roles; Social work and Child and Youth Care students who anticipated working with Indigenous individuals or communities related strongly to this possibility.

After listening to the speakers, what do you believe are the most important ways researchers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) can create space for Indigenous knowledges, worldviews, and respectful research practices? How might these be further developed in your discipline?

To create space for Indigenous knowledges, worldviews, and respectful research practices, students highlighted mutual, respectful relationships as essential. Students emphasised the need for Indigenous knowledges and learning to be regarded as valid knowledge systems; thus, they reiterated the importance of protocol and ceremony. A key related theme was to let Indigenous people speak for themselves. The Dialogue had given them exactly this experience of

hearing from Indigenous speakers first. Students argued that there is a need to create space to rethink and redo relationships based on reciprocity rather than authority. Here students were talking precisely about Willie Ermine's concept of 'ethical space'. There should be an end to non-Indigenous researchers taking credit for knowledge that was provided for them by Indigenous Elders and community members. The relations between researchers and Indigenous community members should be cited with gratitude, they insisted, as a way of maintaining a respectful relationship with the Indigenous community and as a means of acknowledging the importance of the knowledge provided. As so often in their postings, students were giving emphasis to the ideas of the Indigenous speakers, rather than parroting statements they had heard from faculty: moreover, they were being insightful and prescient about the new ideas they were acquiring. This is crucial to a clear understanding of the Dialogue as a project: it begins and ends with Indigenous thought. Non-Indigenous students found Indigenous worldviews to be wonderfully refreshing and exciting, and they were eager to run with the knowledge imparted by the Indigenous speakers.

Discussions of how these ideas could be further developed within their own disciplines led to specific ideas as well as consensus on how academic structures need to change. Applied fields like Nursing and Social Work stressed respectful relationships and cultural awareness as key to furthering culturally competent care and to developing anti-oppressive approaches. Students majoring in disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities reflected on ways to bring Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous perspectives on research into their curricula, as well as how to have more culturally relativistic approaches. Students overwhelmingly supported the idea of bringing the ideas and stories shared by the Indigenous speakers in the educational forums to all students and faculty across the university and beyond. Students in all

fields of study emphasised that western academia needs to acknowledge its historical roots of entitlement and abandon the oppressions associated with those roots. Students argued that the way that the education system is currently structured does not allow Indigenous peoples to express their spirituality and their knowledges.

Educational Forum 3: Indigenous Methodologies

The sole keynote speaker, Dr. Margaret Kovach of the University of Saskatchewan and author of the seminal work *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2009) presented an overview of Indigenous methodologies, and, following the educational forum, students participated in online discussions, answering the following questions:

What stood out to you as the most important thing about Dr. Margaret Kovach's discussion of Indigenous methodologies?

Students highlighted three key areas of interest in Dr. Kovach's discussion of Indigenous methodologies. First, the connections between Indigenous cultural beliefs and values that underlie Indigenous methodologies greatly assisted students in understanding the perspective of specific Indigenous research methods and their emphases on relationships and trust. Her use of symbolism (the use of a feather to reveal the connections of relationships and respect, for example, to Indigenous research) and metaphor (the roots of a tree to emphasize foundations) to illustrate relationships and interconnections was especially embraced by students. It seems to the authors that students were here approaching the topic of the way in which symbols convey several meanings simultaneously (some of them profoundly emotional) and thus form an

important way in which symbol-making societies counter or subvert the one-dimensional meaning-making of western rationalism and logical analysis. Second, Dr. Kovach 's discussion of where knowledge comes from was an intriguing topic for students. They contemplated the Indigenous assumptions that knowledge derives from observing the world and through experiential learning, and from immediate relationships with animals, nature, and the cosmos. As Indigenous methodologies and research perspectives see knowledge to be collectively held, students linked these ideas to those introduced in previous educational forums, such as the purposes of sharing circles, and the views of knowledge as communal and for the benefit of all. Third, students found the ideas around Indigenous knowledge systems as being non-human centred, in contrast to the human-centric mind-set of western views, to further fill out ideas around interconnectedness, relationships, and spirituality. It is clear to the authors that students were here reaching for a critique of the entire tradition of western humanism. Students pondered the variety of sources of knowledge that would come from observing the world and the relationships we have with each other, as well as the importance of our relationships with the natural world. Many quoted and reflected on Dr. Kovach's statement, 'the world of knowledge far exceeds our ability to know', in their online posts. Again, the authors were aware that, in different words, students were articulating a recognition of the humility inherent in Indigenous ways of knowing in contrast to the egotism endemic to humanist individualism.

The concept of *Indigenous oracy*, or the dissemination of knowledges through stories, song, and dance, brought lively discussion to the student online forum. Some students trained in the western tradition of giving primacy to written evidence could not give their assent to the veracity and reliability of oral testimony. For most, oracy was accepted as an important methodology and as a great way to acquire knowledge and reveal the wisdom kept in oral

traditions. Many students expressed their new understandings of how oracy facilitated knowledge-sharing relationships and wisdom across generations. Given the primacy of oracy in Indigenous ways of knowing, some students insisted that if western academia wants to work with Indigenous peoples in a respectful and honourable way, it needs to restructure and reorganise to accept the oral transmission of knowledge as a legitimate research method. Students emphasised that story is more than just an exchange of words: it is wisdom being shared and passed down, and it should be treated with respect.

Why is protocol important, and what are the dangers of inattention to meaningful and community relevant protocol?

Students expanded their understandings of protocol from developing respectful relationships to seeing how protocol governs the exchange of knowledge and ensures relational ethics. Although they had originally seen it as offering medicine in exchange for knowledge, they came to understand that protocol reflects the official rules about how to do something respectfully, in accordance with cultural beliefs about the sharing of knowledge. Some students emphasized the spiritual nature of the research agreement established through protocol, and the importance of the wisdom gained through ceremony; yet other students wanted to learn much more about the connections between spirituality and ceremony. Students actively discussed a variety of issues and concerns about following protocol properly. As protocol reflects a relationship with a knowledge bearer, and a knowledge bearer can deny interaction with a researcher when this relationship has not been established, protocol places the responsibility on the researchers and ensures that researchers are held accountable for upholding the integrity of their projects and practices. It ensures the relational ethics involved in the research

methodologies are protected. Further, students emphasised that inattention to proper protocol would be breaking trust and losing the potential to create meaningful relationships and to build research capacity within Indigenous communities. Most students linked the denial of proper protocol with the perpetuation of colonialism, and with running the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past, creating further tension and mistrust between Indigenous and western communities. Overall, students concluded that embracing protocol is necessary not only for addressing the mistakes of the past but also in building a foundation for reconciliation.

Dr. Kovach situated reconciliation considerations in relation to research: "A decolonising reconciliation must be part of research with Indigenous communities. This is not just a matter for Indigenous researchers, but for all of us in search of a more socially just society". How might your discipline respond to her statement?

Students reflected on what they had learned, and many felt their respective disciplines had a long way to go to consider doing research in a new way, or to incorporate Indigenous perspectives on research. Students in the Social Sciences and Humanities felt their disciplines needed to incorporate more diversity in their ways of approaching epistemology. Students in the sciences discussed concerns around the western emphases on analysis or compartmentalisation; for instance, on the tendency of the biological sciences to separate knowledge into unconnected parts. Some students highlighted the variances in different views of knowledge and/or acceptable research practices; the focus on peer reviewed studies; or on data being manipulated or replicated, pointing out that these variances would be at odds with many of the ideas discussed around Indigenous methodologies. Several students acknowledged that they never thought of the possibility of doing research in a different way. Some expressed a concern that more time and

effort needs to be put into creating a critical self-awareness of how we run studies and experiments, and into whether these practices are respectful to cultural values and beliefs. Others noted that there will be those who disagree with Indigenous research methods or already see their scientific approach as 'unbiased', despite its denial of Indigenous ways of knowing. Yet several students saw the benefits of a combination of approaches. English majors, for example, saw more emphasis on storytelling and oral history as a fantastic idea, but also asked how disciplines with a significant emphasis on writing could incorporate oral tradition. Students speculated that it would be important for policy makers to move forward with Indigenous communities in a respectful way, observing protocol and respecting traditional knowledges. Here the students were again articulating Willie Ermine's concept of 'ethical spaces' in their own words.

Students acknowledged that past (and current) research approaches have led to long-lasting negative impacts on Indigenous communities, emphasising that there needs to be more awareness of the impacts of that history. Going forward, students stressed the need to incorporate research utilising Indigenous research methodologies, including oral history and Indigenous ways of knowing. While divulging that it is difficult to admit that much of what they have been taught maintains systems of oppression, and being somewhat taken aback that reconciliation implies such deep and sweeping changes in our systemic approach to knowledge, students argued for the need to identify and deconstruct the ways in which colonialism and white supremacy are embedded into our systems and institutions: it is time to redress historical injustices and to build a more just society. Students highlighted decolonization and reconciliation as ongoing processes and something that everyone must actively work towards on an everyday basis. Although some students began to question what they had originally thought reconciliation

meant, students overwhelmingly acknowledged that we have a very far way to go in decolonising, not only in terms of research in academia but in society as a whole.

Celebration of Learning and Final Reflections

The Interdisciplinary Dialogue concluded with a Celebration of Learning held at University nuhelot'įne thaiyots'į nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills and involved ceremony, a keynote address by Dr. Kathy Absolon-King (Director of the Centre for Indigegogy at Wilfrid Laurier University), a tour of the former residential school, and a debrief. Students were also asked to reflect on the Interdisciplinary Dialogue as a learning experience in a final online discussion forum by answering the following questions:

What were the most interesting and/or new ideas or concepts that you have learned about during the Interdisciplinary Dialogue Project? Review your post to the "Introductions" discussion. Did your learning during the Dialogue match your expectations of the Dialogue? Why or why not?

Students described the Interdisciplinary Dialogue as a very eye-opening, insightful, and valuable learning experience, as well as an amazing opportunity, and saw it as an excellent tool to help break down ideas that they didn't realise were built through a dominant culture/colonial framework. Students were grateful for the opportunity to hear and learn about Indigenous perspectives on research and Indigenous methodologies, as well as the underlying Indigenous beliefs and values. They saw their new understandings of the importance of respectful relationships and protocol as vital knowledge that everyone should be introduced to and learn about through programs like the Dialogue. Several students noted that the educational forums approached the topics in ways that were different than what they had anticipated. They had

expected there would be more of a historical academic approach in contrast to the personal views that were shared. They found that the more personal approach taken by the Indigenous speakers made the topics more relatable for them. Some students attributed this unexpected approach to differences between western versus Indigenous approaches to knowledge and knowledge sharing, finding that it represented the inherent differences between western and Indigenous methodologies. They saw it as vital to begin to understand just how vast the differences are, not just in the approach to research but also in the cultural mind-set. They pointed out that many are hesitant or reluctant to accept the validity of Indigenous knowledges simply because they are so foreign to western ways of knowing. Students took a holistic approach, connecting the information about decolonising Indigenous research provided in the Dialogue with improving understandings and relationships in society. Students cited the incorrect information about Indigenous peoples and their communities disseminated in the media, which conveys harmful stereotypes. The authors found that the Dialogue gave students a new lens with which to view the world around them, beginning with the assumptions and approaches of their disciplines, extending to western academe as they had experienced it, and culminating with the culture that had surrounded them their entire lives. It was clear that students were excited by the opportunity that this lens gave them to begin to see from the multiple perspectives of Indigenous knowledges. Overall, students concluded that the Dialogue introduced them to such an array of new concepts, perspectives, and approaches, that it left them with many questions. Students emphasised the need to keep moving forward by engaging in these types of dialogues, and the need to learn more. Within the Dialogue, students found they were learning beyond their courses and making broader connections.

A key topic discussed in the students' final reflections was protocol: how much they learned about it, the cultural importance and significance of it, and its essential role in reconciliation. The discussions of protocol from a variety of approaches in the different educational forums led some students to realize that, even though they had heard about it in their courses or their programs, they had not grasped its actual significance. The idea that researchers had relational responsibilities and could be denied access to knowledge stood out. Students emphasised that in order to support Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, there is a need for insightful programs, such as the Dialogue, to provide access to this kind of learning. Deeper learning about protocol can lead to a better understanding about the differences between western society and Indigenous cultures and practices. Students reflected on the idea of how decolonizing research, as well as academia, can seem quite daunting, and that society itself has a great distance to cover. The students suggest, however, that by beginning with protocol – as one should to initiate respectful, reciprocal relationships, academia can restructure its approach to knowledge, and society can start on a journey to reconciliation.

Conclusion

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission rejected the popular notion of the 'restoration of mutually friendly relations' as a meaning for the term 'reconciliation'. The Final Report stated that its goal was, in contrast, to establish and maintain the 'mutually respectful relationship' that had not existed before (TRC 2015a: 3). The educational system may contribute toward achieving this definition of reconciliation if it begins by acknowledging that it has historically practiced *epistemicide,* 'the deliberate silencing of voices and epistemologies that are inclusive and holistic' (Barrett et al. 2017: 137). The first step in MacEwan University's Interdisciplinary

Dialogue was for students to question what Freire called the 'myth of pedagogic neutrality' (Freire 1972: 22) and to recognize that education does 'mirror oppressive society as a whole' (1972: 59). Throughout the Dialogue, the students moved toward an acceptance of what the TRC Final Report called for from the Canadian education system: nothing less than its transformation into one that 'treats Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect' (TRC 2015b: 21).

MacEwan University's Interdisciplinary Dialogue invited students to begin to put Indigenous worldviews on an equal footing, side by side with the hegemonic western epistemology, in order to create a new approach to learning that is ethical and reciprocal. It was an occasion for foundational rethinking and a deeply emotional process. Students first had to admit that they study within a system that has been historically unjust: as the TRC Final Report stated, 'The perpetrators are wounded and marked by history in ways that are different from the victims, but both groups require healing' (TRC 2015a: 5). The experience was an opportunity to work toward what Giroux calls 'an embodied response' to a learning that is 'an understanding as well as a form of action designed to overthrow structures of domination' (Giroux 2011: 40); in the words of Paulette Regan, the Dialogue was 'a springboard for socio-political action' (Regan 2010: 32). The Dialogue allowed students to stand apart from the oppressive system of western pedagogy and to question it, using the contrasting perspective provided by Indigenous educators. At the same time, they were just learning about this contrasting perspective as one 'characterized by oneness, wholeness, interconnectedness, and interrelationality' (Atleo 2004: 14). The Dialogue introduced a profoundly relational approach to knowledge and thus challenged the old colonial juggernaut of individualism and progressivism. Using the framework of Willie Ermine's 'ethical spaces', it allowed students to envision a pedagogy of mutual respect for Indigenous and

non-Indigenous ways of knowing, or what Jeremy D.N. Siemens calls a ‘pedagogy for reconciliation’ (Siemens 2017: 130).

Next Steps

Many similar projects and programs will no doubt be needed to establish this mutual respect for Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing at post-secondary institutions in Canada. By inventing credentials equivalent to the conventional ones, universities will need to lead the way by recognising the expertise of Indigenous knowledge keepers. Policies will need to recognise Indigenous ways of conducting research through respectful relationships, community, and ceremony, and of conveying knowledge through Indigenous oracy or the dissemination of knowledge through story, song, and dance. The fundamental acceptance of Indigenous ways of knowing will, as the students recognized, usher in a broader and more culturally relative understanding of knowledge itself, and constitute a reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges.

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