Indigenous Instructors' Perspectives on Pre-service Teacher Education: Poetic Responses to Difficult Learning and Teaching

Instructors teaching an Indigenous education course face the challenges of shifting students' understanding and inviting them into the work of decolonizing education. Indigenous instructors take on the embodied and emotional work of highlighting diverse representations of Indigenous peoples, histories, and perspectives in scholarship in order to make this learning meaningful to students. Bringing such views to education students, who are mostly non-Indigenous, is no easy task. In this study, we examine instructor experiences of difficult teaching within a mandatory Indigenous education course in Canada. We adopt a "poetics of anti-racism" (Santoro, Kamler, and Reid 2001, 194) to represent and explore the moments of difficult teaching that are indicated by what is said, and unsaid, by the Indigenous instructors we interviewed. We argue that poetic approaches are powerful in articulating the complexity of Indigenous instructors' experiences, as well as inspiring moments of transformation in education.

Keywords: Indigenous education; teacher education; decolonizing pedagogies; anti-racism; poetics

Introduction

With blood, breath, and bone vibrating with the tensions of this work, we step into our classrooms. Our pedagogical task is to lead future teachers to engage respectfully with

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Indigenous peoples, perspectives, and learning. With a young Indigenous[1] population on the rise, and with a surge in national interest on topics of reconciliation and Indigenization, we see the need to take up this work *thoughtfully*. We are also acutely aware that colonial tactics of silencing and unexplored biases can continually undermine our teaching efforts. In this article, we represent our experiences as Indigenous instructors seeking to instigate social change in the minds and hearts of new educators.

This article addresses instructor responses from a wider three-year study that explores both instructors' and students' experiences of what Simon once termed "difficult learning" (2000, 77). For Simon, difficult learning encompasses the experience of having one's prior understandings ruptured by historical truths. Shifts in consciousness hold the potential to precipitate improved relations between First Peoples and Canadians. We agree with Simon (2000) that difficult learning can be transformative—we argue that this discomfort may even be essential to transformative learning. Inspired by this notion, we highlight the difficult *teaching* encountered by Indigenous instructors working with pre-service teachers in 2013 and 2014: specifically, within the context of a mandatory Indigenous education course at a Western Canadian university. In these examinations, we situate our work within Canada but look to our international colleagues in Indigenous contexts to learn and dialogue.

The clash of differences between our students' prior assumptions around Indigenous peoples and our lived experiences holds the potential for a hostile learning environment replete with misconceptions and negative attitudes. The majority of our students have been raised in environments where stereotypes and racism against Indigenous people are still commonplace, and their formal education has not included Indigenous perspectives: learning what they do not know is part of the work they do in our course. Instructors must encounter some difficult

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attitudes en route to sharing new knowledge with students, which can be turbulent. To convey our experiences of these tension-filled spaces, we adopt a "poetics of anti-racism" (Santoro, Kamler, and Reid 2001), taking an arts-informed approach to representing and exploring moments of difficult teaching. As Elliot Eisner (2008) explains is the case for arts-informed research, "the products of this research are closer in function to deep conversation and insightful dialogue than they are to error-free conclusions" (7). In seeking a way forward in our teaching, learning from the instructors in this study, we see poetics as a powerful entry point into a challenging and transformative learning space.

Context for study

As teacher educators working in Canada, we have witnessed a series of initiatives emerge over the past decade that signal a growing momentum around Indigenous education (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP] 2008; Association of Canadian Deans of Education 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC] 2015a, 2015b). n the 94 Calls to Action issued by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, the mandatory inclusion of Indigenous content—such as "residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada [as well as] Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods"—to be integrated into K-12 education is seen as essential for all students in Canada (2015a, 7). Similarly, the Association of Canadian Deans of Education articulates a vision where "Indigenous identities, cultures, languages, values, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems will flourish in all Canadian learning settings" (2010, 4). Over the years, post-secondary institutions in Canada have taken up this call in a variety of ways (TRC 2015a,

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2015b). Ours is a time of many transitions where students and educators are learning from one another.

This growing commitment to Indigenous education has been paralleled by faculty leadership at our university. In 2013 [name of institution] hired five Indigenous tenure-track faculty members in education, and two more in 2015, who joined forces with a longstanding Indigenous scholar. One of the first tasks assigned to the Indigenous faculty members was the design and development of an Indigenous education class mandated for all Bachelor of Education students. This course became the impetus for our study.

The task of designing a common syllabus for a nine-week class to encompass Indigenous peoples, perspectives, and learning across Canada—with some acknowledgement of international Indigenous peoples—was challenging to say the least. While the course outline is shared across multiple sections of classes, we also recognized that each instructor would approach the content through unique teaching styles and pedagogical practices. The scope of our team's intentions was reflected in the initial course design, with its wide-ranging emphasis on history, education, and leadership across diverse Indigenous contexts. This daunting task was framed by an awareness that many non-Indigenous Canadians know very little about Indigenous histories and education (Battiste 2013; Dion 2009; Regan 2010; Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003). The team also recognized that many non-Indigenous Canadians have not integrated whatever knowledge they do hold into building relationships with Indigenous people (Dion 2009). In its initial iteration, the list of course readings became heavy with good intentions to fill this void for our education students.

Looking back at that initial planning experience, we—speaking as the authors of this article[2]—recognize that course instructors brought a variety of lived experiences to the

classroom. Their backgrounds spanned a spectrum of First Nations and Métis identities and a range of urban to rural to on-reserve upbringings. In our time together, we (the authors) have come to value how the instructors' diverse lived experiences collectively inform and enrich our approaches to this work. We see that teaching as minority instructors, from dually marginalized positions as Aboriginal women, complicates and complexifies the dynamics in our classrooms; yet we also believe that working collaboratively supports and strengthens our practices. We further acknowledge that our diligent attempts to teach this material would gain little traction if we did not address the elephant in the room: racism.

By introducing and teaching content that counters mainstream norms and beliefs in our mandatory education class, we are disrupting, unsettling, and challenging hegemonic views and beliefs. Instructors teaching an Indigenous education course face the challenges of shifting students' understandings while undermining deep-seated racism and colonialism in broader Canadian society. Bringing these counter-hegemonic views to students, who are mostly non-Indigenous, is no easy task. Instructors ask students to examine their positioning within Canadian society relative to First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives. In doing this, instructors take on the embodied and emotional work of representing Indigenous peoples, histories, and perspectives to make this learning meaningful to students. Students are exposed to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing that may contradict and even upset their current understanding of their lived worlds (Martin and Mirraboopa 2003). These moments represent sites of difficult learning for our students as they are challenged to consider how they, as future educators, might hold and reproduce unearned power and privilege.

Through our investigations, we have found that Indigenous instructors not only teach this challenging material, but they also embody the issues and dynamics that the course seeks to

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address. This study represents a sampling of instructor perspectives from the initial years of the Indigenous education course offerings. Representing two instructors from a larger group, we acknowledge our own perspectives and biases within this study: the interpretations presented here emerge from our lived experiences and in our voices.

In this teaching, we try to show students how they are responsible to a set of knowledge they might not have considered before. We ask them to allow this new understanding shift how they understand themselves and their world and, as future teachers, to commit to integrating Indigenizing ways into their future professional practice in service of social change. We have found that a particularly effective way of relaying our teaching experiences is through apoetics approach) which incidentally is also an effective pedagogical strategy to precipitate—or, better, inspire—these shifts.

In envisioning a way forward, we turn to the arts as a powerful entry point into this difficult learning environment. In this article, we look to two interwoven sites of possibility. One is that we see a poetic approach as a powerful way of relaying Indigenous instructors' experiences of difficult teaching to others while also serving as a powerful rendering of the transformative aspects inherent in students' learning. Our purpose in this article is to draw on poetics to illustrate the emotional, embodied nature of Indigenous education work, while also showing the power of aesthetic approaches to convey complexity in teaching. We present counter stories, or counterweights, within this unique teaching and learning discourse, signifying and portraying the complexity of this work when teaching as Indigenous instructors. In order to explore the precarious balance between our learners' needs and our own instructor experiences, we listen with care and a poetic ear to our own reflections and the voices of fellow instructors in order to find insights that will move our teaching work forward.

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Literature review

In exploring literature relevant to this area, we acknowledge those who have taught Indigenous perspectives within teacher education over the years. This work has been taken up by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous allied instructors and represents a myriad of approaches. Within the literature, we have found scholars who shared regional and local Indigenous knowledges, content, and perspectives with interested others (Armstrong 1987; Bell, et al. 2004; Cajete 2011; Sanford, Williams, Hopper, and McGregor 2012); those who have challenged the limitations of an inclusive approach, often framed as diversity or multicultural approaches (Allard and Santoro 2006; Battiste 1998; Hikido and Murray 2015); and, of particular interest, those scholars who have either underscored the need for a variety of anti-racist or social justice approaches (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2012), or the need for finding a middle ground or shared space. In the following sections, we detail this latter work as a conceptual backdrop, against which a more aesthetic approach to understanding Indigenous education is highlighted, along with an ethics of care for our students (Noddings 2002).

Taking on the system—anti-racism, social justice, and praxis-based approaches

Our work aligns with that of critical scholars who see the importance of unsettling the often-privileged positioning of pre-service teachers through an anti-racist approach (Allard and Santoro 2006; Aveling 2002, 2006; Battiste 2013; St. Denis 2007). These scholars argue that pre-service teachers tend to position or, more appropriately, distance themselves from what are often framed as radical, painful, or traumatic topics—such as Indigenous education—in order to protect themselves from harsh truths (Aveling 2002; Henry 2015; Swartz 2003). We attend to these scholars because, in our experience when students resist the learning, it is often through

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neoliberal and austerity arguments—for instance by asking why Indigenous people are singled out for special treatment as one cultural group among many. It is important then to consider a theoretical framework for Indigenous education, and social justice or critical education can be a way into that learning.

Since pre-service teachers in Canada still tend to be a relatively homogeneous group,[3] we realize that our learners must be made aware of how privilege and power is implicated in education, and how their positioning will impact future interactions with students (Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell 2005). As we see it, ignoring this critical element of our work risks reifying what Hikido and Murray (2015) deem to be cultural hegemony. Likewise, we agree with Nieto that teacher education needs to ask "difficult questions related to access, equity, and social justice"—questions that "strike at the heart of what education in our society should be" (2000, 180).

We also find our experiences parallel that of anti-racist educators Verna St. Denis and Carol Schick (2003) who challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in the discourse of dominant society and, in turn, white pre-service teachers. By challenging the assumptions undergirding what are perceived as 'commonsense' notions where "we're all part of the same human race," (2003, 1) or that Indigenous peoples should simply let it go as all of this took place in a distant past, we side with St. Denis and Schick as they seek to disrupt common-sense racism and the maintenance of a racial hierarchy. As we see it, attempting to teach Indigenous perspectives without a deliberate disruption of normative and hegemonic claims is ineffective and superficial. At the same time, we are also keenly aware that the risk of losing learners is high if the tensions inherent in such disruptions overtake the possibilities of learning.

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The role of experiential learning, through either immersion learning or critical service-learning programs, significantly impacts white pre-service teachers in teacher training programs (Causey, Thomas and Armento 2000; Poitras Pratt and Danyluk 2017; Tanaka 2017). As with Causey, Thomas, and Armento, we see the need for teacher educators to "stand as on-going partners with their graduates and with school educators to ensure the continued development of knowledge and constructive beliefs leading to student success" (2000, 43), and importantly, in the years following graduation. We maintain that intense and effective learning opportunities are best embedded as integral components of an ongoing teacher education program to allow the transformative aspects to survive beyond the experience itself. In saying so, we acknowledge with Nakata, Nakata, Keech, and Bolt (2012) that "[h]ow [students] are brought to the encounter has everything to do with whether they resist, oppose, defend, convert, patronise, tolerate, or thoughtfully engage the content of their course" (136). In seeking a way forward, we understand that Indigenous education courses open up complex intercultural spaces that need to be navigated with critical care especially in the context of mandatory inclusion.

Bumping up against "hard truths"

On the social justice continuum, the thankless task of un-settling hegemonic norms also surrounds the work of American scholars Boler and Zembylas as they take up a pedagogy of discomfort (2003, 108). This aptly named pedagogy highlights the unconscious and "the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines, and unconscious complicity with hegemony" (Boler and Zembylas 2003, 108)—or, in other words, the normalization of dominant attitudes and beliefs. It demands that learners step out of their comfort zones into new learning. Akin to this positioning, American teacher educators Ullici and Battey point out how a "'kinder, gentler' form of racism" (2011, 204) is made possible by white pre-

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service teachers laying claim to colour-blindness. By claiming, "I don't see race," students are comfortably able to subsume difference and negate their own privilege, which in turn perpetuates ongoing systemic racism. As unsettling as these truths may be for those who are privileged by status quo, we maintain that learners are limited in their ability to open up to new ways of knowing, being, and doing in the world unless common-sense, hegemonic views are disrupted. Notably, Boler and Zembylas ask students to imagine a liberatory and empowering approach to education that not only confronts power, but also envisions difference as a creative and energizing endeavour (2003, 128).

More hard truths are encountered within the work of Godlewska, Moore, and Bednasek who assert that what are otherwise well-educated students often arrive in their classes "[knowing] almost nothing about Aboriginal Peoples in Canada" (2010, 418). These geographers and educators further maintain that schooling systems which remain "complacent about a deep-seated ignorance of the country's past and present, [are] affecting both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians" (417). According to these scholars, evidence of mainstream ignorance around Indigenous perspectives is found within omissions, silences, and colonialist perspectives all framed within a celebratory approach to nationalism—in essence, a "white-washing of key issues" (426). Similarly, the truth of what students do not know is evident in our learning spaces but, in our opinion, the act of labelling ignorance may repel students from learning what they need to know. We agree with Tupper that Indigenous education for future teachers entails "encountering and teaching through colonial tensions and resistances, engaging in dialogue on (previously submerged) sensitive conflictual issues, and being attentive to . . . students' ignorance and gaps in knowledge," but doing so "respectfully and with humility" (2014, 483). Otherwise, the truth tugs too sharply.

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Meeting on middle ground

Realizing that an "us versus them" positioning has not made substantive change over the years, another approach—one where Indigenous and mainstream perspectives might meet on common ground—has gained traction. A number of scholars articulate ways of meeting on middle ground: Ermine (1995) acknowledges educators' ability to be self-reflective as key to coming together; he later shows the possibilities of an "ethical space of engagement" (Ermine 2007). Burtonwood (2002) points to a "third cultural reality" and Donald invokes a concept of "ethical relationality" (2012, 535) involving relationship and responsibility. From a Torres Strait Islander perspective, Nakata (2007) points out, via a concept of "the cultural interface" (2007, 9), the complexities and risks inherent in bringing Indigenous knowledge traditions too quickly or simplistically into undergraduate education. Finally, Battiste speaks to "trans-systemic education systems" (2013, 101) as a way of transcending formerly disconnected paradigms. In these shared spaces, we are reminded by the African postcolonial theorist Chilisa (2012) that lasting social change involves the creation of partnerships between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing where power imbalances are confronted and challenged as a first step.

An engaging example of what this new teaching space could look like arrives from the University of Victoria where education faculty members are learning from First Nations educator Lorna Williams on the ways in which Indigenous principles, specifically Lil'wat principles, can re-vision education programs (Sanford, Williams, Hopper, and McGregor 2012; Tanaka 2017). According to Sanford, Williams, Hopper, and McGregor, fellow instructors who took the Lil'wat course were able to shift their course outline from its original neo-liberal design where individualism, competition, and the notion of merit were forefronted, to that of valuing "students' collective identity, shared learning and co-operation" (2012, 29). The connections

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made in this re-imagined learning space where students were asked to focus on the learning of their peers and to support one another along their learning journeys were powerful and surprising. However, challenges remain: in those instructors who wish to retain status quo, from students who resist the dissonance of new ways, and from "administrative structures and expectations requiring compliance with policies created from Euro-American-centric traditions and values" (Sanford, Williams, Hopper, and McGregor 2012, 30). As Chilisa (2012) and Nakata (2007) contend, to be sustained, ethical spaces of change must be accompanied by structural change.

"You are our hope for a brighter future"—the development of future allies

Paralleling the exemplary work of Paulette Regan (2010), we acknowledge the work of education scholars in their articulation of ally development models (Broido and Reason 2005; Peters 2010). Echoing the call of critical pedagogues, these authors reinforce the idea that learners must first reflect on their positionality before any ally potential can be realized. Once again, the importance of first-person narratives, or testimonials, by First Peoples in this transformative learning is seen as paramount (Peters 2010). Swartz (2003) has argued that if the teaching of this difficult material achieves the right balance and momentum, future educators not only become allies but also increase their overall teaching attributes and skills. On the other hand, if critical thinking is absent from this work, non-Indigenous educators might erroneously see themselves in the role of savior (Broido and Reason 2005; Pennington 2007; Swartz 2003). The constant pulling of different priorities and the ongoing negotiation of power, ethics and relationships can translate to a persistent feeling of being unsettled for our learners. As we see it, this disquiet is a poignant marker of an ally-in-the-making; however, respecting the difficulty of this process requires an ethic of care to fully realize its ally potential.

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Minority instructors as facilitators, catalysts, or model teachers?

We recognize that the role of minority instructors in difficult learning environments is contingent on their chosen theoretical or conceptual framework. As Klassen and Carr once observed, the potential of racial minority teachers to positively affect the attitudinal development of their students, or *how* and *when* students learn to challenge racist and sexist attitudes, exists and is therefore deserving of further study (1996, 135). Importantly, the political education of both mainstream and minority students is facilitated through the modelling and expression of lived experiences by minority instructors (Klassen and Carr 1996, 129). The use of storytelling as pedagogy enables this work and, importantly, the role of the minority teacher is recognized as a catalyst within this transformative learning. In her work on autoethnography as pedagogy, Pennington (2007) similarly acknowledges the role of minority teachers in moving learners beyond what King terms “dysconscious racism” (1997, 128).

Adopting a critical or anti-racist framework can enable minority teachers to serve as a catalyst in disrupting the racist beliefs of pre-service teachers (Aveling 2006; Pennington 2007). Yet the Australian educator Aveling (2002) has also highlighted the power of the instructor to silence and evaluate students in these learning environments. Effective educators will recognize that power relations are ever present and require careful navigation. Given such complexities, we appreciate the caution issued by Aveling that “teaching against the grain” (2006, 262) is a turbulent and risky business. As our teaching has shown us, the risk appears well worth it if we are able to move learners from a position of guilt or distance to one of potential allyship.

Finding a poetic way to interpret Indigenous pedagogy

In arguing for an emancipatory pedagogy, Swartz (2003) calls for a creative approach to making change. A creative approach is similarly embraced by Australian educators Santoro, Kamler, and

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Reid who take up a poetics of anti-racism methodologically in their studies of teachers talking difference. In this arts-inspired approach, the data reveals the “fragility of meaning and the frailty of interpretation” in that “meaning was often carried in an intonation, a hesitation, a rephrasing,” (2001, 193). By highlighting how difficult it can be to speak truths about differences, these authors move their analysis from only spoken words, or text, to the act of speaking these truths. Here, the utterances are not the main signifiers; instead, the speech acts are framed by what is not said or how certain passages are said. Through their poetic explorations, Santoro, Kamler, and Reid (2001) foreground the need for future teachers to be aware and sensitive to cultural differences that may remain unspoken.

Scholarly representations through the arts not only portray our struggles to understand difference, but also allow audiences to be immersed in the experience—to understand in a deeper way. Poetic approaches can offer a way out of the difficult learning and into different ways of knowing and being. They can expand to hold and portray experiences of difficult learning/teaching, but can also enable shifts that take learners to a different level of commitment.

Across such scholarship on Indigenous and social justice education, we see a shared concern for relational engagements that shift learners’ perspectives and invite them to see their own responsibility for social change. Recalling Simon, we challenge our students by asking what it would mean “to live our lives as if the lives of others truly mattered” (2000, 62). Teacher education programs are ideal locations for such moral negotiation to occur: these are vital learning spaces where significant and lasting change can be seeded. Recognizing the need for hard truths to be delivered, we also acknowledge that our own positionings as Indigenous educators affect the ways in which we can, and cannot, move forward in this shared relational space.

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In what follows, our examinations of instructor perspectives reveal Indigenous education for pre-service teachers as a potential point of rupture between students and instructors. Worldviews clash and racist stereotypes are challenged by Indigenous instructors, who represent an embodied mixture of institutional authority and marginalized perspectives. Through our examinations, we build upon the work of the scholars reviewed above in order to present our argument for an arts-informed approach to decolonizing pedagogies and practice.

A Poetic Path to Understanding

Understanding the context for why Indigenous instructors' work to prepare future teachers to engage respectfully with Indigenous people and perspectives is both so complex and so significant, in this section we explain how our study generated its analyses. The insights we articulate in the following section emerged from a round of interviews and focus groups held with a small number of Indigenous instructors who taught our faculty's mandatory Indigenous education course in its first and/or second year of offering—namely, 2013 and/or 2014. These conversations opened up spaces for instructors to share memories, questions, and reflections on their teaching. As we have stated, we were inspired by Santoro, Kamler, and Reid's "poetics of anti-racism" (2001, 194) in crafting an approach to understanding what instructors had shared across the conversations. We turn to poetics recognizing the power that artistic expression has to convey complex layers of experience. We turn also to poetics recognizing the necessity to acknowledge spaces of difficulty and tension, and to honour instructors' struggles and strengths in working with those spaces. Finally, we turn to poetics recognizing the significance of the arts to Indigenous peoples' "imaginative possibilities," as Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice puts it (2008, 150). In his words, "physical freedom won't matter if we can't imagine ourselves free

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as well" (Justice 2008, 150). We see how the work of poetics enables us to portray the difficult teaching experienced in Indigenous education classrooms, in solidarity with broader efforts of Indigenous peoples to envision and work for self-determination.

Following Santoro, Kamler, and Reid, we have worked through a poetic process of interpretation, such that our "text is constructed out of our analysis" (2001, 194). For us, this process entailed distilling significant passages or utterances from our transcripts into poetic form. Composing a poetic representation of instructors' experiences involved arranging significant lines or passages in particular ways on the page, highlighting meaning through poetic representation. In other words, we found the poetics in the words of the instructors: we raked the transcripts for poetic and interpretive possibilities. In creating these representations, we were attentive not only to what was said and significant during the discussions, but also to what was unsaid and significant. By arranging the text into poetic form, we captured the non-verbal modes—pauses, gaps, silences, deep breaths, laughter, sighs—that revealed as much as the words being said.

We leveraged the power of poetic writing to represent thematic areas of embodied, complex, and difficult experience. Some of the ideas that instructors expressed were difficult to convey through expository language. The spaces between words are laden with meaning: we required a poetic form to carry the emotional weight of these experiences. We agree with scholar and writer Audre Lorde (1984), who tells us, "Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives" (37). We used poetic passages to interpret and illustrate what instructors shared with us verbally and nonverbally.

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Instructors’ voices are not presented separately within the text, but rather are interwoven through deliberate interpretive processes that highlight related or diverging experiences: this interweaving also serves to veil personal identities. Thus the voices of multiple Indigenous instructors speak at various times through the text. The overall result is a lyrical, multivocal, aesthetic piece that opens up understandings around difficult teaching in Indigenous education.

Just as focus groups and interviews were carried out through dialogue, with individual instructors coming together to express shared and divergent perspectives, poetics were generated both individually and collectively by our research team. Members of our research team worked separately to compose poetics from the transcripts, and then we met to generate a common poetic text together out of our separate pieces. Wide-ranging discussions grew out of the relationships, experiences, critical frameworks, and analyses brought by the members of our team. Conversations extended in many directions: backward, recursively, into the teaching experiences; inward, into each member’s emotional life and well-being; outward, into the institutional and social contexts that make this work significant; and forward, into the future of education and the well-being of generations yet to come. We describe these directions here to illustrate the rigour and scope of the discussions that helped to shape the poetic texts. The composition of each line was held in the complexity of our team’s community-oriented ethics of care and the realities of resistance.

What follows, then, is excerpts from the “poetics” work carried out by our research team, interspersed with our emergent analyses and interpretations. Through quotation and close reading, we reveal the significant understandings that emerged from this poetic approach to analyses. A creative approach illuminates a promising path to understanding and inspires us to

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find new ways of seeing difficult experiences, opening up the spaces of breath, embodiment, intention, conflict, and hope.

Poetic Possibilities—Listening to Instructor Experiences

> so thinking back
> we survived
> we have a group
> they have an idea of Aboriginal education
> they wouldn't know a lot
> about First Nations, Inuit, Métis peoples
> because it's, you know
> pretty common
> you could say most people who have gone through the public education system
> don't know very much

When students enter the mandatory Indigenous education class, they bring with them a set of prior knowledge and assumptions, as well as feelings about what they are about to learn. To this learning, some of them bring anxieties, stereotypes, false assumptions, hubris, and resentment, while others bring enthusiasm, willingness, open minds, and a sense of responsibility. Typically, what instructors encounter is a pervasive lack of knowledge. In their conversations, instructors recognize that the public education system is complicit in that lack of knowledge. What is taught, and not taught, about Indigenous peoples and perspectives passes on to the next generation of teachers. (We hope, at the time of this writing, that this system is changing.) The passage above speaks to the realities of entering a learning space where many students "wouldn't know a lot" coming in. Not only do students lack a great deal of knowledge; in many cases they also come in

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with an “idea of Aboriginal education” that predisposes them to resent or refuse the learning, or to think of it only in terms of deficits held by Aboriginal learners. They often come in with racist and colonial assumptions about Indigenous peoples and what Indigenous education entails: these assumptions implicate, and can undermine, instructors. By acknowledging that “we survived,” the instructors signify the weightiness of this teaching work. For them, it has been a difficult undertaking to confront that lack of knowledge and to balance tensions in the classroom.

> I had … *[silence]*
>
> some students who were still pretty, well….saying....
>
> some pretty ignorant things
>
> people don’t want to be represented as being obviously …*[silence]*
>
> racist
>
> but the writing some people had...
>
> it was clear...
>
> like, I had some people write about Aboriginal people getting free money from the government in their final assignment which is *[silence]*
>
> shocking... *[silence]*

This passage illustrates how some students hold onto their ignorance, despite instructors’ best efforts over the term. Even “in their final assignment,” when students might be expected to know better, it sometimes happens that a few students will write “some pretty ignorant things.” What is also going on in this passage, however, is the instructors’ struggle to articulate what they are experiencing in recognizing this ignorance. Within this passage, we note the silences, pauses, and hesitations as the instructor speaks. There is a reluctance, here, to name painful facts. Students have written something “shocking,” and yet the instructor hesitates to call it “racist.”

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There is also a sense of humanity in the hesitations as the instructor does not want to perpetuate verbal violence. That is, the pain of confronting difficult truths is something the instructors know intimately. Even if the label "racist" would be a fair evaluation, as "it was clear," the instructor also might hesitate to levy this charge against a student, given the sense of professionalism that guides the instructors' positioning: they are there to take care of our students, not to hurt them.

> I vary my teaching, as best I can, to the needs of my learners
>
> weird little things to get at them
>
> knowing full well this isn't easy learning for them
>
> I know that I will have to shift my teaching
>
> to take the learning from the head to the heart
>
> to commitment
>
> I want them to be shifted
>
> this is transformative learning

On the surface, this passage looks like a simple reflection on differentiated instruction: that a good teacher varies pedagogical approaches in order to foster the best possible learning opportunities for diverse learners. However, more than that, this instructor depicts intentional and deliberate ways of disturbing, disrupting, and unsettling learners so that they might start questioning their own assumptions and worldviews. Knowing that each learner arrives with a different level of understanding, with particular investments and interests, and with unique life histories, this instructor works to "vary" approaches in an attempt to "get at" different learners. We have seen that instructors bring a wide range of approaches to the learning environment: film, playfulness, games, jokes and humour, teasing, talking circles, ceremony, music, literature, visual arts, current events, dialogue, collaborative projects, group research, guest speakers, visits

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from community members, land-based and outdoor learning—and many more. Each student represents hope for an improved educational future but may also bear racist and colonial ideologies—this teaching, then is not just a process of transferring knowledge, but rather one of wearing away these assumptions. Creating change requires each instructor to "get at" those limiting ideas in a myriad of ways. Without this awareness, there is no opening to new ideas.

Also, in this passage, an ethic of care (Noddings 2002) is apparent in the instructor's empathy: she knows "full well this isn't easy learning for them." In difficult learning, the instructor enacts the dual impulse of pushing students into discomfort—unsettling territory—while simultaneously caring for them, with the goal of transforming their understandings. In order to accomplish these dual, overlapping, and ambitious aims, instructors aim to "take the learning from the head to the heart." The course is not about filling students up with information; rather, it is about surprising, unsettling, inspiring, encouraging moments where we ask students to shift their understandings and to open up to ethical engagements with Indigenous communities. Using varied approaches in Indigenous education is not only about keeping students interested; it is about preparing students for the often surprising and shocking parts of history that they will encounter. The instructors are bridging the difficulties and gaps between where students begin and where this learning journey will transport them. The instructors' hope for the future rests in the students' enactment of that responsibility. "This," as the instructor says here, "is transformative learning."

> throw into that mix that myself,
>
> I'm emotionally vulnerable
>
> I have to go through a lot of disclosure that makes me vulnerable
>
> you have all sorts [long sigh]

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of terrain you have to navigate

that makes you really vulnerable.

Evoking a powerful sense of embodiment, this passage speaks to the intensely personal nature of Indigenous education. This instructor reveals the risk-taking that is inherent in sharing one's own experiences. We believe such sharing is necessary in order to spark students' understandings: we see how this instructor is opening up her own personal experiences as part of her teaching. We see that such disclosures will be impactful for students: rather than studying Indigeneity in an abstract or academic way, they are witnessing a personal testimony from someone who lives out each day as an Indigenous person. This is strongly embodied work and requires strength. When she repeats, "I'm emotionally vulnerable," and that the work makes her feel "vulnerable," she demonstrates that she takes the risk of opening up personal experiences—old wounds, emotional issues, lingering memories, and painful community histories. This opening up is difficult, but she does it in order to reach her students on an emotional as well as cognitive level. The long sigh in this passage is telling. Right in the middle of describing "the terrain" that she has to "navigate" in her teaching, this instructor pauses, with heavy breath. In this sigh, we hear the tension she feels as her reluctance to share pulls against the necessity of sharing in order to expand her students' awareness.

When the instructor points to the complex "terrain" of her teaching, what we understand is that she is navigating multiple overlapping possibilities. She recognizes her students' growing knowledge and lingering ignorance—the interplay of power and privilege and racism. She understands the professional responsibilities of her instructor role, *leveraging* the power of being the professor in the room against the minority role of being the representative Indigenous person in the room. She also viscerally feels the unspoken stereotypes that permeate the teaching

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environment—circulating within the students' minds as they learn and unlearn, impacting the instructor as she grapples with internalized and external racism, but also reflecting off the complex realities that the instructor has lived. She also stands within the colonial histories and ongoing controversies surrounding Indigenous peoples. Navigating these multiple influences is extraordinarily complex—hence the sigh.

> try to make them care
> enough to make some change beyond the surface level
> really try to
> convince them of their privilege
> that's where the difficulty happens

This passage speaks to how bringing students to understand their own ability to engage with Indigenous peoples is inherently difficult, in that it requires them to confront their own privilege. That is, the students in these classes (future teachers) are largely non-Indigenous and often relatively privileged in terms of education and class background. When the instructor says that she wants to "try to make them care," it is important to see the "try": the caring is not something she can mandate or cause to happen, but it can be ignited. In *trying*, the instructors seek ways of motivating or instigating students to care sufficiently that they will carry the work forward into the future—but first their own learning must take place. Confronting power and privilege in relation to their own personal positioning can be "where the difficulty happens" and where the potential of learning is threatened. The discomfort that students feel can tempt them to back away from the learning, to disengage, even in ways that feel ethical (McKegney 2008). However, as Mezirow (2000) reminds us, dissonance can be the catalyst for transformative learning. For instructors to "try to make them care" is to support students in working through those feelings.

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Instances of personal defensiveness can become “entry points into greater self-knowledge, and content knowledge” (DiAngelo and Sensoy 2001, 13). The transformation that occurs when people face their own positionality and integrate their own narratives with the learning that they are doing can help them to develop a commitment to ongoing learning and decolonizing work in the long run.

What we see in this sharing, then, is that this instructor is looking toward the long term where students might care “enough to make some change beyond the surface level”: if students/teachers are going to carry their learning meaningfully forward into future practice, their motivation (caring) must be significant. That caring enables a sustainable future for their own Indigenous education work. We know that they will encounter a range of power structures and potential barriers when they enter the teaching profession—that being in the school system may or may not enable them to continue the work they began in the course. Navigating potential obstacles requires a deeper commitment, a moral sense of responsibility to the work, and a genuine engagement with issues of racism and social inequities.

> I don’t know if she had prejudice or not
> but she didn’t like the mark on her first assignment
> it just so happened we were watching this documentary
> this moving, powerful, emotional documentary
> about Indian residential school survivors
> she asked if she could meet with me
> and she was crying, leaking from everywhere
> because she got a B+
> She said, “This is just who I am. This is how I am.”

> we had just watched a documentary about people who had been
>
> severely abused in the residential schools
>
> and I said, “I can’t tell who you are.”

For Indigenous instructors, moments of intense difficulty can arise. Tremendous clashes of values take place between the institutional experience and the lived experiences that this type of learning addresses. In this passage, the instructor faces such a clash: as a group the class has just shared the intense experience of witnessing colonial violence in a highly emotional film about the Indian Residential Schools system and the abuses students endured. The instructor then encounters a student who is so upset because “she got a B+.” As this instructor speaks, she is taken aback by what she hears from the student: there is such a disconnect between what she is feeling— “we had just watched a documentary”—and what the student feels is important at that moment—namely, her grade. In analyzing this passage, we acknowledge the complexity of the contexts here: students are pushed to be competitive; individualism and the market economy shape their choices; and they are led to believe that their grades are of the utmost importance to their future careers and success. However, as this instructor makes clear, the moment she describes is laden with conflict. The student says, “This is just who I am,” but that statement is unintelligible to the instructor: “I can’t tell who you are.” Who are you, she wonders, if you are able to ask me about grades when we have just witnessed this traumatic experience—something that is so personal and affecting to the Indigenous instructor? This is just one example of how the lived experiences of Indigenous people—and, in turn, the embodied, affective experience of teaching about those experiences—can cause difficulty for the instructor who must reckon simultaneously with the day-to-day institutional pressures of grades and student expectations.

> these people carry the right stuff

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it's just that their formal education has not provided them

with the full story, our side of the story

This passage suggests an important source of strength in the instructors' beliefs about their students. "These people carry the right stuff," this instructor believes—any deficit is not located in them, but rather in the schooling they have received. Having "the right stuff" is at the heart of the possibility of this work—it resides in their character, sense of ethical positioning, and their deep sense of caring. This instructor ultimately trusts the students. What is missing and what is not ultimately their fault, she recognizes, is an understanding of "the full story." Students entering the course generally do not have a strong foundation of knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, about colonialism in Canada, about history before contact, about the contexts that shape Indigenous communities' realities in the present—or even who the nearby Indigenous peoples are. The stereotypes and misunderstandings that students hold are enabled by this gap in their "formal education." Oftentimes, our students feel betrayed by these gaping holes in their learning. However, as McKegney points out, this kind of gap is not an inherent obstacle: "knowledge can be attained" by those who are "willing to put in the time and effort in terms of research, dialogue, social interaction, and community involvement" (2008, 57). What the students bring in terms of capacity to learn is what fosters this instructor's trust.

Because if you do it right, you're taking people

Down a really momentous road

That opens up all these emotions

Remaining firmly grounded in this trust it is vital to "do it right"—to teach in a way that will open up transformative learning for students. Over the years, we have found good pedagogy exists in the tension-filled space between professionalism and the personal; between caring for

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students and working for decolonization; between building kind, caring relationships and confronting difficult truths. This is a space of struggle and possibility. Instructors shape their work each day through dual (and often opposing) impulses: to take care of students—as their teachers—and also to knowingly cause them disruption—by unearthing their biases, challenging their taken-for-granted beliefs, and exposing the hegemony of the worldviews they were raised with. The example cited above is also a clear indicator of this dual responsibility: instructors have a professional responsibility to care for their students' well-being, and yet knowingly show students a film about residential schooling that will seriously upset many students. Engaging in this teaching is difficult, yet important. Trying to "do it right" means not shying away from that difficulty, trusting that it will open up the possibilities. It means accepting who students are and what they bring. The aim is meaningful pedagogy that inspires students and enables them to experience the power of relationship and respect in the classroom. What that looks like in practice will of course vary widely—the instructors we spoke with were a diverse group with diverse approaches. It is not our intention in this paper to describe one "right" way of teaching. What we see in this instructor's words, "if you do it right…" is a recognition that the learning matters, and that the path to the learning must be laid with care, intention, respect, and courage. "Taking people / down a really momentous road" is a great responsibility—making this journey meaningful means engaging learners' hearts.

Decolonizing education is a vast, complex endeavour; in its service, education faculty are required to prepare future teachers to address Indigenous subject matter and to foster success for Indigenous learners. Preparing our students to undertake these challenges in ways that are respectful and well informed is no small feat. Inspiring them to commit to this work in their hearts and actions is an even higher aspiration. As these instructors have shown, transformative

learning can be realized within the space that instructors hold open for their students: a space of difficulty, but also one of care and of immense possibilities.

Conclusion

While such teaching can be challenging, it is also important: teacher preparation is a necessary element in the decolonization of education. In Canada, the mandate for teacher preparation is clear: Indigenous education matters. With this article, we contribute to the growing understandings among education scholars as to what Indigenous education in teacher preparation entails. In this paper, we have described instructors' experiences of teaching a mandatory course for pre-service teachers on Indigenous perspectives within a faculty of education. Our research suggests that, for Indigenous instructors, facilitating students' learning is complex. Instructors are called to represent and to embody Indigenous perspectives, histories, and peoples, as well as to draw non-Indigenous students—often reluctantly—toward an interrogation of their own positionings and understandings. Such teaching can be emotionally difficult. It requires Indigenous instructors not only to implicate themselves personally in their classroom teaching, but to do so explicitly from a marginalized position, working against the dynamics and discourses of deep-rooted and systemic colonialism. Further, engaging in the challenge of unsettling pre-service teachers, while also respecting their experiences and capacities as learners—dual tasks which may feel oppositional, at times—adds another level of emotional complexity for instructors as various axes of power and privilege interact with each other.

Moving forward, we hope other scholars and educators will continue, as we will, to consider what pedagogies, what policies and protocols, what practices in the university best foster the educational transformation needed to bring change for the next generations. With this

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piece, we hope to illuminate the creativity and the strength of these instructors as they work to engage future teachers in building relationships with Indigenous people and perspectives. A poetic process is powerful for articulating the complex demands of this teaching, which can otherwise evade our description—these instructors evoke creative, relational, caring, and responsive approaches to this teaching. Such approaches are effective and inspiring: they can precipitate transformation. We believe there is a strong need to think through how Indigenous education instructors can effectively and sustainably inspire future teachers—as one of our instructors so aptly put it, "to care enough to make some change."

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Notes

[1] We use the term *Indigenous* within this work to refer to First Peoples in Canada and globally. We use *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit* to refer more specifically to those identified as Aboriginal through their inclusion in the 1982 Canadian Constitution. We acknowledge that *Aboriginal* is an exclusionary term, and encourage students in our course to learn about diversity within and between First Peoples.

[2] We would like to address the potential ambiguity of the "we" voiced in this article. The potential blurriness originates from the ways in which the groups of people we discuss are overlapping. For instance, our "we" might be (mis)understood as referring to the authors of this article, to the instructors of the Indigenous education course, to the instructors who participated in our study, or to our study's research team. While these groups in some cases overlap, in others they do not. It is important to us not to speak for others or to otherwise blur the lines where they should be distinct. For instance, not all of the instructors who participated in our study are authors of this article; not all instructors teaching the course participated in the study; and not all of the authors of this article were participants in the study. As we engage in our interpretations, it is important to respect the integrity of everyone's perspectives. We also protect our colleagues' ideas by maintaining a degree of anonymity. When we use the pronoun "we,"

then, we refer *only* to ourselves as the named authors of this article. Otherwise, we specify—for instance, by using "instructors" to refer to the instructors who shared perspectives for the study. Our intention is to share our insights with respect and care for those who helped to shape them.

[3] Many of our students are white, middle-class, heterosexual, young people, and predominantly women—these demographics have been slowly shifting to a more diverse group over recent years, yet the characteristics noted here remain the majority.

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