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DESIGNING AND SHARING RELATIONAL SPACE THROUGH DECOLONIZING MEDIA

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As Indigenous educators who share a passion for innovative approaches using instructional media, we are inspired to explore the ways in which technology can support teaching and learning from Indigenous perspectives. Several scholars advocate the use of technology in reclamation of First Peoples' voices, stories and other ways of knowing (Ginsburg, 2000; Iseke-Barnes, 2002; Dyson, Hendriks & Grant, 2007). Reflecting social constructionism, we believe media can be designed to build educator capacity within these special interest areas. By highlighting work that is currently underway within Indigenous education, we invite readers to imagine their own possibilities for transformative and decolonizing pedagogy.

Keywords: Indigenous education; decolonizing media

The intentional use of media to support educational endeavours is an emerging and evolving area of interest (Brown, Jacobsen, Lambert, 2014; Clifford, Friesen, & Lock, 2004; Friesen, 2009). Early works in this area focused on how digital technologies served to deliver content within classrooms, while contemporary education scholars advocate for the agency of learners in media use (Jonassen, Howland, Marra, & Crismond, 2008; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2010). Recent education policies, including *The Learning and Technology Policy Technology Framework* (2013), assert: “Teachers, administrators and other education professionals [need to] read, review,

participate in, share and apply research and evidence-based practices to sustain and advance innovation[s] in education” (p. 23). As technology settles in as a mainstay of education, we are buoyed by the potential of media to innovate transformative strategies in both teaching and learning, and in particular how it may impact the work of decolonizing education. As Indigenous educators, we are motivated to respond to the crisis in Indigenous education by “giving back” to our communities through the privilege of our education. We are also keenly aware that this is difficult and complex work that cannot be accomplished alone. Fortunately, an online environment allows us to create what we understand as a relational and ethical space where all educators have the opportunity to contribute to the important work of decolonizing.

The recent release of the 94 calls to action by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (2015) has prompted many concerned people to envision how a different approach to education could realize reconciliation. Our present work in the specialized area of Indigenous education, supported through online platforms and digital technologies, responds to the need for innovations within, and an ethical response to, Indigenous education (*Deans’ Accord on Indigenous Education*, 2010; *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2015). Reflecting Friesen’s (2009) “networked communities of inquiry,” we see the strong potential of an online relational space where Indigenous communities and educators can engage with one another in a shared vision of reconciliation. We urge educators to move beyond the checklist approach to covering curricular outcomes, or simply using technology as a mode of content delivery, to considering how media might support collaborative teaching efforts that honour Indigenous perspectives. When the focus of educational programming is on meaningful acts of creation (user agency) and peer learning that is highly responsive to context, the educational space reflects the major tenets of social constructionism. Moreover, a respectful approach to this work requires engagement with

First Peoples where “decolonization is about the process in both research and performance of valuing, reclaiming, and foregrounding Indigenous voices and epistemologies” (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 31).

Over the past two decades, global initiatives demonstrate that one of the most powerful ways that digital media can serve decolonizing efforts is in the realm of Indigenous education. As international scholars exploring Indigenous media traditions, Zimmerman, Zimmerman and Bruguier (2000) acknowledge that “some [Indigenous] schoolchildren learn to use computers before they learn to read and write, and the multimedia fit well with a learning style more like that based on oral tradition” (p. 79). Other authors acknowledge the fit of “appropriate technology” to Indigenous ways of knowing where learners who “often experience difficulties as a result of isolation, culturally inappropriate educational programs and learning styles” (Dyson, Hendriks & Grant, 2007, p. xiii) are afforded educational alternatives. Across Canada, Indigenous scholars are creatively appropriating digital media to revitalize and restore long-held cultural traditions, such as the oral tradition of storytelling (Iseke-Barnes & Danard, 2007; Poitras Pratt, 2011) yet the increasing popularity and use of other digital media forms, including social media and other promising digital educational initiatives, are largely unexplored within educational studies (see Appendix B). Moving forward, we are inspired by American scholar and cultural activist Faye Ginsburg (2000) who envisions a reimagined world, free of hegemonic influence, made possible when digital media forms are “embraced, appropriated and indigenised” (p. 46). Significantly, we imagine this new world opening up within a relational space for teaching and learning.

In this paper, we outline three educational projects that we are currently involved in where digital media provides the architecture to support the learning needs of Indigenous learners and, just as

importantly, those wishing to learn more about Indigenous perspectives. This sampling presents what is possible when a digital environment contributes to a culturally relevant approach to Indigenous education that honours collaboration, creation, interconnectedness, and a collective orientation. As with Luke, et al. (2013), we realize that a single set of pedagogical practices will never meet the diverse needs of education students nor the diverse communities of Indigenous learners spread across a large territory. Nonetheless, by sharing our experiences, we hope to demonstrate the potential of a dynamic online relational space where educators can connect to diverse Indigenous perspectives and demonstrate their own commitment to reconciliation. The following sections provide a glimpse into our intentional use of digital media to support, and amplify, Indigenous perspectives on the road to reconciliation.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A DECOLONIZING APPROACH

As a Métis scholar, Yvonne has drawn from her background in communications development to realize decolonizing aims within the field of Indigenous education. With the defeat of the Métis in 1885, many Métis resorted to either denying or hiding their identity and in the years that followed, shame and silencing became an all too common story of the Métis (Devine, 2010; Richardson, 2006). In a decolonizing effort, Yvonne opted to work with her home community of the Fishing Lake Métis Settlement on an intergenerational digital storytelling project in 2009. Yvonne worked alongside experts from the Center for Digital Storytelling, and community leaders led by a group of Elders, to fashion a community-based digital strategy that would help rekindle the much loved tradition of storytelling. By bringing youth, Elders and settlement members from Fishing Lake together in a collaborative digital storytelling project, they created a learning space for disparate generations to come together and reconnect to their collective history and identity as Métis (Poitras Pratt, 2011). In what is now a collection of 19

digital stories from the Fishing Lake Métis settlement, they have started to reclaim and revitalize stories from the Métis perspective. Looking to the future, the vital work of decolonization and reconciliation resides in how these stories are respectfully shared with others. In this way, the learning from the stories is equally as important as learning how to care for the stories.

MAKING ‘DIFFICULT LEARNING’ ACCESSIBLE THROUGH MEDIA

The Werklund School of Education has forged a path to reconciliation by creating a mandatory class on First Nations, Métis and Inuit history, education and leadership for preservice teachers. In this course, many Indigenous instructors rely on media resources to prompt affective responses creating the space for students to open up to what Simon (2005) terms “difficult” learning. Students are given the opportunity to use media to relay a new vision of learning, one where they are asked to imagine a metaphorical rendering of their place in Indigenous education through a photo-essay assignment (see Appendix A for samples of student work). Both the teaching and learning processes are contingent on the strategic use of media within the classroom setting but, as Brown, Jacobsen, and Lambert (2014) suggest, the online sharing of lessons learned from this course would prove even more valuable as professional learning resources for practicing educators.

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, AND INUIT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROJECT

As a project designer and facilitator with the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia, Solange has led the Provincial First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Professional Learning Project. The professional learning project is a wholistic collaborative inquiry paradigm which focuses on building educator capacity to create relational spaces for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives and content in educational programming (Lalonde, 2015). A core feature of

the project is exploring innovative ways to empower educators with resources and tools in an online, open access environment (see Appendix B). While technology is used to enable multiple entry points and increase accessibility to resources, educators are also actively engaging with regional Indigenous community members in this important work. By working alongside Indigenous educators and community members, educators have the opportunity to experience a pedagogical shift and are engaged in the significant work of contributing to reconciliation and decolonization. As project funding ends in June 2016, educational resources including a website and a facilitator's toolkit will help support the continuation of this work.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In imagining how technology can further the work of decolonization and reconciliation, we are called to envision new landscapes of learning. The online learning management system, Moodle, offers strong potential for this new vision - one that requires a pedagogical shift: "All of us are potential teachers as well as learners - in a true collaborative environment we are both" (Social Constructionism, para. 1). Moodle can be designed to enable educators to create an educational environment where traditional ways of knowing, being, and doing are foundational aspects in educational programming. The Moodle philosophy embraces the idea that "connected behaviour within a learning community is a very powerful stimulant for learning, not only bringing people close together but promoting deeper reflection and re-examination of their existing beliefs," (Connected and separate, para. 1). Reflecting an ethos of social constructionism, Moodle allows educators and students to contribute artifacts of their understanding in a shared online environment. As Brown, Jacobsen and Lambert (2014) assert, "[m]ore emphasis is needed on building expressions of learning through deep learning experiences, collaborative and creative designs and shared knowledge creation," (p. 30). When this intentional practice is aligned with

the perspectives of Indigenous peoples within a learning space, the work of decolonizing education is underway.

This path to decolonizing education is not as straightforward as it might seem. In advocating for agency in media use, we are also keenly aware that traditional teachings from Indigenous communities resonate with place and space. This means there are real limitations to online learning. Educators are free to access online resources that support their capacity to understand and evaluate historical events, but engagement in this work also bears a responsibility to reach out to Indigenous communities to ensure that this work is accomplished in a respectful and meaningful manner.

As these initiatives demonstrate, the innovative use of technology can enable Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to creatively imagine and demonstrate their vision of what reconciliation and decolonization can look like in a relational and ethical space. However, we also recognize the need for further research in this specialized area to help ensure the integrity, and to maximize the impact, of this critical area of education. In the spirit of reconciliation, we call on other educators to help us imagine a future where educators together plan, create, deliver and share educational programming which demonstrates an understanding of reconciliation using media as a tool of decolonization.

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Appendix A

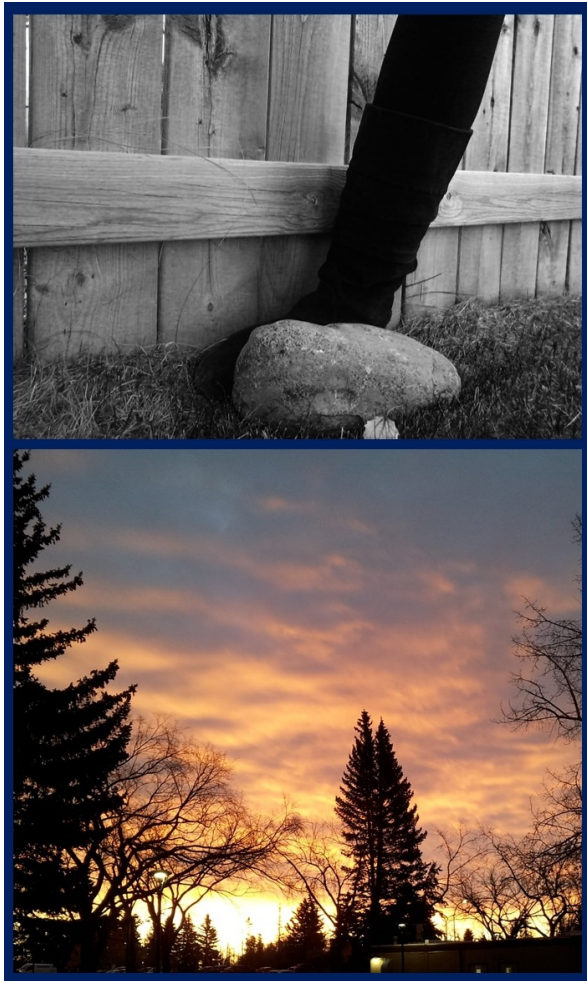


Figure 1: Student photovoice assignment
(C. Schmidt, 2015 cohort)

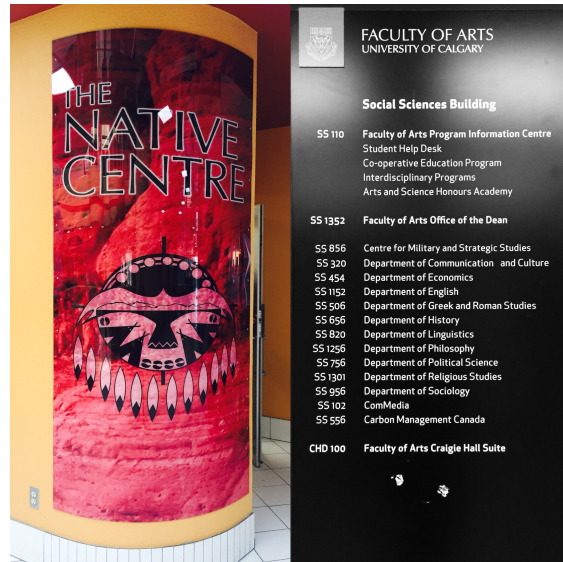
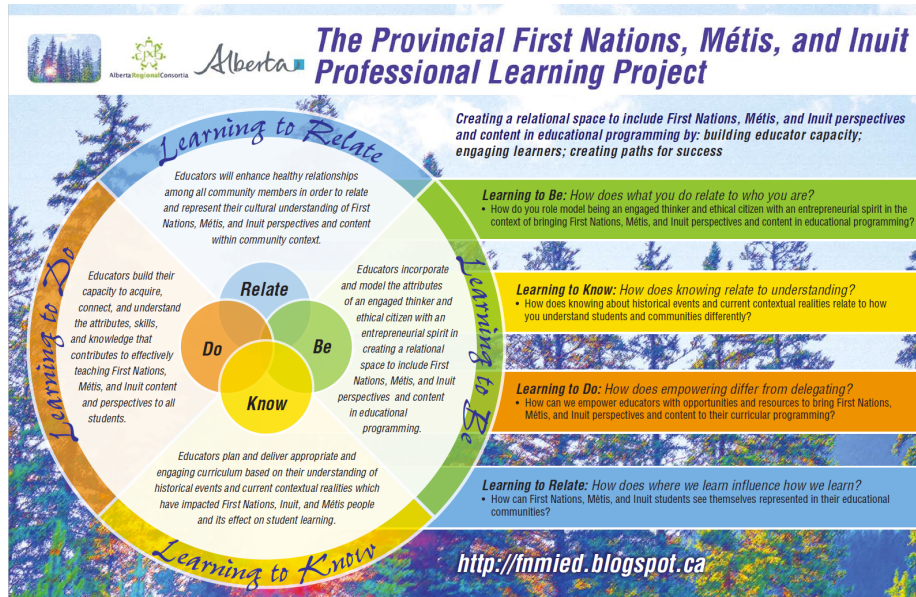


Figure 2: Student photovoice assignment
(E. Catsirelis, 2015 cohort)

Appendix B

THE PROVINCIAL FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, AND INUIT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROJECT



<http://fnmied.blogspot.ca/>

The Provincial First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Professional Learning Project calls for educators across the province to take actions to develop their understanding of creating relational spaces for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives and content in educational programming. The Professional Learning Project offers a wholistic collaborative inquiry paradigm for building educator capacity, engaging learners, and creating paths for success. In seeking innovative ways to address the achievement gap between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and all other students, the Professional Learning Project focuses on empowering educators to achieve success in the project's goals of: Learning to Be, Learning to Know, Learning to Do, and Learning to Relate.

[ARPDC First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Moodle Site Directory: googl/8qk4dw](http://googl/8qk4dw)

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