Learning To See: Generating Decolonial Literacy Through Contemporary Identity-Based Indigenous Art

Shannon Leddy
University of British Columbia, Canada

Susan O'Neil
University College London, England

Abstract

This paper describes the findings of an exploratory study for a pilot program in teacher education that employs contemporary Indigenous art as a forum for increasing and enriching teacher confidence and agency in the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous content across K-12 curriculum. Building on a model of transformative education through dialogue, the phenomenological process for engaging with art presented in the pilot workshop asked participants to question not only their own assumptions about Indigenous art and artists, but also to examine assumptions about

themselves within education. As such, the phenomenological depth of art explorations provides a mechanism for developing decolonial literacy, a pedagogy for antiracist and transformative education (Bacon, 2015; Curry-Stevens, 2007), and a means of creating ethical space (Ermine, 2007). Our question as researchers explores how the approach of looking at contemporary identity-based Indigenous art in the context of a larger dialogue around the colonial construction of Indigenous identity supports and encourages the sensitive inclusion of Indigenous content in school curricula. Our findings suggest that looking at the self-representations of contemporary Indigenous people can open up a dialogic space between settlers and Indigenous people in ways that encourage student teachers to think more deeply about their relationship with Indigenous peoples and how they might engage in a more inclusive curriculum with their own students.

Old Habits

For many decades there has been a one-note version of the story of Canada. Conventional social studies curriculum in the province of British Columbia, for example, has historically constructed Canada as a good and just entity, wrought by the cultural influence and hard work of European colonizers who made good use of land that was open and undeveloped (Cranny, 1999; Dion, 2009; Moles, 2001). It is a place where industrious individuals thrive through their own effort, persistence and merit, and anyone who lives in, or emigrates to, Canada has an equal chance for success. Donald (2019), however, points out, that such curricular constructions are "imbued with the cultural assumptions and prejudices that the majority of the members of a society have come to consider as normal and necessary" rendering curriculum itself as "an exercise in citizenship" (p. 106). While this version of curriculum has created a citizenry well-versed in the status quo of a Canadian life built on a colonial agenda, it has left out significant portions of our history.

For Indigenous peoples, Canada as a body politic has meant something quite different. Not only does curricular content rarely include meaningful and accurate knowledge about Indigenous peoples and epistemologies, but Indigenous students continue to graduate at significantly lower rates than non-Indigenous students (BCTF 2013; Kanu, 2011,). Worse, both curricular content and pedagogical approaches often anchor Indigenous people in the past, ignoring their residence and resonance in the ever-unfolding present, and ignoring the many iterations of genocide caused by colonization. The reifying story of Canada as both a democracy and a meritocracy requires disruption.

Recently, the long-overdue critical mass of attention being directed towards police violence against racialized bodies, institutional racism, and social justice has also heightened our

collective awareness of the need to re-evaluate "common sense" notions of equality and equity. It has shone a light on the need to take up new discourses in the way we educate ourselves and our children; to learn to see the world in new, holistic, and inclusive ways. It calls for the development of decolonial literacies--learning how to check normative tropes, uncover curricular assumptions, and to include Indigenous voices, perspectives, and pedagogies in meaningful ways in our work as educators.

The multiple and often competing narratives of Canada have created a national anxiety with regard to Indigenous people that often results in an avoidance of taking up meaningful and transformative conversations in classrooms. Antiracist educators and researchers Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis (2003, 2005) report that the problem rests in culturally imbedded and tacit racisms that many non-Indigenous Canadians have rarely been asked to stop and question. Susan Dion (2009) discusses the impact of these embedded racisms as creating a perfect stranger positionality, whereby non-Indigenous people simply do not know, and do not learn (or refuse to learn) anything about Indigenous peoples. Stereotypes and colonial power narratives are allowed to persist, especially amongst Settler students and teachers, hampering positive change and precluding real conversations about the realities of Indigenous people in the present (Battiste, 2013; Donald, 2019; Lowman & Barker, 2016). In part, the problem rests in the narrative loop that has been created by Canadian curriculum, in which teachers reiterate their own set of received messages about Indigenous people, often uncritically, which are repeated in the curricular materials offered to students. This has had the effect of creating a reifying exclusionary curriculum and pedagogy that systematically avoids the real issues underlying the inequitable status quo.

Many current approaches to healing this cultural rift focus on education programs designed for Indigenous students to address the gross inequities produced by past colonial policies, and by the legacy of intergenerational trauma (Battiste, 2013; Friesen, 2002; TRB, 2015). Although these programs are generally successful in improving educational outcomes, Indigenous graduates often still face barriers in the form of internalized systemic racism amongst their non-Indigenous fellows (Cote-Meek, 2015). This is an indication that the root of the problem has yet to be effectively addressed.

Recent revisions to British Columbia curriculum mandate the inclusion of Indigenous content and pedagogies across the curriculum, which is a positive step towards better understanding. But such changes are not be made easily. We need to revise the way we look at Indigenous peoples, content, and pedagogies within school curriculum so that teachers and students are better able to detect and eliminate racism when they encounter it in course materials, and in themselves. Building on the work of Curry (2007), Schick and St. Denis (2003, 2005), and Dion (2009), the research presented here seeks to expand the national dialogue on Indigenous

education as not only a matrix of pedagogical, social, and cultural concerns related to the delivery of education for Indigenous people, but also as the delivery of intercultural education aimed at opening space for dialogue and understanding amongst all Canadians. We seek to help educators become literate in the language and process of decolonizing education.

New Ways

To address concerns related to decolonization literacy, researchers have engaged in pedagogies for antiracist and transformative education (Bacon, 2015; Curry-Stevens, 2007), and as a means of creating ethical space (Ermine, 2007). Jack Mezirow's (2003) model of transformative education, with its roots in Habermas' distinction between instrumental (received) and communicative (critical) learning, presents significant potential in finding a new way through our national cultural landscape. Mezirow focuses on a practice of critical discourse as a means of transforming one's thinking through exploring assumptions and habits of mind. According to Mezirow (2003), "Habermas's concept of emancipatory learning is here interpreted as the process of transformative learning that often takes the form of task-oriented problem solving in instrumental learning and critical self-reflection in communicative learning" (p. 61). That is, one must actively create the conditions necessary for such a process to take place, both by defining a particular problem (in this case, a social and cultural one) and by examining one's own relationship to that problem. In order to move beyond rigid views, we must engage in self-reflection and in the interrogation of our own beliefs and principles. To affect true communicative learning, we must also engage in dialogue with others, especially in situations where their views and insights conflict with our own.

This dialogic approach evokes Willie Ermine's notion of ethical space (2007), which is also taken up by Donald (2009). Broadly speaking, Ermine suggests that the way forward in Canada for relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, is to recognize our differences together, to accept our solitudes so that we can come to the table together as equals to work towards the things we agree upon. As he frames it, "engagement at the ethical space triggers a dialogue that begins to set the parameters for an agreement to interact modelled on appropriate, ethical and human principles" (Ermine, 2007, p. 202). We suggest this is a crucial aspect of decolonial literacy.

Building on a model of transformative education geared specifically towards sensitivity training, Ann Curry-Stevens (2007) employed a "pedagogy of the privileged" (p. 33). Curry-Stevens suggested that in order for the dialogic activity of transformative education to be successful, two key steps are necessary. Learners must first be brought to notice and question their own assumptions about "The Way Things Are." Learners' confidence in their own reality narratives requires destabilization so that they can begin to identify the degree to which

they occupy positions of privilege. Curry-Stevens points to the idea that privilege and disadvantage occur along continuums, and that each of us occupies multiple positionalities along both. In the second step the gaps that become apparent in old learning are tempered by new and more inclusive narratives, which help the learner move forward as an active agent of positive social change. In the context of the work in this exploratory study, this step allowed for learning about how power is seized and subsequently structured in order to maintain the convenient fictions that support the colonial status quo.

The arts and artistic ways of knowing have gained prominence in studies of transformative learning over the past decade. In a comprehensive literature review, Blackburn Miller (2020) notes the importance of the arts as a way of engaging imagination to help us to "try on" new possibilities (p. 339). According to Hoggan, Simpson, and Stuckey (2009), "multiple ways of knowing is directly connected to transformative learning in that art and creative expression offer an opportunity for us to engage in alternative forms of expression, which may shift the way in which we view our current situation (p. 17). Hoggan and colleagues also note that artistic experiences by themselves do not create transformative learning; they require educators to create learning spaces that make use of these experiences, reflect on them, and make sense of them in meaningful ways.

Susan O'Neill (2015) has addressed the idea of transformative learning as a journey in her work on musical engagement among youth. Learning of any kind takes place within its own ecology, and the conditions of such ecologies are themselves variable within a learning experience. The metaphor of journeying is a crucial one here, getting to the heart of learning as a process of sense-making, a gradual coming to know. It is about process—allowing things to unfold over as much time as it takes. The journey metaphor also makes room to focus on both process and destination, offering a more holistic lens in relation to art as a 'lived experience' that unfolds over time in relation to transformative learning.

Methodology

In considering the contributions of Mezirow (2003), Curry Stevens (2007), and O'Neill (2015), the participants in our pilot program followed a two-stage process, roughly matching the steps outlined by Curry-Stevens. First, participants examined how their own understanding of Indigenous people within Canada was constructed by received narratives through schooling, media, and informal learning. This work involved uncovering the tacit assumptions and overt silences that were contained within the materials they learned from their own school experience, and in the larger world. This can be an intense process and can lead to what has been described by some antiracist scholars as a sort of intellectual and emotional trauma (Berlak, 2004; Erickson, 2004). However, it is precisely through examining power narratives that the production and perpetuation of stereotypes may be identified and challenged, creating

space for Indigenous perspectives (Dion, 2009; Schick & St. Denis, 2003, 2005). Ultimately, this first step seeks to help us define the parameters of our collective rut.

In the second step, participants began to explore new narratives about Indigenous peoples and Canada that clearly compete with mainstream perspectives. For the purposes of this study, contemporary identity-based and political Indigenous art provided the mechanism for mobilizing a shift in knowledge. The participants' engagement with art was structured as a phenomenological practice, in which works of art created an opportunity for dialogue between self and other (Dewey, 1931; Bourriaud, 1998; Parry, 2011). Phenomenology here is understood as the philosophical engagement in meaning-making through consciously attending to how we experience particular phenomena, such as encounters with works of art. American art educator and philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) makes a clear connection between art and phenomenology by drawing on the work of one of the most noted phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty, to summarize the potential impact of encounters with art: "we may have the experience Merleau-Ponty describes when he talks about 'a route' being given to us, 'an experience which gradually clarifies itself, which gradually rectifies itself and proceeds by dialogue with itself and others' (1964, p. 21)" (p. 149).

In searching for a way to structure these phenomenological dialogic encounters with art, we looked to the work of Don Ihde (1986), who laid out the mechanics of this process as follows: "phenomenology begins with a kind of empirical observation directed at the whole field of possible experiential phenomena" (p. 31). This involves an accounting of the relationship between 'noema' (the thing/phenomena) and 'noesis' (the experience of the thing/phenomena by the person experiencing it). Ihde further outlined four hermeneutic rules to guide the process of meaning-making in relation to perceived phenomena, such as encounters with art: "(a) attend to phenomena as and how they show themselves, (b) describe (don't explain) phenomena and (c) horizontalize all phenomena initially" (p. 38) and "seek out structural or invariant features of the phenomena" (p. 39).

The focus on art in this work was significant because creative expression plays a major role in Indigenous heritage, culture, and identity. Contemporary Indigenous artists, especially those whose expression is rooted in identity and the politics of colonization, offer a window into the manner in which Canada has unfolded in an entirely different way for Indigenous peoples than what is described in school curriculum (Morin, 2013). As such, Indigenous artists make available tropes of thinking and experience in their work that invite non-Indigenous people into dialogue. In terms of disrupting old ideas and narratives, artists provide the other side of the story. This resonates with the work of American educational reformer John Dewey (1934), who framed his thoughts about art as experience, in close relation to the tradition of phenomenology. He characterized art as fundamentally communicative, suggesting: "It is

when the desires and aims, the interests and modes of response of another become an expansion of our own being that we understand him. We learn to see with his eyes, hear with his ears, and their results give true instruction, for they are built into our own structure" (p. 350). This is true for Maxine Greene (1995) as well, who notes that "meaning *happens* in and by means of an encounter with a painting, with a text, with a dance performance" (p. 139, emphasis in original). It is also evident for Nicolas Bourriaud (2002), as he states, "*it takes two to make an image*" (p. 26). While much has been written about phenomenology in relation to art producing practices (Cohen-Miller, 2013), in this study we took the approach of focussing on how encounters with existing work by historically and socially produced Indigenous 'Others' could transform participants' curricular and pedagogical considerations in response to the call for teachers to include Indigenous voices in their work. We agree with hooks' (1995) avowal that "art is necessarily a terrain of defamiliarization: it may take what we see/know and make us look at it in a new way" (p. 4).

Perhaps the most important aspect of contemporary Indigenous art in this context is rooted in the power of *self-representation*. The artists whose work was selected for this study all address colonization and its persistent impact on Indigenous lives and realities, pointing to the ways in which Indigenous voices have been eliminated or distorted in conventional narratives. Bill Anthes (2015), in writing about the work of Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne), describes Indigenous art-making as "a kind of symbolic or semiotic warfare, undertaken for community protection" (p. 13). In this definition the notion of community protection is central. Artists are not making war, *per se*, but rather they are standing up to be counted, pointedly drawing our attention back to their communities and the systems of values that have defined and sustained them since long before contact.

Learning takes time and patience—it is recursive and reiterative. Learning deepens over time, and our journeying towards it is continual. It takes patience to unpack the ways in which Western ideologies, such as Enlightenment thinking and expansionism, continue to inform modern Canadian thought (Donald, 2019). It takes patience to unlearn exclusionary thinking and relearn inclusionary narratives. In an educational context, this means implementing Indigenous education not as a multicultural curricular add-on, but as an immersive model that is critical and literate in nature and makes transparent its sociocultural matrix as it develops (Silva & Langhout, 2011). We need to approach Indigenous thought, as Haig Brown (2010) suggests, as a secondary discourse that Canadians need to learn much in the same way that Indigenous people have had to learn Western thought as a secondary discourse.

Participants in the pilot workshop, entitled "Are we teaching about First Nations Backwards?," included both an undergraduate and graduate class, each with approximately 15 students, at a university in British Columbia, Canada. Over the course of two one-hour

sessions, participants were introduced to an interactive presentation aimed at directing their teaching practices towards project-based learning through Indigenous art. Active discussion using Bohm's (1996) model of dialogue played a major role in this portion of the program. The researchers followed ethics guidelines and secured permission to undertake the study, ensuring that each participant read and signed a consent form.

During the first session, following a brief introduction, students were asked to consider what they remembered learning about Indigenous people in their K-12 education and were encouraged to share their recollections in small groups. We wanted to facilitated students' ability to access what Crowther (2009) terms, in relation to his discussion of phenomenological depth, as "the ontological reciprocity of [the] subject and object of experience" (p. 3). After ten minutes of animated conversation, students discussed their thoughts with the group as a whole. While a few participants reported a wealth of experience through programs with local First Nations, the majority recalled limited learning about historic life ways. A few students reported recalling nothing at all about Indigenous people in their early schooling. In both classes, the consensus was that there was not enough opportunity offered during their school years to address the on-going presence of Indigenous people. Moreover, there had been little encouragement for students to do their own learning in this area. In many cases, it was not part of the curriculum. Statements expressed during the workshop were reflected in comments written by participants at the end of the workshop and submitted to the researchers.

Participants were then shown a series of four slides: *Screaming Shaman No. 4* (1994), Jane Ash-Poitras; *Cultural Briefs* (1996), Teresa Marshall; *Red Man watching White Man Trying to Fix Hole in the Sky* (1990), Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun; and *Totems* (2007), Brian Jungen. These works were selected based on broad criteria that included: visual interest, modernity, political themes, regional representation, and atypical aesthetics (compared to traditional material culture works, such as totem poles, beadwork, and masks, for example). Importantly, the works selected present examples of radical acts of self-representation, often in ways that draw attention to the previously silenced histories and current realities of Indigenous peoples. Above all, consideration was given to the potential of each work to engage the viewer in a dialogue, in the Dewey-an sense, where art functions as a portal between two solitudes.

At each slide participants were invited to get up and examine the works on the screen more closely. They were encouraged to make connections and associations of whatever kind to the work, and to discuss their thoughts with one another. In many ways, this activity was meant to mirror the experiences of museum visitors, activating the social and contemplative type experiences described by Kirchberg and Trondle (2015). At the end of the activity, participants reported enjoying the freedom to look at art without concern that there was a

single correct way to view and interpret it. Although in other contexts an argument can be made for the careful and deliberate interpretation of art works (Meszaros, 2006), in this context it was the openness of the invitation to look that superseded more complex arguments around interpretation. Participants also noted the animation and palpable engagement in the room. Many were surprised at the wide range of contemporary art they were shown and expressed the relief they felt with the idea that there was no correct answer and all descriptions of what they were seeing or feeling in relation to the art were welcome.

Students were then given a brief background about historic display practices, colonization, and the development of the modern museum (Clifford, 1988; Duncan, 1994). They were introduced to the notion that Indigenous subject matter in museums and in schools often rests on colonial narratives that are anchored in the distant past and in the curio collections of the first few generations of European visitors. These early ideas about Indigenous people and cultures are still resonant in classrooms, as teaching about the historic life ways of Indigenous people subtly reiterates the notion that this continent was here for the settling, and that Indigenous civilizations were inferior to those of Europeans (King, 2012). In effect, this perpetuates a colonial version of the Canadian narrative and cements stereotypes rooted in exoticism and difference. It also locks Indigenous peoples in an ethnographic past and supplants opportunities for learning about the forces of colonization in the formation of Canada, and the impact this has had on the lives of contemporary Indigenous peoples.

In the final segment of the first session, an inversion of this canon was offered. We returned to the question, "are we teaching about First Nations backwards?" Participants were invited to consider the difference that rooting curriculum about Indigenous peoples in the present might make to their perceptions and to the perceptions of their students. In discussing these questions in small groups briefly before the end of the session, participants reflected on their own early education again, and began to question why they were not taught in their past schooling what had been covered during the workshop. They began to sense that a very important part of the Canadian story was missing from their early learning.

At the end of the first session, participants were asked to submit a written reflection in response to the following: Thinking about what you have seen during this presentation, how might this idea inform your own teaching practice in the future? What other aspects of Indigenous culture might you bring into your work? What is the cost of ignoring First nations culture and ideas in our classrooms?

During the second session, students were reminded of Bohm's (1996) four aspects of effective dialogue, which they were employing as part of their regular course work (listening, suspending, respecting, and voicing). Participants then arranged themselves in a circle and

were given the following prompt: What do you recall from last week that sparked ideas for either your teaching practice or for your own learning? After several minutes of discussion, participants were given another prompt: What might it mean to teach about Indigenous Peoples in the present before addressing the past? As a final component to the sessions, students were shown a political cartoon from the website, *The Oatmeal*, (Inman, 2013) that detailed reasons Christopher Columbus Day in America is a questionable celebration. It provided an alternate account of the 'discovery' of the Americas focusing on the violent impact that contact had on Indigenous peoples, and of the decimation that ensued as a result of not only disease, but cultural destruction as well.

Analysis

After the second session, students were asked to submit a written reflection on their overall impression of the program, what they saw, heard, and felt over the two sessions. Their responses were gathered and coded, then transcribed without reference to any identifying information. The data was then reviewed using the strategy of thematic analysis to detect significant units of meaning and thematic patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2012). We also looked to Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) framework for thematic analysis, attracted to their foundation in phenomenology as an alternative to the dominant Western positivist paradigm of traditional research, as much as for its resonance with our own interest in the power of taking a phenomenological approach. In respect of both analytic methodologies, reflections were read and re-read multiple times in order to detect units of meaning and narrowed down into key themes.

Several recurrent words that indicated enthusiasm, such as *connection*, *engagement*, *understanding*, and *confidence,* emerged from our analysis. There were 33 mentions of transformed thinking (sometimes framed as "eye-opening"), and 26 mentions of the importance of Indigenous art. On the other hand, while none of the participants rejected the process they were exposed to, 37 mentions were made of lingering concerns about their ability to mobilize this learning, along with limited knowledge base, and being fearful of making errors. All 30 participants expressed some level of enthusiasm, and more than half of the participants were both enthusiastic and concerned. Reponses were further organised into three major themes.

Stumbling Blocks

Students frequently referred to resistance, limited knowledge base, and feelings of anxiety. This theme reflects similar anxieties described in the work of several authors working in anti-racist education (Schick & St. Denis, 2003, 2005). Even in the course of recognizing their lack of knowledge and avoidance of Indigenous content, a few students commented in their

reflections that these problems would continue to deter them.

In support of this theme, the following excerpts are offered:

- "…resistant toward discussing Indigenous culture for fear that I will get it wrong." (Participant 16)

- "What stood out to me is how Indigenous education is seen and felt as such a sensitive topic…" (Participant 24)

- "While I have been educated via schooling and first-hand experience about Indigenous people I was surprised to notice that I mainly only know the history. I couldn't tell you much about current Indigenous people." (Participant 20)

- "I have realized that I know very little about current First Nations identity and traditions, and this is something I need to look for and research myself – no one is going to come to me with this information." (Participant 22)

Kraehe, Hood, and Travis (2015) site ignorance as an active strategy rooted in the idea that by not knowing we cannot be implicated. The fear seems to be that *knowing* means things will change. So, while participants recognize gaps in both their learning, and in school curriculum, there remains a resistance to what filling in those gaps may ultimately mean. There is also evidence here of some of the elements of "white fragility" (Di Angelo, 2018), with the deeming of Indigenous education as a sensitive topic. This points to a common strategy for settler educators who avoid Indigenous education citing their fear of reprisal if a mistake is made.

Connection

Students repeatedly used the words *relevant* and *connection* in relation to how they felt their own students might perceive the approach of beginning with the present. This was especially evident in contrast to reflecting on their own learning about Indigenous people in an historicised way with little to no reference to current lifestyles, political issues, and culture. Bringing the present forward seemed to provide a promising platform for changing those old habits. The idea of looking at art also carried significant implications for participants.

By way of example, the following excerpts are offered:

- "…learning about First Nations starting with their present art allows them to self-represent even when teachers are not First Nations themselves." (Participant 4)

- "Art has a powerful way of connecting us to our emotional selves." (Participant 7)

- "Exposure is important to overcome stereotypes and engage in dialogue. Context is everything too." (Participant 14)

- "This seems so much more relevant than the drudgery of learning about the past before having an understanding of the present." (Participant 2)

- "Previously, when I thought about Indigenous art, I thought exclusively of ornate wood carvings and other sculptural works made from natural materials. The paintings that we looked at gave me more to work with..." (Participant 29)

- "The most enjoyable part of the last two sessions about Indigenous education was the art as a means of communicating issues and views about Indigenousness. I really thought that everyone was able to connect to the art in some way…" (Participant 22)

What seems most evident here is that in many cases participants were not even aware that they had preconceived notions about Indigenous people. It was only once they were shown works of art that challenged their assumptions that they could be brought to the fore.

Transformed Thinking

Given that transformative pedagogy was a key element of our work, it was rewarding to note the success of this methodological consideration in our analysis. Participants referred frequently to *teaching*, *learning*, and feelings of enthusiasm for new ideas and approaches. Many of them expressed surprise that they had never noted that change within their classroom curriculum was possible. Several participants immediately made concrete connections to their teaching practices and were excited to have their preconceived notions disrupted.

Supporting expressions, such as those below, were common:
- "You have changed my thinking forever. I cannot now imagine beginning from the past…" (Participant 2)

- "…gives students a connection to the culture in a way that will be relevant, and allows them to…learn about the past through the present—thus turning the past from something to memorize to something that is meaningful in understanding the present." (Participant 4)

- "…more aware of assumptions that we make about First Nations/Indigenous peoples and people in general of any culture…As well, teaching about the present before we teach about the past is something I never thought about!" (Participant 6)

- "I enjoyed thinking about starting in the present to eventually better understand the past…Starting in the present also seems like a fabulous way to explore stereotypes and current issues." (Participant 7)

- "…it helped me to see the picture from a different perspective, from the other side." (Participant 30)

It became clear that there were two key factors significant to participants' learning. The first was the introduction of contemporary content that ignited transformative thinking by inverting traditional curriculum. The 20th century focus on viewing Canada's history as a linear sequence that only really concerned itself with Indigenous peoples at and around the time of contact has meant that generation after generation of students learned to see Indigenous people as concerns of history, rather than as peers in the present. In large part, this is also responsible for participants' expressions of reluctance and concern when considering addressing Indigenous content in their lessons. The sequence of activities in this exploratory study allowed for a significant shift in perspective that opened participants to seeing both their own education, and Indigenous peoples, in a new way. It was also clear from their reflections that participants, many of whom were practicing teachers, could see advantages for their own students in shifting the traditional sequence of learning about Indigenous people and history in Canada.

The second key factor for participants was the nature of the art selected--contemporary political and identity-based art as Indigenous self-representation. Many students expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity for artistic dialogue (Dewey, 1931). Some expressed pleasant surprise at having their preconceived notions of Indigenous art challenged. Other participants wrote about the emotional nature of the engagement and expressed excitement about the connective power of looking at the art works.

Conclusion

We are responsible for the stories we tell our children, and we must have the courage to tell them well and truthfully. The power of art to open dialogue between maker and viewer played a significant role in participants' experiences of transformative shifts in thinking. In many cases, the initial shift was moving from traditional and necessarily limited notions of what constitutes Indigenous art, to seeing contemporary Indigenous artists as real people in the present, engaged in radical acts of self-expression. This seemed to illuminate the thinking of most participants, producing a deeper level of reflection directed towards uncovering and interrogating their assumptions. They were able to see the ways in which they had been carrying unexamined stereotypes about Indigenous people. This in turn rendered them more

receptive to looking at the ways in which those stereotypes were created by colonial mores. Further, they became aware of how such stereotypes are debunked by the realities of contemporary Indigenous people. Through even the most initial level of phenomenological exploration, participants began to view art not merely as decorative, but as communicative. They began to detect their own knowledge gaps, and better still to understand how they might be able to fill them in. They began to develop new levels of literacy for working in decolonizing ways.

The second significant finding was the development of participants' sense of agency in relation to curricular materials and classroom practice. Because many had their own teachings about Indigenous peoples rooted in the remote past, it simply had not occurred to some participants that they had the agency to change the story themselves. While some still expressed trepidation around lack of knowledge and fear of making errors, they did acknowledge art as a powerful tool in aiding them to think more deeply about their relationship with Indigenous peoples and how they could present a more inclusive curriculum to their own students. Making connections between their lack of prior knowledge and their anxiety about implementing Indigenous education was also instructive. Participants began to understand where and how they needed to improve their own education to effect these changes.

The success of such a program is really only measurable if there is evidence of transformative change. In the context of education, that means measurable differences in both curricular and pedagogical approaches within the subsequent teaching practice of participants. According to Curry-Stevens (2007), to guarantee such a transformation in teaching practice, participants need support in the formation and implementation of sharing their learning. While this initial study did not include a component of sustained support for participants, subsequent research within a teacher education program included supportive reading groups and elicited further evidence of the potential for success in this methodology (Leddy, 2018). Subsequent iterations have included the use of five guiding phenomenological questions to guide dialogic inquiries (what do I see, what does it remind me of, what do I like, what do I dislike, and what do I need to learn), and this work has been carried out in both teacher education courses and in graduate programs in education. Future research might build on phenomenological depth in relation to Indigenous art experience and transformative learning by considering further connections between meaning making and perspective transformation as a result of other forms of arts engagement, including Indigenous art pedagogies and art making.

We are all at different stages of our journeys as educators. We live and teach within ever changing circumstances and ecologies, as do our students. Rare is the educator who is utterly complacent about their students' learning, or about their own teaching practices. But we

simply cannot teach what we don't know. And sometimes we cannot see what it is we do not know until we are invited to look. Learning to see art as a phenomenological arena that welcomes dialogue and the interrogation of self and difference presents a powerful stimulus for transformative learning and the development of decolonial literacy. Exploration of our own personal, local, and national relations with Indigenous peoples starting from *now* rather than from the distant past has the potential to show us a new path to understanding both how we *are* together and how we *could be* together on this occupied land.

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About the Authors

Dr. Shannon Leddy (Métis) is a Vancouver based teacher and writer whose practice focuses on using transformative pedagogies in decolonizing and Indigenizing teacher education. She holds degrees in Art History and Anthropology from the University of Saskatchewan, an MA in Art History, and a BEd from the University of British Columbia. Her PhD research at Simon Fraser University focused on inviting pre-service teachers into dialogue with contemporary Indigenous art as a mechanism of decolonization in order to help them become adept at delivering Indigenous education without reproducing colonial stereotypes. Before arriving at UBC, Shannon taught high school Art, Social Studies, and English. She is the Co-Chair of the Institute for Environmental Learning, and a Research Fellow with the Institute for Public Education/BC. Her forthcoming book, *Teaching where you are: Weaving slow and Indigenous pedagogies*, written with Lorrie Miller, will be available from the University of Toronto Press in May, 2023. She is also a mother and a Nehiyaw/Cree language learner.

Dr. Susan O'Neill gained her PhD in Psychology at Keele University where she served as a Senior Lecturer before moving to Canada where she held academic positions at the University of Western Ontario and Simon Fraser University. She was awarded visiting fellowships at the University of Michigan, University of Melbourne, and Trinity College Dublin. Professor O'Neill has served on several national education and research advisory councils in Canada, UK and USA, as Chair of the Simon Fraser University Steering Committee on Community-Engaged Research, and as President of the UNESCO-affiliated International Society for Music Education. She brings a wealth of international and interdisciplinary teaching, research, leadership and administrative experience with postgraduate degrees in three disciplines (psychology, education and music)." https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2022/mar/professor-susan-oneill-appointed-head-learning-and-leadership