

Reconciliation in Social Work: Creating Ethical Space Through a Relational Approach to Circle Pedagogy

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The Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action challenge educational institutions to address the integration of Indigenous knowledges and teaching pedagogies into mainstream¹ curriculum. Embedded within historical and current contexts, this article emphasizes a decolonizing and relational approach to the application of circle pedagogy. This approach serves to foster the physical and inner ethical spaces needed for engagement and dialogue in social work education and practice because of ongoing colonization and the ethical responsibility to move towards reconciliation.

Keywords: ethical space, reconciliation in social work, circle pedagogy, reflexivity

Kelly Laurila is of Sáami Indigenous and Settler Irish heritages. She is song carrier of an urban Indigenous community youth and women's drum circle. In this time of *Calls to Action* for reconciliation in Canada, Kelly is pursuing doctoral research regarding Indigenous women and girls and police relations, and the search for ethical space that can transform the relationships between them.

The process of reconciliation begins with knowing oneself and what one's roots are in relation to the land where one resides (Freeman, 2014; Regan, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). This self-reflexive process is crucial if one hopes to enter into genuine relationships between Indigenous and Settler² peoples in Canada and in social work. To this endeavour, I acknowledge that I am an Indigenous Sáami³ and Irish woman, born in Canada. Coming from roots of both oppression and privilege, I recognize that I have been colonized, and that I am also a colonizer and Settler as my grandparents left Europe to settle in Canada. With there being few Sáami people in my region, I have learned much from and found kinship with the Anishinaabe⁴ peoples for over 25 years. The Anishinaabe knowledges have been given to me by Anishinaabe Elders and teachers whom I have known for years, and they support me and the path I am walking in education. My reality is that I live intertwined Indigenous and Euro-Western epistemological ways of seeing, being, knowing, and doing (Laurila, 2016).

Having said this, it is not a given that I can use whatever knowledges and practices I want as that would cause further colonization. I want to acknowledge that the Anishinaabe knowledges I walk with are from my lived experiences. It is not a given that I can be an ally to Indigenous peoples just because I want it (Barker, 2010). In addition, I may be an ally in one context but not in another. I have grappled with how to be ethically responsible for what I have come to know and with what knowledge I share. While I cannot unlearn what I know, I have learned that what is shared is context-specific and respectful of the Indigenous peoples with whom I have intentionally built relationships.

This article is a contribution to existing conversations regarding decolonizing pedagogy and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in social work. My contribution pertains to the conscious creation of ethical space that can enable understanding and dialogue not only in the classroom but also in social work practice. I begin this article by providing background information needed to understand the discussion of ethical space. Relevant here is the historical context pertaining to the education of Settler and Indigenous peoples in Canada, social work's involvement with Indigenous peoples, the importance of the circle to Indigenous peoples, and its contribution in education. I then discuss the concept of ethical space and how it holds hope for a way of learning and relating in social work education and practice with Indigenous peoples. With my intention to contribute to reconciliation, I provide an example of how I use circle pedagogy to foster ethical space. I conclude this article with reflexions⁵ of circle pedagogy.

Background

Historical Indigenous Context of Education in Canada

Canada is experiencing a time of raised awareness and tensions with reconciliation between Indigenous and Settler peoples (TRC, 2015). The federal government has publicly apologized and acknowledged the traumatic impact of government policies on forced attendance of Indigenous children at residential schools (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2008). The purpose of these schools was to assimilate the children into dominant society through imposed hegemonic ideology and efforts that conveyed the inferiority of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Battiste, 2013; Cote-Meek, 2014). In many ways, this assimilation continues in today's mainstream education system as Euro-Western centric knowledge dominates many classrooms. Not only does this dominance call into question the relevance of public education to Indigenous learners, it has also prevented many Settlers from learning about Indigenous peoples, colo-

nialism in Canada, and settler colonialism in their own lives. Emphasizing this point, Absolon (2016) stated, "Through a gross omission, education is one of the main culprits in propagating social ignorance and colonial amnesia about Indigenous peoples and colonization in Canada" (p. 46).

According to Battiste (2013), institutions need to critique the monopoly of Euro-Western centric knowledges in education. Hegemonic ideologies that remain unchallenged will continue to marginalize other epistemologies and maintain the status quo of knowledge. Locating Indigenous knowledges within mainstream education can contribute to the decolonization of what is learned and how learning takes place. Battiste (2013) defines decolonization as a process of disrupting normative discourses and singularity of voice by incorporating multiple voices and diverse perspectives and discourses. Inclusion of Indigenous knowledges can also promote understanding and relating with one another, thereby contributing to reconciliation efforts within educational institutions. Battiste (2013) explains that colonization has defined the kind of relationship between Indigenous and Settler peoples as being one of unequal power. Decolonizing education, then, is an opportunity to redefine a different kind of relationship: one that moves towards greater power equities and reconciliation.

In 2015, following its study of the horrific legacy of Indian Residential Schools and colonialism, the TRC issued its *Final Report* and 94 *Calls to Action*, exhorting public institutions to contribute to moving forward with building better and more inclusive relationships between Indigenous and Settler peoples (TRC, 2015). Especially poignant is the fact that *Calls to Action* 1 through 5 are directed to the social work profession.⁶ Education and reconciliation efforts are needed in this field to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care and to develop supports for Indigenous families so that they can stay together (Blackstock, 2009; TRC, 2015).

Decolonization efforts are beginning to be made at the post-secondary level of education. For example, during the same month of the closing of the Commission and release of its *Final Report*, Canada's universities adopted 13 principles that would guide their efforts to enhance educational opportunities for Indigenous students and foster a commitment to the reconciliation process (Universities Canada, 2015). Part of this commitment involves the education of Settler students regarding Indigenous peoples' history, epistemologies, and contemporary experiences. This commitment is expressed through such principles as developing resources and ways to promote dialogue between Indigenous and Settler students, building respectful learning environments and spaces dedicated to Indigenous students, and fostering intercultural engagement among students, faculty, and staff.

Social Work Involvement with Indigenous Peoples

There is a saying that holding up a mirror to a society reflects back the impacts of its social injustices (Ermine, 2007). Such a mirror can reflect back injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples through the social work profession. There is a long history of social work involvement with Indigenous peoples. From the residential school system (Cote-Meek, 2014), to the Sixties Scoop where large numbers of Indigenous children were removed from their families and put into the child welfare system in the 1960s (Blackstock, 2009; Sinclair, 2007; Sinclair, 2016), to the Millennium Scoop and the resulting overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in child welfare (Gilchrist, as cited in Sinclair, 2007, p. 67), and now to the Foster Care Scoop where there is ongoing adoption of Indigenous children by non-Indigenous foster families (Sinclair, 2016), social work has been implicated in traumatic assimilation tactics (Kennedy-Kish (Bell), Sinclair, Carniol, & Baines, 2017; Strega & Esquao, 2015). Social work continues to be implicated in contemporary social services through the ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the child welfare system (Absolon, 2010; Baskin, 2016; Blackstock, 2009) and the disproportionately high numbers of Indigenous men and women in the prison system (Belanger, 2014; Chan & Chunn, 2014; TRC, 2015).

Despite the social work profession being rooted in altruistic values such as social welfare, justice, and equality (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2017), the ideological interpretation of these values in social work is based on hegemonic state policies (Tamburro, 2013) and, thus, these values are not being translated into practice that helps Indigenous peoples. Instead, the good intentions of social workers are hurting Indigenous peoples and their families (Blackstock, 2009). Tamburro (2013) and Hart (2010) have argued that social work education needs to be rooted in a post-colonial/anti-colonial theoretical lens that critiques hegemonic dominance and fosters awareness of worldviews, explores the effects of colonization, and advocates for the use of less oppressive practices. For there to be justice in social work with Indigenous peoples, decolonizing ideology and practices need to be utilized in ways that actually support and strengthen Indigenous knowledges, values, and child and family welfare.

Indigenous Knowledges of the Circle

The concept of circle pedagogy used in education is not new. As a decolonizing strategy, it is important to acknowledge that the circle was central to Indigenous epistemologies (Graveline, 1998; Hart, 2002) long before it was ever applied in formal Euro-Western education. The concept of the circle derived from Indigenous peoples' understandings of their relationships

to all that is in creation: an understanding referred to as *all our relations* (e.g., Absolon, 2010; Baskin, 2016; J. Becker, personal communications, 2003-present; G. Cyr, personal communications, 2014-present; Hart, 2002; Smith, 2012). This understanding includes Indigenous peoples' relationships with themselves, with their families, communities, and nations, and with the land, water, sun, moon, plants, trees, animals, and other living beings. From this relational worldview, there is an understanding that everything in life is interrelated and interdependent with one another. Thus, something or someone cannot be understood or related to without understanding how it is connected with everything else.

Conceptually, the circle represents a wholistic⁷ approach to looking at all that life encompasses. Metaphorically, the wholistic approach is viewed as a circle that has four quadrants or directions: east, south, west, and north. There are four aspects of being that correspond with each direction. According to Anishinaabe teachings about the circle and the interconnect-edness of all of life, I have learned from Elders and teachers in southern Ontario that the east direction has a spiritual aspect; the south has an emotional/relational aspect; the west has a mental (cognitive) aspect; and the north has a physical aspect. I view the spiritual aspect as a life force that sustains individuals and communities. Spirit is what provides a foundation for one's life and for the direction one takes. Spirit helps one to look inside oneself to find answers to many of life's questions, and spirit is the place where intentions are realized. The emotional/relational aspect of learning connects with the emotions one is experiencing and what is triggering them. It also pertains to a reflexive use of self by tuning into one's relationships with others and the implications these have for oneself. The mental aspect is the place of knowledge, learning, and understanding information. The physical aspect pertains to the physical environment where learning is taking place. It also pertains to the analysis and synthesis of knowledge and experiences, and action plans for applying what has been learned. It is noted by Kathy Absolon (2010) that the spiritual, emotional/relational, mental, and physical aspects are interpreted within the contexts of the past, present, and future.

Applications of the circle have been interpreted in various Indigenous and Settler ways in the classroom (Baskin, 2016; Boyd, MacNeil, & Sullivan, 2006; Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Graveline, 1998; Palmer, 2007; Roffey & McCarthy, 2013; Sinclair, 2004). Rather than discuss Settler applications, my discussion centres Indigenous ways. Common among various applications of circle pedagogies are the physical set-up of the classroom and the concepts of wholism and interrelatedness (Baskin, 2016; Graveline, 1998). The seating is arranged in a circle, and everyone has a place in the

circle. Graveline (1998) states that when the four aspects of the self are engaged in the learning experience, there is often recognition of the complexities of knowledge and, hence, a deeper learning experience. The concept of interrelatedness is seen and experienced in the circle as learners begin to share their thoughts and understandings of course material and relevant personal experiences with one another. I have found that the experience of circle pedagogy is about being present in the moment, listening to learn, learning to listen, and practicing self-reflexivity within the circle. These concepts can help to foster a space within the learning environment that aids genuine understanding and dialogue with one another.

Ethical Space in Education

The idea of an ethical space was conceived by Roger Poole (1972). Having himself been influenced by Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy of subjectivity, which analyzed how one is intimately related to knowledge, Poole (1972) recognized the inherent subjective nature of all knowledges. He explained that there are moments when one becomes aware of one's own subjectivity and recognizes that someone else might have a different truth (perspective). Herein lies the place between the intentions of one and those of another. It is a place where the unspoken intentions confront one another and the entities decide how to engage with each other. Ethical behaviour happens when a decision is made to engage for the purpose of understanding one another.

Adapting Poole's work of ethical space, Ermine (1995, 2007) specifically addresses the contrasting knowledge systems and contentious relationships between Indigenous and Settler peoples and how ethical space can be the place for engagement and understanding. With each entity relating differently to knowledge systems of history, traditions, worldview, and social and political realities, a dichotomy is created between them. However, within this dichotomy there is a space of inner experience. In this "inner space," Ermine (2007, p. 103) states that there is an acknowledgement of the presence of the other but that this acknowledgement is not yet stated externally. Ermine (2007) says that it is this unstated acknowledgement of each other's presence that constitutes many of the deeper thoughts and assumptions that influence the relationships between the entities. Ermine (2007) suggests that ethical choices can be made in this space to understand these deeper knowings. Through dialogue with one another, the entities learn what harms, hurts, and creates divisions as well as what is moral and can enhance well-being.

Ethical space is not something that simply exists or just happens between people. It has to be a conscious decision to move into this space and

to be open to learning about one another and oneself, and the assumptions that one brings into the space. Entering this space also means being cognizant of the ongoing effects of colonization and the potential to recolonize the space and one another if these effects are left unquestioned. If moving into this space can happen, then there can be the potential for understanding what it means to have a collaborative and equitable partnership (Ermine, 2007; Styres, Zinga, Bennett, & Bomberry, 2010) where there is no fear of assimilation by the other (Longboat, 2011). There can also be the potential for the sharing and creation of new knowledges based on respectful relations (Ermine, 2007; Kapyrka & Dockstator, 2012; Longboat, 2011).

There are educators who incorporate aspects of ethical space in post-secondary classrooms. For example, Kapyrka and Dockstator (2012) use a pedagogical approach in teaching environmental education called "two-worlds" (p. 98). Herein, there is inclusion of Indigenous and Western environmental knowledge systems in the curriculum but also the utilization of an ethical space that fosters an understanding of these knowledges and recognizes their similarities and differences. The authors note that in this ethical space of engagement, neither knowledge system merges into or becomes the other; instead, each is recognized for how it can complement the other. For example, bringing in the Indigenous concept of *wholism* can serve to raise awareness of the varying sources of knowledges (as opposed to just the intellect) and the interrelatedness of all aspects of life.

Longboat (2011) used the concept of ethical space as the beacon to guide a research study at a secondary school in a community in northern Canada. Despite a high Indigenous student population in the school, administrators and teachers were concerned with low engagement of the students in classes, the curriculum, and the school community. An interesting and significant component of Longboat's research is an understanding of two sources of ethical space. One source pertains to Ermine's (1995) conception of inner space; the other source is physical ethical space, or the physical location where support is given to venture into the inner space. It is a physical place where dialogue is encouraged and where one can discuss contentious issues, ask questions, and express concerns without interruption and/or fear of judgement. In the case of Longboat's research, a room was located in the school that was considered a supportive and inclusive environment, where various student, parent, teacher, and administrators' discussions were facilitated in independent sharing circles. Through the process of negotiating the physical and inner ethical spaces, participants were encouraged to share their questions and concerns and offer constructive plans for engagement of Indigenous students at the school.

A pedagogy that intentionally engages physical and inner ethical space in the classroom is a way to contribute to reconciliation in education. This kind of pedagogy can prompt learners to critique unchallenged hegemonic assumptions and explore new ways of learning and relating to one another. Beyond the emphasis in this article on using circle pedagogy to create ethical space and dialogue with Indigenous peoples, the principles could be considered for other relations where clashing worldviews provoke deep-seated epistemological, religious, immigrant, and racial tensions.

Application of Circle Pedagogy That Fosters Ethical Space in Social Work

I provide an example of how I use circle pedagogy in undergraduate and graduate courses to facilitate the creation of ethical space in social work education. Inevitably, there is an exchange and transfer of learning from classroom to practice, and around again. I have included a depiction of this example in Figure 1.

I begin in the centre of the circle. In this location, I acknowledge who I am and where my roots lie. As an educator, I make explicit my intentions for interacting with members in the class and designing the course the way I do. My intention with teaching this course is to facilitate the creation of an ethical space that enables learners to critique and reflect on their personal and social work relationships and knowledges regarding Indigenous peoples in Canada.

I take time to teach learners how I use the circle and from where my knowledge and practices come. This discussion promotes a sharing and critique of one's assumptions and sources of knowledge. I discuss protocols of the sharing circle, whereby each person is given the opportunity to speak, one after the other, following a direction around the circle. The protocols allow learners to know what is expected of them and to teach learners how to speak their opinions and thoughts in respectful ways. For example, I teach learners to speak from the "I think (feel) that..." position, rather than referencing their comments using someone else's name. This encourages one to be accountable for what one says. The sharing circle teaches participants to listen to one another. With having to listen and wait one's turn, the circle teaches patience and encourages active listening; thus, responses are less reactive and more reflective. Listening in the circle can also encourage reflexive thought. This involves critically thinking about how one is implicated in the comments just discussed. I have found that taking the time to lay this foundation at the beginning of the term helps to foster respect and positive connections within the circle as the semester continues, allowing learners to stay engaged when unsettlement and tensions arise. With an eye towards social work practice, laying this

foundation helps the social worker and individual(s) learn each other's contexts and how they will engage with each other. Laying this foundation is also a necessary process for movement towards inner ethical space.

The east quadrant is considered to be the place of beginnings. Here, I cover course content about Indigenous peoples before European contact and how they had their own political, economic, and social structures to govern their lives within their geographic regions (Belanger, 2014; Dickason & McNab, 2009). Spirit is discussed as it guides every aspect of Indigenous peoples' lives, from the connection to the land, to ceremonies, to surviving in their environments, to their ways of seeing, being, knowing,

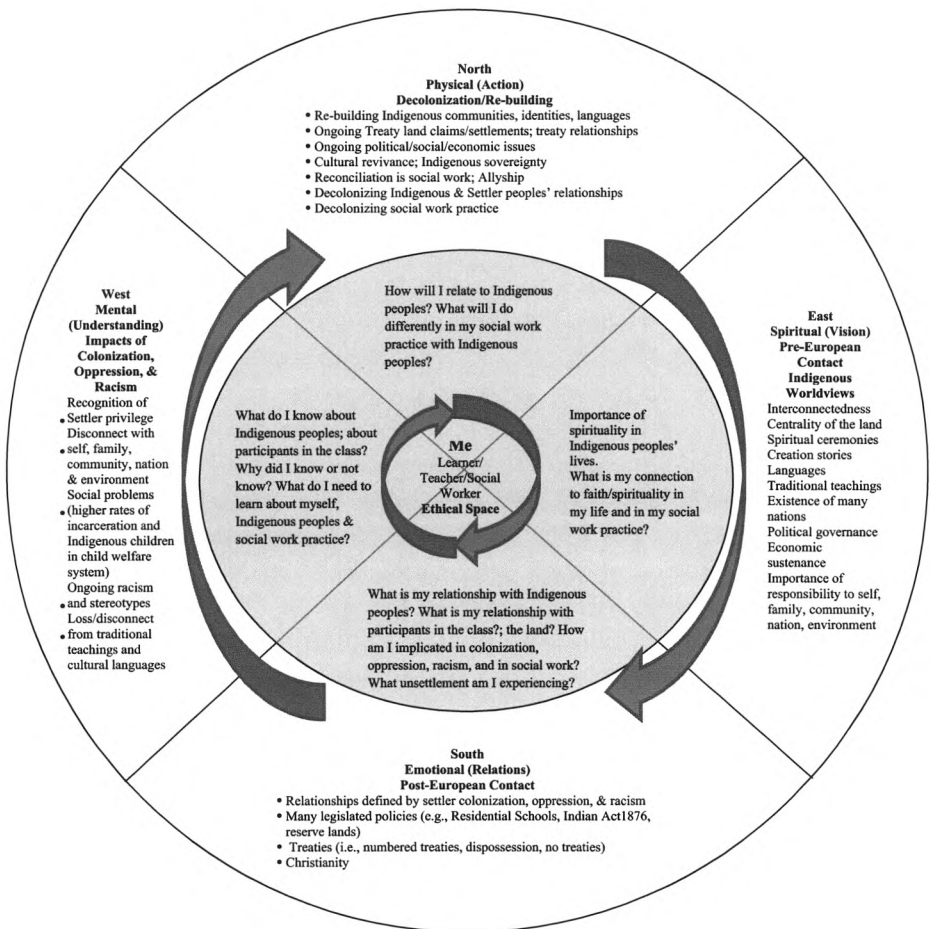


Figure 1. Circle pedagogy and the fostering of ethical space in social work education and practice.

and doing (G. Cyr, personal communication, May 17, 2015). Spirit is expressed in the learning environment (or in one's social work practice) through one's intentions and how we speak to one another. I speak to the learners about the word *intention*, recognizing that, while learners have varying faiths and beliefs, most can likely relate to intention. Thus, I ask learners to engage with their own intentions regarding spirit and what will ground/guide them in their own lives, in their social work practice, and in working with diverse individuals, families, and communities with varying faiths. I also ask them to reflect on the importance of spirituality to many Indigenous peoples' lives and the implications that this reality could have for them as social workers.

Moving to the south quadrant brings an exploration of the emotional/relational aspects. Students learn about the relationships Indigenous peoples had with European Settlers during the brief time of friendship and reciprocity enacted through early treaty agreements (Tehanetorens, 1983). Students also learn about the relationships of domination, oppression, and racism created and sustained through policies to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Settler society (Belanger, 2014; Dickason & McNab, 2009). As they are learning about these relationships, students are simultaneously learning about themselves; they are asked to reflexively think about their personal and social work relationships with Indigenous peoples, as well as how they are implicated in ongoing dynamics of colonization, oppression, and racism in these domains.

Regan (2010) notes that Settler peoples have not needed to ask themselves these questions as their lives may have little relevance to and interaction with Indigenous peoples. With many Settler peoples having grown up believing the one story they learned about the settlement of Canada (i.e., benevolent peacemakers settling the new lands), they have not needed to question the plight of Indigenous peoples. As a result, many Settler peoples have attributed the problems that Indigenous peoples have faced as beholden to Indigenous peoples themselves and not to the impacts of Settlers' own colonial mentality and historical ignorance. Regan (2010) speaks to the need for Settlers to decolonize with regard to Canada's history and present with Indigenous peoples. She also identifies the act of claiming ignorance as a colonial strategy (i.e., when you don't know anything, you can't do anything). Necessarily, social work education and practice requires a reflexive process in which learners wrestle with the dissonance raised from learning about Indigenous peoples' experiences and social work's oppressive involvement in these experiences, as well as the unsettlement that surfaces as they grapple with their own implication as social workers in ongoing colonization. This wrestling and unsettlement

process is indeed reflective of the experiences many Settler peoples in Canada are undergoing as they come to grips with the truth of what Indigenous peoples have experienced and how they are implicated in the reconciliation process (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015).

Still within the southern quadrant, I take students outside to sit on the land. I ask them to close their eyes, to be still, and to listen to what they hear around them. I then ask them to open their eyes and observe what they see, to pay attention to what they are experiencing and feeling. In preparation for this time outside, I ask them to bring a photo and/or a story that speaks to their perspective on connection to the land. This is often a very moving experience for the learners as some admit that they had taken for granted what was around them and that they had not really thought about how they were connected to the land. When hearing and reading about government policies that dispossess Indigenous peoples from their lands and relocate them onto reserves, away from their familiar geographical locations that sustained them, learners express guilt for being on this land. At the same time, they feel conflicted because they have had many enjoyable moments on the land. Many have also felt that the land they are from has always felt like home to them. I talk about the land being a part of their lives too (i.e., they don't exist in a place without land), and that the land has helped them to sustain the life they have now. These reflexions can foster movement into the ethical space of understanding what Indigenous peoples might feel about the land, and also help learners to connect with the importance of the land to themselves as Settler peoples.

It can be quite disconcerting to realize that the history of Canada that one knew is not what was, and that, in fact, it was much worse. Learners will experience varying emotional reactions to course content and sharing circle discussions. Guilt seems to be a common emotion when talking with Settler learners about Indigenous peoples (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015; Regan, 2010), their histories, and the ongoing injustices many Indigenous peoples experience. I consider it imperative to facilitate an ethical space to address guilt and other difficult emotions learners may be experiencing. This is part of what Anuik and Gillies (2012) refer to as nourishing the learning spirit. This nourishment is about validating learners' experiences and feelings, and providing support as they wrestle with challenging and conflicting knowledge. Treating the classroom or one's social work practice as a place of physical and inner ethical space allows for the expression of emotions and sharing for the purpose of understanding one another.

While acknowledging this challenging process and encouraging learners to engage in reflexive class discussions and written work about their emotions and thoughts, I am also mindful to turn their gaze towards

efforts that will mobilize them to a new stance. I focus on responsibility, one of the principles documented in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report (RCAP, 1996) and again in the final report of the TRC (2015). Both reports note that responsibility is required for a renewed relationship between Indigenous and Settler peoples. The spirit of this principle pertains to being accountable for one's actions, promises, and the impacts one has on others. By making conscious efforts to engage in an ethical space in the social work classroom and in practice, one is accepting the responsibility of being accountable for one's actions and inactions pertaining to Indigenous peoples.

As a way to mobilize emotions and foster responsibility, I ask learners to attend an Indigenous event and to speak with an Indigenous person about the event and its importance to the person. Learners prepare a reflexive paper on what they learned, and they share their experiences with others in a sharing circle. Learners often talk about how intimidating it is to speak with an Indigenous person, knowing that they have limited knowledge of Indigenous peoples. Many fears come out through this sharing. Learners fear that the person they ask will not want to speak to them; they fear being seen as ignorant. These concerns are talked about in the circle before learners arrange to speak with someone and again afterwards, to help them debrief and reflect on their experiences. Learners may feel surprised that they were met with respect and openness. They may feel relieved that some of their previously held assumptions and fears were false. Some may feel hurt and rejected because their invitation for engagement was not welcomed. Sharing in the circle brings out the diversity of responses from Indigenous people and of learners' experiences and reflexions. A deeper self-reflexion may emerge that has them questioning their role and assumptions about the interaction. For example, a learner may ask, "Why did I expect that if I asked they would speak to me?" or "What is it about rejection that I am afraid of?" or "How would I, as a social worker, react if an Indigenous client did not want to engage with me?"

In the ethical space that has been created in the circle, this sharing helps learners to better understand themselves, each other, and their roles in social work practice with Indigenous peoples. It is also an opportunity to provide support to one another. While closure cannot be expected with regard to all of the learners' experiences, recognizing and attending to them validates the process they are going through. I also think that sustaining ethical space enables reflexion, and thinking through the conflicting parts and coming to new insights. As Anuik and Gillies (2012) state, the mind makes meaning when the spiritual and emotional capacities are engaged.

These discussions raise reflexions about knowing. Settler peoples are not accustomed to being the ones who are not in the know (Regan, 2010); neither are social workers. In addition to the profession of social work being framed within familiar dominant Settler ideology, the emphasis on competence training (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2017; National Association of Social Workers, 2017) can give social work students and practitioners the expectation that they should be “in the know” in their social work practice. As stated by Regan (2010), if there is to be decolonization and, thereby, room for Indigenous narratives, then Settler peoples need to acknowledge themselves as “vulnerable ‘not knowers’ who are willing to examine our dual positions as colonizers-perpetrators and colonizer-allies” (p. 28). Within the ethical space I ask learners to engage with Indigenous peoples from a place of not knowing, to enter into a dialogue to learn and understand.

Incorporating the west quadrant marks the place of learning and understanding. This is the place most familiar to those who teach and learn in Euro-Western academia. It is the place where readings are assigned and new information is given to learners. Using circle pedagogy is a way for learners to engage with and relate to course material and each other. Thus, the circle lends itself to exposing new information and perspectives that, on one’s own, one might not have thought about. This relates to Absolon (2010) stating that, “Sometimes we don’t know what we don’t know until exposed to knowledge and experiences of others” (p. 83).

Learners learn how colonization, oppression, and racism have impacted and continue to impact Indigenous peoples in Canada. They also learn how social workers have been implicated in these resounding effects through their practices (Baskin, 2016; Hart, 2002, 2010; Sinclair, 2004). Learning about colonization necessarily leads to discussions about what decolonization would look like in social work practice. It involves not only learning about the history of Indigenous peoples but also using this history to inform envisioned social work practice. As a decolonizing pedagogy, the circle process encourages engagement in one’s inner ethical space: to consider various perspectives, to question previously held assumptions, and to listen in order to learn.

It is in the north quadrant where the physical aspects are considered. On one level, this pertains to the actual physical environment in the classroom. The rows of tables are moved aside and the chairs are put in a circle so that everyone can see each other. Efforts are made to create a respectful learning environment where everyone is encouraged to listen, speak, and voice questions and concerns. The physical also pertains to consolidations of various learning experiences (i.e., spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and

physically). Learners learn about their roles as potential allies, addressing injustices and creating equitable ways to support Indigenous people in their work as social workers. They also learn how Indigenous peoples and communities are reviving self-determination, their cultures, languages, traditions, and communities.

As a way of bringing the action pieces together, a final sharing circle comprises the last class. Sharing food with one another is a natural way of bringing people together. While eating and sitting in the circle, learners share what they have learned and what they will carry forward (i.e., taking responsibility) from this class into their lives and into the social work profession. Indigenous peoples and Settler allies from the local community are invited to participate in this sharing circle.

Reflexions of Circle Pedagogy

Using circle pedagogy is a decolonizing choice for educators. There is a risk of vulnerability that comes with its application (Ecclestone, 2007). There is also the potential for learning and growth (Wong, 2004). Using this pedagogy can be a way to move outside one's familiar comfort zone of knowing, to learn how dominant beliefs and normative practices sustain social inequities (e.g., Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012).

My ethics as a social worker and educator prompt my own reflexion on the discomfort learners may experience with circle pedagogy. I see that the classroom is a microcosm of the society in which we live. People are being who they are. They are carrying their cultural heritages, power differences, worldviews, assumptions, beliefs, and experiences/perspectives of colonization, racism, oppression, and privilege with them, wherever they go, including into the classroom. For these reasons, Zembylas and McGlynn (2012) suggest that the classroom is not neutral space or safe. These dynamics get played out in various verbal and non-verbal ways.

Redmond (2010) advocates for bringing these dynamics to light in the classroom by creating "intentional space" (p. 9). This involves naming the tensions and addressing the false expectations that the classroom is immune to what exists in public spaces in society. Redmond (2010) notes that having learners reflect on their experiences of discomfort may help them to see how they have been shaped by the dominant culture and implicated in maintaining hegemonic thought. I do not know from one academic term to the next who the learners will be in my classroom, and I do not know what personal histories and experiences they will bring with them. This is precisely why I use circle pedagogy and strive to intentionally create an ethical space of engagement in the classroom. I also stress this same creation of ethical space between the social worker and the Indige-

nous people with whom one is engaged—to enter into the space not knowing but having the intention to learn.

Use of circle pedagogy can raise questions and fears about appropriation of Indigenous knowledges and practices. I have two considerations for the reader to ponder. First, I consider it neither ethical nor responsible to use the concepts of the Medicine Wheel derived from the Anishinaabe peoples unless one is Anishinaabe, one has been given these teachings to use by an Anishinaabe person (and therefore, declare this as such), and/or one invites an Indigenous Elder or teacher to speak about these teachings. There is a nuanced understanding of Indigenous concepts that cannot be fully ascertained without lived Indigenous experience; thus, the sharing of Indigenous knowledges by non-Indigenous educators only recolonizes this knowledge.

Second, I see that decolonization in education is about giving voice to non-Western knowledges—in this case, Indigenous knowledges. There is so much value and utility to be learned about the relevance of Indigenous knowledges in many academic disciplines. But the sharing and use of Indigenous knowledges are the ethical components that an educator must contemplate. What to share and how to share are questions to be considered. What is important to remember is that decolonizing is not about replicating Indigenous knowledges but about using the philosophical understandings of Indigenous knowledges and concepts within one's own cultural frame of reference. Thus, people of all cultures have some kind of understandings about the wholistic nature of life and educators may see fit to bring in certain valued pieces of Indigenous knowledges to further an understanding. I hope that educators might feel encouraged to decolonize their spaces by restructuring their pedagogies to include spirit, emotions/relations, mental (i.e., cognitive), and physical aspects that can create richer and more wholistic teaching and learning experiences, all the while acknowledging the origin of their knowledge.

Conclusion

This article is motivated by the reconciliation process underway in Canada and its implications—past, present, and future—for social work educators and practitioners in their engagements with Indigenous peoples. The use of a circle pedagogy that facilitates an ethical space for relating to one another is emphasized. This approach encourages a process of reflexive learning and engagement with one another. Engagement of ethical space has significant implications not only for learners, educators, and social work practitioners working with Indigenous peoples but perhaps also for those desiring to learn and engage in dialogues where religious and racist epistemological tensions exist.

Notes

¹ I use the term *mainstream* to refer to the public education that exists in Canada at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels.

² I wish to denote the terms *Indigenous* and *Settler* as representing peoples who have distinct identification with the land called Canada. I view Indigenous peoples as descendants of the first peoples of the land from precolonial times. In Canada, Indigenous and Aboriginal are often used interchangeably with the legal term *Aboriginal* referring to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. In defining Settler peoples, I refer to Battell Lowman and Barker (2015) who use the term to acknowledge non-Indigenous peoples "inherently bound up with settler colonization of this land" (p. 18). This perspective takes into consideration new immigrants, refugees, visitors on vacations, enslaved peoples, and indentured workers. I want to acknowledge that I use capital letters to reflect the terms Indigenous and Settler as proper nouns.

³ My ancestral roots come from the Indigenous peoples (sometimes referred to as Laplanders) of northern Finland.

⁴ In using the word *Anishinaabe*, I specifically refer to Indigenous word for the Ojibway peoples with whom I am familiar in southern Ontario, Canada.

⁵ In this paper I use the words *reflection* and *reflexion* with intention. These words represent different levels of engagement with critical thinking. I use the word *reflection* to refer to the thinking one does about what happened or what someone said. I use the word *reflexion* to mean critically thinking beyond what happened or what someone said to about how one is implicated in that situation or discussion. For further information, see D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez (2007) and Heron (2005).

⁶ *Call to Action #1*. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care by:

- i. Monitoring and assessing neglect investigations.
- ii. Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.
- iii. Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the history and impacts of residential schools.
- iv. Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the potential for Aboriginal communities and families to provide more appropriate solutions to family healing.
- v. Requiring that all child-welfare decision makers consider the impact of the residential school experience on children and their caregivers.

Call to Action #2. We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, to prepare and publish annual reports on the number of Aboriginal children (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) who are in care, compared with non-Aboriginal children, as well as the reasons for apprehension, the total spending on preventative and care services by child-welfare agencies, and the effectiveness of various interventions.

Call to Action #3. We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle.

Call to Action #4. We call upon the federal government to enact Aboriginal child-welfare legislation that establishes national standards for Aboriginal child apprehension and custody cases and includes principles that:

- i. Affirm the right of Aboriginal governments to establish and maintain their own child-welfare agencies.
- ii. Require all child-welfare agencies and courts to take the residential school legacy into account in their decision making.
- iii. Establish, as an important priority, a requirement that placements of Aboriginal children into temporary and permanent care be culturally appropriate.

Call to Action #5. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Aboriginal families. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 75)

⁷ I prefer the spelling of wholistic. It prompts me to think whole and, as Absolon (2010) also states, “balanced and circular.”

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