Knocking, Unsettling, Ceding: A non-Indigenous teacher's journey towards decolonizing teaching practice in a "remote Indigenous community"

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Abstract

This paper explores a reflexive decolonizing framework, arising from a teachers` first four years of teaching practice in an Indigenous community in the North of what is commonly known as Australia[A1]. The paper seeks to frame a connection between the already-established field of teacher self-reflection, and a need for decolonizing ways of knowing in education, to respect and recenter othered knowledge systems. Autoethnography and open-ended interviews are implemented with Indigenous elders, to explore the self-reflection that a non-Indigenous teacher must embrace to begin to decolonize their practice. Drawing on theories of whiteness (Moreton-Robinson, 2000), othering (Staszak, 2009) and the *Cultural Interface* in settler-Indigenous discursive spaces (Nakata, 2007), this work documents an extended process of teacher self-reflection. Reflecting on Karen Martin's (2008) work *Please Knock Before You Enter*, and in response to Laenui's *Processes of Decolonisation* (2000), starting points are proposed from which teachers can think deeply about their practice concerning ongoing coloniality. The epistemological underpinnings of teachers' practice are explored as the place where decolonizing work must occur across all educational spaces.

Keywords: decolonial; post-colonial; Indigenous; reflection; teacher education

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Introduction

The education experience of Indigenous young people in so-called "Australia"[2] has been shaped entirely by settler colonialism (Behrendt et al., 2012; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016; Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2010; Hogarth, 2016), which has set the backdrop for "trauma and disadvantage that inhibits educational progress for many Indigenous students in the present" (Brown, 2019, p. 56). This educational experience sits on the backdrop of a colonial history that includes frontier wars, displacement from traditional lands and forced removal of children from their families, the ongoing impact of which are felt across all domains including health, education and life expectancy. Australian government approaches of segregation and assimilation have "den[ied] a sufficient education for generations of Aboriginal people" and privileged Western education at the expense of Indigenous ways of knowing (Gray & Beresford, 2008, as cited in Brown, 2019, p. 56).

Australia's policy interactions with Indigenous people continue to be framed around *the gap-discourse* (Rudolph, 2016; Kowal, 2015). *Closing the Gap* refers to Australian government initiatives that seek to close the statistical disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in markers of inequality in health, education and life expectancy (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009). In educational discourse, the gap focuses largely on outcomes of literacy, in which Indigenous students are framed in deficit due to their significantly lower outcomes in both national and international literacy assessments. In the school in which this study takes place, significant policy moves such as those enforcing that the first four hours of every day be taught in English instead of the over 100 Indigenous languages spoken in the Northern Territory alone (NT DET, 2009), have contributed to devaluing of Indigenous knowledges within the schooling space.

Discourse in schooling spaces continues to be centered around Western knowledge, and in the school context of this research, Indigenous knowledge systems (hereafter referred to as *IKS*) tended to be compartmentalized into short weekly sessions on "language and culture". Indigenous *perspectives* have been included in Australian national curriculum since 2011 (Rigney, 2011), but in the community in which this study was conducted, Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies were largely devalued within the school and treated as an aside from the chief policy aims of remedying students' low literacy levels (as reflected in the nation-wide literacy test NAPLAN). Mark Rose has described the education systems' interaction with Indigenous knowledges as a "silent apartheid", and "intellectual segregation" targeting "colonization of the mind" (Rose, 2015). This commentary rang true in the schooling setting in which this study took place.

In an environment where partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities are posed as key to improved educational outcomes (Ma Rhea, 2012; Kearney et al., 2014; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2013),

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2 "Australia" refers to the settler name given to this country, superseding the notion of a singular nationhood over some 500 Indigenous nations, which never ceded sovereignty.

this study poses that reflexivity on the part of teachers is a necessary prerequisite to creating authentic sites of partnership within the classroom. Relationships between predominantly white educators and Indigenous students in colonial spaces are shaped by the lingering connotations that "reinforce the false dichotomy of inferior/superior" (Rudolph, 2018, p. 134). This study sought to apply a decolonizing lens into the minutiae of the relationships between non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous students, focusing on teachers' responsibility for more ethical relationships between themselves and Indigenous members of the classroom. This framework places the onus on settler educators to conduct the reflexive work that is essential for genuinely decolonizing efforts in education, a precursor to partnership and collaboration. This article will begin by describing the methodological approach taken, debating the term decolonization, and then describing phases of decolonization of settler-colonial educators: Acknowledgement, Knocking, Unsettling and Ceding, with a discussion of findings illustrating these phases.

Methodology

As a graduate teacher, I moved to a *remote Indigenous community* to begin teaching. I am a non-Indigenous person, thus an outsider to the community which I will call Clear River, one of immense linguistic and cultural diversity. "Remote Indigenous communities" is the policy shorthand used to describe communities across Australia, remote in terms of their geographical distance from city centers and governments, where some Indigenous communities live. Many of these communities speak a diverse range of Indigenous languages and maintain cultural and educational practices such as ceremonies. Classrooms in these communities continue to be sites of cultural interface (Nakata, 2007) and ethical complexity. This interface refers not only to the interactions between different Indigenous groups within the community but to the contested epistemological ground of the classroom in which non-Indigenous knowledge systems were given primacy over Indigenous ways of knowing. The dominance of non-Indigenous teaching staff means that many Indigenous educators, (many with decades of experience in the classroom, and with varying degrees of recognized education qualifications) are often rendered as classroom help without being recognized as valuable knowledge-holders. This research, focused on finding ways to conduct non-Indigenous teacher practice in such a way that Indigenous knowledge was centered within the classroom and that teaching would become a genuine partnership, documents key shifts in dispositions and thinking that needed to occur to create the conditions where this was possible.

While this work on decolonizing education was focused on an Indigenous community setting, its implications are not limited to this setting. Many Indigenous students attend "mainstream" schools in urban and rural centers across the country. Additionally, a shortcoming of Western education is the normalizing of modernity and of the settler-colonial project, an aspect of our inherent knowledge bound work that all teachers are implicated in. All teachers must continue to critique the forms of knowledge that we perpetuate within classrooms, as it is here that societal inequity becomes replicated through the way our

education systems currently operate (Kerr & Andreotti, 2019). The work of decolonization is an activity that all teachers must engage with, not only those working with Indigenous students.

This study sought to utilize reflexive autoethnography to document my attempts to find an ethical teaching practice, reflecting on my practice while reading decolonial theorists such as Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), Nakata (2007), Bhabha (1994), Martin (2008) and Moreton-Robinson (2000). References to *whiteness* throughout refer to racial identity and privilege, whether this is codified by physically white skin or not. It exemplifies being part of and privileged by the dominant culture and epistemology. Whiteness here, informed by the work of Moreton-Robinson, designates the "invisible and omnipresent norm" (2009, p. xix). In contrast, *othering* refers to the discursive process by which this dominant in-group (Us, the Self) constructs dominated out-groups (Them, Other) by stigmatizing a difference (Staszak, 2009, p. 2). Situated as outside of the settler-colonial center, Indigenous students, teachers and community become othered by the discourse of the education system. Nakata's notion of the cultural interface provides an alternate framework for negotiating the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the classroom space. Interface theory provides a framework for understanding sites of contested knowledge, recognizing the meeting together of multiple knowledge systems that frame who can be a knower, what can be known, and what constitutes knowledge (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001, p. 57).

While I began with autoethnography, I recognized that an attempt to decolonize my thinking could not occur in a silo, that learning of this nature was best conducted in relation to those whose voices I needed to listen to. The Indigenous elders and teachers with whom I taught, were teachers of their own pedagogies, worldviews, and epistemologies, whether or not these roles were institutionally acknowledged. Relationships with these teachers were educative, a place where I began to see the theories I was reading embodied. I conducted a series of interviews with three Indigenous elders (named within these stories as Betty, Brenda and Jan) with whom I shared a classroom in team-teaching partnerships over four years. Yarning was the research methodology utilized, which is necessarily situated within relationship (Dean, 2010, p. 7), seeks to be culturally safe (Aveling, 2013, p. 208), and acknowledges Indigenous participants' autonomy in speaking freely about their ideas in ways that more closely reflect Indigenous epistemology (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 38–39) than typical question-answer models of interviews. As such, while my open-ended prompts for our discussions sought their feedback on my pedagogies and at decolonizing, responses were not straightforward antiphony as much as in depth explanations of the elders' perspectives and pedagogies. Yarning Circles enabled the process to become more like a classroom for me, in which the participants shared their wisdom and constructed a series of lessons for me to learn from.

A tension with this kind of learning is that it relies on a kind of emotional and intellectual burden of labour from my Indigenous colleagues. This sits alongside the problematic

neo-colonial risks of non-Indigenous people researching in and with Indigenous communities, and of falling "straight back into the intellectually arrogant trap of thinking that we know what we are doing" (Aveling, 2013, p. 207). These tensions were present throughout the research. The focus of the research was on how I could "contribute in some small way to the study of decolonizing methodologies by speaking 'to my own mob'" (Kessaris, 2006, p. 360). Thus, the questions asked of the elders were framed not only for my own learning but for how I could contribute to teaching discourse becoming more respectful to the communities within which we work.

Throughout this paper, autoethnographic journaling and creative writing are interspersed with key segments of elder interviews. Although I have attempted to tidy up the messiness of autoethnography by presenting it in an organized sequence, the sense of musing and interruption remains. Time spent reflecting on my privilege and power is then startled and unsettled all over again by an elders' insights outside of the frame of reference in which my thinking operates. It is this sense of polyvocality that served to unsettle me during the research process, which I attempt to weave together into a picture of pedagogical and relational possibility. In these pages, I have selected key autoethnographic excerpts and interview moments that best illustrate the findings as a whole.

It would be preferable to refer to research participants by the terms they prefer, such as their distinct language and nation groups that they identify with and belong to. However, in the context of this writing, to refer to these distinct languages and cultural groups would be to erase some of the anonymity upon which participants agreed in providing their consent. Thus, *Indigenous* is used as shorthand for Indigenous Australian peoples (while acknowledging that some would prefer not to be called *Australian*, and some would prefer to be called Aboriginal people). This terminology is not ideal, as it implies a homogeneity that does not exist within the diverse First Nations people of Australia. I use this term acknowledging its limitations, but understanding it to be the best term to stand in where I am not able to use more specific and meaningful terms.

This work was influenced by Laenui's "five phases of decolonization" (2000) that subjugated peoples may go through. Laenui describes these phases as 1) Rediscovery and recovery (the group realizes the state of realities caused by colonization), 2) Mourning (lamenting their victimization), 3) Dreaming (upon which the new social order is discussed and mobilized), 4) Commitment (considering all aspects of the previous phases), and then 5) Action (achievable only when a consensus has been reached in the previous phase of commitment) (2000, p. 54). If Laenui has described the phases of decolonization for those who have been colonized, what I sketch out here may be the beginnings of the mirroring process that non-Indigenous, settler individuals may go through to participate in the decolonizing of their own minds and teaching practices, in support of this work.

In performing thematic analysis of the subsequent data, key verbs emerged that encapsulated potential reflective actions on the part of non-Indigenous teachers. These resonated through both my autoethnographic reflections and the perspectives of Indigenous participants. These verbs - Knocking, Unsettling, and Ceding - came to encapsulate the

phases that I felt I moved through in seeking to decolonize my teaching practice in this space. Here I have selected some of the narratives that described these phases, in an attempt to illustrate both the processes of reflection and the epistemic shifts that occurred as a result.

This framework is not intended as a wholly replicable model. I do not wish to contribute to the homogenization of Indigenous peoples by presuming that the learning within one community transfers across to all other contexts. These frameworks must be created responsively and contextually, in place and relationship, in response to each new context we find ourselves in. This framework is simply my response to the question at one point in time and about a particular community: "What do I need to be doing to decolonize myself and my practice?" While this work occurred in relation to one community context, I argue that reflexive processes are necessary for all teachers within countries with colonial histories, as we come to truly acknowledge what has gone before.

Cautiously using the word *decolonizing*

Tuck and Yang (2012) have described how "the metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or 'settler moves to innocence', that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (p. 1). I echo their troubling of this word and sit with the uncertainty of whether I can contribute to decolonization, and whether the education system can be decolonized when colonial intent and logic sits at its foundation. I experiment with the word anti-colonial instead, yet my stance is that as a colonized being in a setting of ongoing coloniality, to oppose is not enough, I must also be actively participating in an undoing. I use the word decolonizing as this word is a gerund and signals that the process of this undoing is never complete.

This article is focused on non-Indigenous teacher experience, reflection and learning, including discussion of myself as a colonized individual, in the sense that colonial logic structures my worldview. This focus risks overshadowing the colonial lived experiences of my Indigenous colleagues, living within a colonial nation and subjected to settler systemic violence. While the scope of this paper on non-Indigenous teacher dispositions does not allow an adequate discussion of the colonized realities lived by Indigenous teachers and research partners, these realities were a constant theme in discussion and reflection, and form part of the impetus behind why such decolonizing reflexive work needs to be undertaken by settler educators.

Phases of decolonial reflexivity

The following sections organize the findings of this research into overarching phases that a teacher may move through in beginning to decolonize their work. Preceded by a disposition of *Acknowledgement* of what has come before, a teacher must first Knock (observe protocols and approach relationships with respect, after Martin, 2008), Unsettle (decenter

their position as Knower), and Cede (defer to Indigenous ways of knowing), before collaboration and partnership become possible. These aspects are proposed as beginning points for non-Indigenous teachers seeking to decolonize their practice.

Acknowledgement: Understanding what has come before

It has become commonplace within Australia to begin any proceedings or events with an acknowledgement; a statement of recognition of the traditional Indigenous custodians of the land (Kowal, 2015), often including an acknowledgement that sovereignty was never ceded. Yet this disposition of acknowledgement has not deeply steeped into the fabric of Australia's education system. Discussions of Indigenous students tend to begin with describing "deficits", without acknowledging the history of dispossession, displacement, and disadvantage or the resilience demonstrated in overcoming these odds. Teacher standards (AITSL, 2014) describe teachers' practice as using "strategies" to teach Indigenous students, calling them to "understand the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic backgrounds", but not describing an understanding of the impact of Australia's colonial history and displacement, unceded sovereignty and lack of treaty as a key understanding regarding these students. Acknowledgement of the history of dispossession, displacement, exploitation, and colonial injustice faced by Indigenous peoples, is not yet explicitly included as a tenet of teachers' practice. Without acknowledgement of the ongoing impacts of colonization, attempts at decolonizing educational practices are null and void. To acknowledge this history means listening to Indigenous people speaking about their experiences, to see this history as having persistent, unresolved and ongoing impacts, and to recognize the need for decolonizing and remedying within the education system. The following data and analysis follows from this starting point

Knocking: Approaching relationship respectfully

The reflexive phase of knocking reflects a disposition of approaching respectfully, as an outsider teacher coming into a community.

> I stand in front of a door. It is closed, maybe locked. I am an outsider. I know that I don't have any right to enter, but I hope to be welcomed in. I know that the room is not empty. This room has a life all its own that predates my arrival. I know that my knowledge of what is going on inside is constrained. I feel timidity. I want to do the right thing, to not cause offence or overlook protocols.

> I raise my hand, balled into a fist. I hesitate. I knock.

> In knocking, I know that I am at the mercy of the Insiders. I know that I am asking for something I am not entitled to. I am a visitor; I do not have a right to instant access. What I am doing is demonstrating my desire to both show respect, and be allowed in. I know that their refusal is their right.

> When the door is opened, I feel relief. I must state my case now for what I am here for. I am simply glad that I have acknowledged that I am not on my turf, that I have shown the necessary respect to an other's boundaries, and that the door has been opened to me. Perhaps this is the beginning of relationship and learning.

When Karen Martin speaks of knocking in *Please Knock Before You Enter* (2008), she uses this anchor point of respectful protocol, to describe what those protocols look like from an Indigenous ontology. While referring largely to the research setting, application to teachers' conduct is evident. Knocking involves acknowledging what already exists, respecting boundaries and protocols, acknowledging my lack of authority in this space, approaching respectfully, waiting, and relinquishing power.

Inherent in the action of knocking is the anticipation of what is on the other side. To barge in presumes that there is nothing behind the wall, that if I cannot see it, it does not exist. For teachers coming into communities as an outsider, our positioning is fraught as we "bring" pedagogies with us and overlook ways of knowing that we do not understand. Just because I did not know, could not quantify, could not understand Indigenous knowledge systems, did not mean that they did not exist, that my students were "empty buckets" (Freire, 1970) waiting to be filled. Just because I could not interpret my Indigenous colleagues' pedagogies did not mean there were none at play. I become aware of the danger of not seeing things simply because I do not have the eyes to see it, to recognize things located outside my own cultural "grid" (Kalscheuer, 2008, p. 31).

Indigenous teachers in the site of this study were subjected to institutional attitudes of *tabula rasa*: a collective erasure or blindness to *what already exists* in Indigenous teachers own pedagogies. With clear mandates as to the types of pedagogies we were expected to be using in our classrooms, chiefly those outlined in *Visible Learning* (Hattie, 2009); the kind of relational pedagogies that these Indigenous teachers embodied were often devalued and overlooked, as I have outlined elsewhere (Gannaway, 2019).

The relational disposition of knocking also involves waiting. Waiting connotes two things. The first is that relationships take time to develop. The second is that the type of relationships that might be worth Indigenous locals' investment are those with an intention of longevity, contrary to the model of "Teachers as Two-Year Tourists" (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2004). When Brenda speaks about teacher relationships with students, she very much has a view of the long run.

> When you come back in a couple years' time, when they are working or married or maybe have siblings, […] then they will introduce you to their family, […]… and they will take you to your homeland, you get a journey walking with them you know, finding your way with these kids, the children that are in our classroom. (Interview, October 2015)

Knocking necessitates listening for a response, and listening becomes an essential dynamic of establishing relationships and decolonizing pedagogy. The dominance of my voice in the classroom, necessitated by the scaffolded literacy pedagogy, was at odds with this aim. Giroux cautions against: "becom[ing] unquestioning and fail[ing] to realize the symbolic violence the dominant voice can exercise… to silence rather than empower" (2005, p. 17). I journalled the source of my difficulty to "listen":

> I feel that because of the mandated curriculum [and the rhetoric of the 'gap' and students being 'behind'] my time is dominated by an endless rush to complete tasks… and my voice (my white,

> [western]-educated, middle-class voice) is dominant. My demands are dominant […] – I 'expect' them to listen and to complete the tasks set, and this is in the name of desiring a 'good' education for them. (Journal, August 2012)

In this sense, the cacophony of urgent priorities can drown out the kind of deep listening that might be necessary to respect the local forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, being and doing that students bring to the classroom.

In contrast to these literacy priorities, was my aspiration to contribute to a collaborative curriculum, written together with Indigenous stakeholders. I had an accompanying sense of urgency to knock *down* the doors and get it happening.

> I have realized that it will take time to forge the kind of connections with the local community that birth the opportunities to draw on this richness for my classroom. […] I can, however, put out my feelers for the kinds of priorities my local counterparts have for education, and express my support and enthusiasm for these, and do what I can to implement them in my own classroom. (Journal, August 2012)

These early reflections betray a perspective of IKS merely as a tool for the kind of utopian classroom I wished to create, based on my priorities. The ontology of knocking rejects the culture of urgency that sees relationships as merely a means to an end, calling practitioners into a disposition of respectful collaboration.

Unsettling: Embracing discomfort

The disposition of being unsettled means a number of things. I was unsettled in the poetic sense, a lack of peace and internal discord, cognitive dissonance reflecting the multiple knowledge systems that my teaching work was negotiating. I was unsettled because the notion of myself and my culture as center – the norm, the ideal – was being constantly disrupted. Moreton-Robinson articulates this when she states that "whiteness remains the invisible omnipresent norm. As long as whiteness remains invisible in analyses 'race' is the prison reserved for the 'other'" (2000, p. xix). I thought about all the subtle ways that I presented whiteness as the "norm", all our constant teacher talk to students about economic participation, our taking for granted norms like reading benchmarks, particular modes of classroom listening, speaking without a trace of Kriol (a form of Aboriginal English)… all around my classroom practice were clues as to the invisible norm that I was perpetuating.

Yet when I say unsettled, I am also connoting my identity as a settler, unlearning many aspects of my thinking as an educator and individual living and working on land that was never ceded. The discourse around teachers' professional practice, at least in this setting, was rife with notions of *goodness* – a desire to be a good teacher and to be recognized as such – although conceptions of what this meant in actual terms were diverse. As I articulated it in my first year of teaching,

> Every teacher seems to need the conviction that they're doing the right thing in order to survive and thrive in this occupation. So who actually is 'doing the right thing' by these kids? The teacher who chooses to listen to the voice of the students at the cost of efficiently moving 'through' the subjects

> to be taught? The teacher who persists until kids really deeply connect with them, or the teacher who covers all the bases in a year? (Journal, August, 2012)

There is a thread throughout the autoethnographic writing at this time, of my exertion of effort on "maintaining a specific racial identity as a 'good' white person and not an ignorant, exploitative, 'racist' white person: part of the solution and not part of the problem" (Kowal, 2015, p. xiv). I was, in unsettling my very identity, unsettling the white helper discourse, the bourgeois need to see myself as good (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). The non-Indigenous desire to *help* seems all very noble, and indeed it was affirmed by most white anti-racists (Kowal, 2015) with whom I interacted. My desire to know that I was doing good was not so different from any other colonizing impulse.

I had arrived in Clear River, as I have outlined, with a pre-conceived idea of what ethical pedagogy would look like, connoting images of Freire (1970), Illich (1973), a passion for a dialogic classroom, and a resistance to neoliberal assessment measures. In reality, no teacher can (or should) arrive with an imported, pre-packaged, place-less and relation-less image of pedagogy and implement it as such without ethical negotiation. Discovering a pedagogy of social justice had to be done contextually, acknowledging both place and people. Sellar (2009) outlines that "pedagogy must be understood as an 'inherently relational, emergent, and non-linear process that is unpredictable and therefore unknowable in advance'" (p. 351). He suggests we engage in the "responsible uncertainty of pedagogy" (p. 347), what Lather refers to as a "praxis of not being so sure" (1998, p. 184). Both as a new practitioner and as a non-Indigenous woman in an Indigenous space, I knew very little and had to come to terms with this for new possibilities to arise. These dual strands, that our pedagogy must be created in place and relationship and also embrace uncertainty in order to leave behind habitual ways of relating, form the basis for why unsettling is a necessary phase of practice. I came to understand this not as a one-off process, but an ongoing state that aimed to constantly purge the self of the very roots that inform damaging neo-colonial interactions.

Unsettling as a teacher, becoming a student

Beyond simply embracing the pedagogy of not-knowing, decolonizing my position as a teacher meant often taking on the role of student, and keeping in mind the limitations of my learning. While I might have been able to "language" the cultural stuff of my students lives – use words like *ceremony* and *dreaming* and my skin name, this mimicry that I participated in gave me the false sense of understanding, empty of the significance and the meaning that my students carried with them. I was coming to see myself as an unsettled learner – sometimes able to "help" but often needing to learn.

Even here, my privilege was evident. I was able to select my positioning, instead of having it thrust upon me. I was able to imaginatively position myself as a learner, a child even, as an ally, as aware of my privilege, taking responsibility for "my mob" in meetings (Kessaris, 2006); trying to remedy the wrongs that I perceived within the education system, trying to draw on my agency to first do no harm.

Kowal (2015) has written about this very *positioning* dynamic extensively, named as a final strategy that white anti-racists may be able to take up to minimize the stigma of whiteness inscribed into our positioning and subjectivity when working in such a setting. I recognized this in a very tangible way on my trips out in the bush to collect pandanus, when I realized that in this setting, my position was that of a peer to one of my youngest students:

> I was no longer struggling to figure out how to position myself in resistance to the deficit framings that shaped relationships within the school setting. Out here, on this trip at least, I had naturally fallen into the position that was most readily available to me, that of the child and learner.

None of these positionings was fixed. In the classroom, I tried to return to that openness to learning that came so naturally "out bush", in the context where the very terrain reminded me I was an outsider on unceded territories. Yet even in this positioning of child is part of a hierarchy, my own "western grid" (Kalscheuer, 2008) shapes my perspectives and fills that subjectivity with cultural meaning.

> Jan would later say to me in a yarning circle, 'When you asked Betty those questions, it's like you're the child and Betty is the teacher. That's good, that's how you learn'. (Journal, November, 2015)

Jan's confirmation of this positioning as a tool for cultural learning becomes a site of unsettling, not a final destination for decolonizing teaching practice, but a reflexive practice of continually de-centering.

Ceding: deferring to Indigenous Knowledge

> They will come to see that they are not helping us but following our lead. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 384)

Having become increasingly unsettled, no longer clinging to certainty or epistemic authority, new positionings are enabled. My interactions with Indigenous forms of knowledge and the unseating of the privileging of my knowledge frameworks had created both tensions as well as openings and possibilities in my thinking.,

I began to use the term *ceding* to address the way Indigenous knowledge interacted with my consciousness while in Clear River.

> I use the term to describe the way two sets of priorities have emerged for me – often at odds with each other. [It]describe[s] the 'tax' on my time – when the priorities of the education system reflected particular administrative and planning duties, but I knew it was important to also make time for bush trips with Indigenous colleagues, language classes once a fortnight, and attending the ceremonies we were invited to. [These activities involved] ceding to the other way of being and knowing that was sovereign in this land to which I was a guest. This enabled greater empathy with the experiences of my students: the holding of two knowledge systems that characterize their interactions with the education system. I experienced the sense of being out of my comfort zone, the insecurity of failed attempts at interpreting the norms around me, the experience of being in deficit, the overwhelm of learning to negotiate another terrain. I experienced this discomfort from a position of privilege: I entered willingly and could just as easily retreat when it got too much.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word *cede* as "to yield or grant typically by treaty", connoting willing relinquishment and mutual agreement. Ceding emphasizes a two-way, agentic process. If I called this phenomenon *colonizing*, I was making myself object, and Indigenous knowers the subject. But there was subjectivity and agency for me too – the privilege of choosing my own relinquishing. I wanted to emphasize that both parties were subjects in this process – myself as a willing participant, and Indigenous knowers and indeed IKS itself.

Ceding to multiple ways of knowing

Ceding-as-epistemology occurs in the sense that I begin to see the limits of what I know, and the limits of the knowledge frameworks rooted in Western science. After Fanon, I wonder what it might take to utilize my "epistemic privilege" (1952/2008, p. 25) to embark on decolonizing of my own mind.

Possibilities emerge when we embrace openness to other ways of knowing. Clandinin here refers to "blurred knowing", turning from the "secure base" of presuming upon knowing the world to "understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience" (2007, p. 25). Clandinin describes the postmodern "unravellers" of the positivistic monolith who have made way for more openness toward other ways of knowing. Mignolo frames this unravelling as more than a postmodern turn, but also a decolonial one: the *delinking* from colonial logic (2007). I pause and think about my own unravelling.

> A thread pulls […] when I hear about Indigenous stories, carried down for centuries, corresponding with other stories across the globe, stories of a huge flood that are corroborated by the science I have been accustomed to trusting. Stitches unravel when I learn about how Indigenous knowledges had their own ways of categorizing and understanding animals that prefigured western taxonomies developed much later. This unravelling and fraying of my reliance upon western frameworks for what constitutes truth and legitimate knowledge created openings where my mind could more respectfully regard other knowledge systems.

Ceding is an attitude that allows a non-Indigenous practitioner in some way to participate authentically in collaborations with both Indigenous teachers and students.

Ceding in team-teaching

We cannot speak of non-Indigenous teachers *ceding* to Indigenous ways of knowing without speaking about privilege and power. The process is one of relinquishing power, and yet I acknowledge that I can never fully divest myself of power and privilege. I am not evaluating the knowledge system that I am ceding to, validating it through my Western knowledge framework, and then to ceding to it. Mastery or connoisseurship of an other's knowledge system is a contradictory impulse to the disposition of ceding. Relational potential lies in a willingness to learn and to acknowledge the sovereignty of another way of knowing. This requires a relational aspect of trust and a willingness to forego some epistemic power in the classroom.

> I am aware of the irony as I continue listening to Brenda address the class. I am speaking about relinquishing a classroom space that was never mine under a treaty, to begin with! This land was never ceded [Thorpe & Andrewartha, 2019] but here, through my privilege and the power of the institution, I, as a teacher, am afforded the ability to pretend that I fully own this space.

Herein lies the potential of ceding as a discursive tool: in acknowledging at every opportunity that there is another knowledge system available and at work, it is harnessed as a tool to counteract in-deficit positions of students and Indigenous teachers. By allowing myself to be othered by Indigenous knowledge, I am delegitimizing some of the colonizing discourses that shape the classroom. Thus, even in ceding, I am performing an act of resistance.

In ceding, opportunities for genuine collaboration began to arise. While there is no scope within this paper to exhaustively document the possibilities that arose for collaboration and negotiation of knowledge systems, two main examples arise. Some sites of collaboration involved Indigenous teachers leading learning that was entirely located within their epistemological frameworks, others involved collaboration to support learning in the Western curriculum. In terms of the former, Jan and I collaborated on a senior school externally assessed subject, in which students needed to be able to demonstrate a range of English communication skills (both verbal and written). In designing this subject, Jan identified an elder who was also a knowledge holder whose stories had not yet been recorded and arranged a series of video-recorded interviews that she led in collaboration with the students. These later became translation and transcription tasks, in order to build a digital library of elders' stories. Even when collaborating on these tasks, I was a learner alongside the students:

> During the interviews, Jan made direct eye contact with the camera. She kept impressing on me the way that there was so much to learn. 'Our culture is rich, there is so much to know'. She kept referring to Wendy next to her. This old lady, she knows everything – she learned it the proper way. 'This is the gap, Jess – I'm not just talking about the NAPLAN gap, when the kids take those tests – I'm talking about our kids don't know our way, we have so much to teach them.' (Journal, October 2015)

When our field was located in my Indigenous colleague's field of expertise instead of mine, is when they were able to model for me a powerful kind of collaboration. Yet even when classes were located within my field of expertise, the teaching of English literacy, these teachers collaborated with me to assist students in meaning-making.

> Jan: But for students like this, they had a lot of support and teaching from you, but we had to put it into our different way of teaching, like helping [students] with your understanding of your teaching technique. And the same for like, for maths, English, for the intersection, you know […]
>
> Brenda: And […] for three years you had Betty helping you. When kids say like, difficult things we don't know what she's saying, 'She said this, this, this', so it's easy, and we have those students give feedback like when they answered back straight away and they like, coping you know?
>
> Jan: This one other thing, like, when a new kid came inside and they like, 'What she wants us to do […]', like one other kid said 'I can't do it', and Brenda and I've said, 'You can do it, we'll do it in our way, in the language, write down all this procedure or something, and then you'll have a look'. And then one little kid's, 'Oh yeah', then we're 'That's what Jess said to do, to do this, do this'.

Brenda: It's like for the last three years you had [Betty] to interpret because you know, and it made sense when kids don't know she tells them what you want kids to do, […] so she is always helping them to understand.

Concluding reflections

The framework begun here describes phases of reflection and decolonization that I pose are necessary before any such partnership or authentic relationship is possible. For teachers to reflect on how they can decolonize their thinking and therefore their practice, opens up possibilities for othered Indigenous forms of knowledge to be acknowledged, valued and respected within classroom spaces. Through acknowledging IKS, dynamics of power and deficit can be reduced and allow opportunities for partnership to emerge.

Just as I began with an acknowledgement of the women who have shaped this work, I conclude with their words to me as we concluded our series of yarning circles. Their words encapsulate the ongoing nature of the kind of decolonizing work that we commenced together.

Jan: There's one thing that you've learned so much, from Betty, and Brenda, and me, […] that something you'll know that our ancestors' spirits, it's connected to you. So you taking full knowledge away. All the information that you gonna take away, like you gonna have to memorize them, you gonna have to think a lot, […] ah this is the knowledge, this is all this teacher gave me, this is how I've learned.

Brenda: And their way of learning, and their journey, and all that, it's like [a] learning journey.

Brenda's reference to a learning journey echoes the notion that the work of decolonizing is an ongoing process. This paper has sought to situate that within a teachers` work, dynamic reflections, unlearning and rethinking must occur to remedy the colonial instincts woven throughout education practice. The findings within this study outline some of the beginnings of decolonial reflexivity that emerged for one non-Indigenous teacher in community with Indigenous teachers, and offer starting points for decolonial work that calls for all teachers to engage with their own epistemological unravelling.

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