

RECKONING WITH OUR PRIVILEGES IN THE CYC CLASSROOM: DECENTRING WHITENESS, ENACTING DECOLONIAL PEDAGOGIES, AND TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Matty Hillman, Kristy Dellebuur O'Connor, and Jennifer White

Abstract: As three white educators working in three different post-secondary contexts, teaching child and youth care (CYC) to diverse undergraduate students, we are interested in exploring the ethical, political, and pedagogical challenges and opportunities of creating learning spaces that can support concrete actions towards decolonizing praxis, social justice, and collective ethics. In order to support each other's developing praxis, we have recently begun meeting monthly to explore various questions and tensions that exist for us in this work. These meetings have been deeply generative for us in that they have produced a sense of solidarity and accountability to each other and our developing pedagogies. This paper attempts to capture some of this experience by sharing three perspectives reflective of the challenges and successes each of us have experienced in our respective institutions.

Keywords: social justice, pedagogy, collective ethics, praxis, child and youth care education

Matty Hillman MA is an instructor in the Child and Youth Care diploma program at Selkirk College, 301 Frank Beinder Way, Castlegar, BC V1N 4L3. Email: Mattyhillman@selkirk.ca

Kristy Dellebuur O'Connor MA is a faculty member in Child and Youth Care at Douglas College, PO Box 2503, New Westminster, BC V3L 5B2. Email: dellebuurk@douglascollege.ca

Jennifer White EdD is a professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, 3800 Finnerty Rd., Victoria, BC V8P 5C2. Email: jhwhite@uvic.ca

We write this paper as three White Child and Youth Care (CYC) educators who have made a commitment to come together to consult, support, and, sometimes, to confront and destabilize each other in our developing pedagogies and classroom practices. Collectively we are committed to reckoning with our White privilege in a way that goes beyond acknowledging the unearned benefits that we are afforded based on our skin colour, to make visible the structures, institutions, colonial logics, and practices that sustain White supremacy. Through regular phone and video conference meetings, we have created an informal community of practice that serves as a site of joint learning, knowledge creation, and professional development. Intensely aware that we live in a world where many (ourselves included) benefit from the oppression of others, we wish to go beyond an analysis of inequalities in the classroom and move to a place where White people like us are actively working to change educational structures and practices that create and sustain anti-Black racism, White supremacy, inequality, and ongoing land dispossession among Indigenous peoples.

Our professional relationships with each other can also be considered what Vikki Reynolds (2014) calls collective accountability. Collective accountability requires that individuals work together to move beyond simple awareness of inequality and one's complicity in supporting systems of injustice to actively changing structures that allow conditions of abuse and oppression to exist (Reynolds, 2010). As White, straight, middle-class, cis-gendered, able-bodied, highly educated persons, we occupy privileged positions that provide us with the option of individually deciding when we will speak and act in resistance to inequality. However, as a group of White people who are committed to dismantling White supremacy and colonial violence in our institutions and in our professional practice communities, we aim to foster a form of critical accountability that requires us to answer to each other in our professional practices. In the case of our regular meetings, we create a space where we not only envision and strategize our classroom practices but also share and critique our own intentions and approaches and hopefully learn from the discussions of our pedagogies.

The collective solidarity we co-construct as educators can also be an act of resistance to the individually focused, technical rational paradigm of education that is typically grounded in discourses of efficiency and procedural logics (White et al., 2017). This type of critical awareness is especially pertinent in classrooms where issues of privilege and social justice are discussed, such as CYC classrooms. DiAngelo's (2011) concept of White fragility reminds us that individual and psychological conceptualizations of racism derail conversations about racial inequality when White students experiencing racial stress respond with defensiveness and emotional fragility. Further, when dominant definitions within mainstream education conceptualize racism as the problematic personal behaviours of individuals, the economic, political, cultural, and social structures that support inequality are ignored.

Ally politics has also been critiqued for supporting the rights-based discourse of individual identity politics (M., 2016). Ally politics can create a false binary of oppressed and ally, conflating large and diverse groups into the former while simultaneously asking that they provide leadership and direction to the latter. Despite good intentions, one practising individual ally politics risks taking the voice of the marginalized person; or, if they become harmed in this difficult work, can begin identifying as being among the oppressed (Reynolds, 2010).

Consequently, individual responsibility is a limiting concept. It asks us to be responsible only for our individual actions, and places unequal responsibility for action on minority groups. Further, because social justice work is demanding, exhausting, and requires resources and contributions beyond those of the individual, a communal effort is required to avoid emotional fatigue and burnout. Collective accountability promotes our sustainability by contesting the individualization of responsibility and offers hope for finding ways forward together (Reynolds, 2010).

As we are discovering through our co-generated learning, while we share much as CYC educators, we are also remarkably diverse and occupy different, multiple, and intersecting social locations. And how could we not? We are diverse in gender, age, education level, and more (our specific social locations will be described below). Though our professional practice experiences may all be accurately described as CYC, our work takes place in distinct time periods and settings, and we are always embedded in the complex political and social contexts of the times we are living in. Currently we are all educators in CYC, yet we teach at different post-secondary institutions in distinct regions of the province of British Columbia. We have varying degrees of experience as educators and consequently teach at various levels (two of us teach undergraduate students and one of us teaches both undergraduate and graduate students). Finally, we are all so much more than CYC instructors: one of us is a PhD student; one a department chair; one a working artist. We also have families, histories, and personal and practice experiences that have shaped us in different ways.

As three White educators who wish to strengthen our commitments to enacting decolonizing pedagogies in the classroom, we meet in a private space based on mutual trust. That allows us to take risks, share our vulnerabilities, ask questions, and articulate our emerging aspirations for the future. By holding ourselves accountable to our own shared ethics around decolonizing praxis and social justice, we hope to strengthen our individual and collective capacity to speak up, take action, and find new ways to make visible our commitments to an anti-racist pedagogy in our classrooms. Through these discussions we have begun to sketch out a shared philosophy of teaching that recognizes the importance of White post-secondary educators actively engaging in social justice work in our institutional settings. Through our regular meetings, we have also been able to examine various teaching and practice experiences that have provided learning opportunities for both our students and ourselves. It should also be noted that in addition to our regular meetings, we all obtain ongoing support and guidance from other colleagues and community members.

Meeting to discuss our teaching practices outside of the institutional spaces we perform them in is useful and significant for several reasons. Firstly, the demands of a full-time teaching schedule can limit the time and energy available to critically examine one's educational practices on more than a surface level. The seemingly never-ending influx of emails, student and colleague correspondence, lesson planning, and grading can dominate the majority of days, especially when working on campus. In our experience, the demands that daily tasks make on an educator's time can be a barrier to developing a critical and adaptive pedagogy. By taking time to address responsibilities that fall outside the day-to-day demands of our positions, we are creating space for the difficult and demanding task of critical self-reflection.

Secondly, as educators employed by different institutions, our meetings take place outside the shared social and cultural spaces of our respective colleges and universities. By providing distance between our teaching practices and the locations in which they occur, we are attempting to promote a critical and outsider perspective on our pedagogies and the assumptions that inform them. Because reflection on educational practices is highly context specific, the social and cultural context that it occurs in can greatly influence the kind of reflection produced (Boud & Walker, 1998). When we are both physically and metaphorically removed from the space and institution we are critiquing, a greater sense of safety is created. In turn, this safety fosters the vulnerability necessary to explore diverse and unconventional approaches to inclusive and emancipatory teaching practices.

Our paper takes the form of three intersecting personal and professional narratives. In each one, we provide examples of some of the questions and tensions present for us as CYC educators, including examples of the limitations and successes we have encountered within the post-secondary environment. The narratives we provide are presented in much the same way that they have been in our group dialogues. As such, we hope reading this paper provides a glimpse into the practice of collective accountability we have been exploring together.

Each of us begins our section by locating ourselves socially within our various professional and personal positions. In order to move beyond a tokenistic gesture of simply naming our various social locations, we have attempted to provide more elaborate accounts that reflect our deepening understanding that we need to go beyond reciting thin statements, statements that quickly become meaningless for ourselves and our students unless we consistently push ourselves to account for the ways in which we are deeply embedded in a complex colonial matrix of power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Our accounts are informed by our collective ethics that urge us to do more than simply repeat tired and predictable corporate statements that run the risk of excusing us for our White privilege. Instead we follow the lead of King, as cited in Smoke (2019), who suggested that land acknowledgements and other efforts to locate ourselves in relation to Canada's colonial past and present should be disruptive and personal. They should include our intentions for right relations with the land and each other, including our plans for action.

We situate ourselves as White settler scholars and educators who are living and working on stolen Indigenous lands within three different Canadian post-secondary, institutional settings. We identify a number of starting premises that have set the stage for our individual and collective work. We engage with one or more of these opening questions to show how we are each reckoning with our privilege as White educators, the shifts we are attempting to make in our own classrooms and institutional contexts, and the joint learning that is emerging.

Jennifer White

I grew up in Calgary, Alberta on traditional Treaty 7 territory, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Iyârhe Nakoda Nations, and the Métis Nation of Alberta. I am currently living and working in Victoria, British Columbia. The University of Victoria, where I work, is situated on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen peoples. The house where I live with my husband is on the unceded territory of the Songhees First Nation.

I am of Anglo-European descent: Irish, Scottish, and German on my mother's side and Scottish on my father's side. On my mother's side, I can trace my European ancestry back at least three generations to when my Irish (O'Hare) and German (Schubert) relatives came to Western Canada as part of the gold rush in the late 19th century. My relatives were part of the group called the Overlanders of 1862. They are described in Canada's history books (LeDuc, 1981) as a group of settlers who travelled from Fort Garry, Manitoba to the Interior of British Columbia in search of gold and a better life. My great-great-grandmother, Catherine Schubert, was the only woman on the trip. She made this perilous journey with her husband and three young children, giving birth to her fourth child, Rose Swanson (my great-grandmother), after arriving in Kamloops (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2019). As a child learning about this story, I was captivated by the heroism, adventure, and courage of the Overlanders who faced many adversities and obstacles on their "fantastic" and "astonishing" journey (Metcalf, 1970; Gallaher, 2002). This journey has been commemorated with many books, plaques, murals, and a statue on the public plaza at Kamloops City Hall. While I can appreciate my great-great-grandmother's dedication to keeping her family together and often marvel at the story of her travelling across the Rocky Mountains on foot and by horseback, while pregnant, accompanied by her three young children, I was never told the *full story* of my relatives' arrival in the West. That is because the heroic narrative of brave European pioneers settling and civilizing the West and the (now cringeworthy) significance given to the birth of my great-grandmother Rose as "one of the first white babies born in the Kamloops district" (LeDuc, 1981, p. 79) were of a piece with other colonial tools and extractive mentalities designed to erase, displace, and dispossess the First Peoples of these lands. Specifically, the colonial logic worked to promote the idea that these were empty, uninhabited lands and the birth of a White child evidently heralded the dawn of civilization in the region. By settling in this region, my ancestors were actively displacing the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc peoples from their homelands. Like other European settlers of the time, my settler ancestors obviously believed that the land and resources were theirs for the taking. Coming to terms with this story — identifying the lies, myths, and

omissions that were embedded within it, and critically reflecting on the specific ways that I have benefitted from the ensuing social arrangements that uphold White supremacy and perpetuate cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples — is just one of the ways that I am reckoning with my privilege as a White settler.

In my professional life, I am a professor in the School of CYC at the University of Victoria, where I have taught courses to undergraduate and graduate students for over 15 years. For the past five years, I have served as the Director of our School. Prior to that, I served as the Graduate Advisor for our program. I have come to this conversation with Matty and Kristy as a co-learner. I attempt to draw on my own experiences as a White educator, working in a post-secondary context in Canada in 2019, where my colleagues and I are endeavouring to engage in the work of decolonizing praxis. I bring an open mind and heart to this work as well as a willingness to confront my own racism, White fragility, and ignorance. I acknowledge that I have made mistakes as I have tried to manage racial tensions and respond to subtle and not-so-subtle forms of racism in the classroom and beyond. I am certain I will make different mistakes in the future. I recognize that my White privilege blinds me to many of the day-to-day micro-aggressions and assaults to dignity that racialized and Indigenous peoples experience over the course of their whole lives. I have learned so much about Canada's colonial history as well as the enduring spirit of Indigenous peoples from my work in the area of youth suicide prevention. I have been blessed to work with generous and wise Indigenous and non-Indigenous friends and colleagues over the past several decades who have helped me to learn about what it means to be an ally. Despite all of these amazing mentors and good intentions of mine, I know that I live and work in a system that is built for my comfort as a White person.

For example, there are many invisible structural arrangements that have contributed to my current position in life and continue to benefit me, granting me and my family basic rights and privileges that Indigenous families do not always enjoy. These include: the possibility of home ownership; the expectation that my mother tongue, English, will be spoken wherever I go; access to clean drinking water; the ability to shop for healthy and affordable food; freedom to engage in my own cultural or spiritual practices; freedom from the fear that I will be racially targeted or profiled; the expectation of living a full and healthy life; and reasonable access to a range of health, social care, and educational services.

In other words, as a White person, I benefit in innumerable ways from maintaining the status quo while others, including many of the children, youth, and families I seek to help and care for, pay a heavy price for my comfort and privilege. It is these kinds of incongruities and contradictions that we need to name and address as part of reckoning with our privilege. As Shotwell (2016) said:

It is hard for us to examine our connection with *unbearable pasts* with which we might reckon better, our implication in *impossibly complex presents* through which we might craft different modes of response, and our aspirations for *different futures* toward which we might shape different worlds-yet-to-come. (p. 8)

Questions for Consideration

With that in mind, the specific questions that I would like to engage with in this paper is:

- If we want to centre decolonizing praxis as a guiding vision for CYC, as White educators, what risks do we need to take in our teaching and writing practices?
- What are the conditions that enable and constrain these types of risk?

Whiteness is a pervasive structure, a system, a site of racial privilege, a performance, and an identity that often goes unmarked (Brooks-Immel & Murray, 2017, p. 316). White discomfort, fragility, guilt, ignorance, and lack of stamina for tolerating racial stress (DiAngelo, 2011) are all ways that White people ignore, resist, and deny the systems of structural inequality that confer unearned benefits because of skin colour. These are also defensive responses against being thought of as “racist”. The field of CYC is predicated on White, Western, patriarchal, and colonial norms (Saraceno, 2012). As Daniel (2018) recently noted, “The reality is that we live in a society that is and has been marked by race and monitored through the practice of racism” [and] “CYC curricula continue to privilege the perspective of Whites” (p. 37). Some writers have referred to this as epistemic violence, in which Euro-Western, patriarchal, Christian, White values, beliefs, and understandings are imposed on *all* people as though these ideas are universal (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

I have unquestionably reproduced Whiteness in many ways through the courses I have designed, the readings I have selected for students to engage with, the assignments I have constructed, and the classroom dynamics that I have facilitated, or, in some cases, failed to facilitate. In the early days of my career I chose readings without considering the power of “citational privilege” that Sara Ahmed (2014) discussed. The readings were overwhelmingly authored by White, Western academics. When I did introduce Indigenous or non-Western perspectives, these were often included in a standalone module that did nothing to interrupt or subvert the dominance of White perspectives. Setting up the course in this way allowed me to preserve the myth of myself as a “good White person”; a responsible, anti-racist educator. I vividly recall an exchange that occurred when I was teaching one of my first graduate courses, in which a White student in my class claimed she “treated all people the same” and “didn’t see colour”. My response on that day was wholly inadequate. While I knew what the White student had said was a way to maintain her White innocence and I wanted to challenge her, I did not have the skills or the knowledge or the words to respond in the moment. I regret the impact of my limited response on the students of colour in my classroom who were let down by me that day. I failed to name Whiteness or White supremacy and neglected to point out the myriad ways that we as White people, including myself, make such “moves to innocence” (Fellows & Razack, 1998). I am getting better at responding in such situations, but I continue to catch myself when I have been ignorant or stayed silent in the face of subtle forms of racism and I know that this is something I need to actively work on every day.

To wrap my section up, I would like to acknowledge that I am inspired by Alexis Shotwell's (2017) book *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* and by Indigenous scholars and thinkers like Zoe Todd (2016), who have long recognized that our interdependent co-existence requires a relational form of ethics that is messy and compromised from the start. This stance implies a form of risk-taking that I think we can create with our students as we seek to create anti-racist and decolonizing classrooms. When we are always already compromised and also collectively responsible, we can hopefully resist the temptation to be pure or good or right, and get on with the messy work at hand. As I have written elsewhere (White, 2019):

I propose an ethical vision that is predicated on our deep *relationality and interdependence* with the whole living world. It is one that is grounded in a recognition that we are always acting under *compromised conditions*. It is a vision inspired by *collective action and accountability* for our shared future, and does not shy away from acknowledging and addressing our potential *complicity with harm*.
(p. 198)

Small, modest, incremental changes that take place in our sites of daily practice can be some of the most revolutionary acts of all. And there is much to be hopeful about. For example, the three of us recently shared classroom moments when we challenged institutional and colonial expectations about what is to count as knowledge in the field of “higher education”. We talked about inviting students to produce creative representations of their ideas, relationships, and their engagement with scholarly texts. We spoke about the tensions and challenges that this evokes in students and faculty who are typically well-trained in producing assignments that map on to pre-determined learning objectives and marking rubrics, but also noted the freedom, creativity, and generativity that non-textual representations of knowledge and learning invited.

White emotional discomfort and fragility in ourselves, our White colleagues, and our students may be inevitable, but it need not be a fixed or totalized identity (Zembylas, 2018). If we read it as part of a broader assemblage of factors and forces (as opposed to an essential psychological quality), there is more room to move. There are always alternative positions and identities that can emerge through other processes. Specifically,

decolonised pedagogies of discomfort entail making subjugated knowledges key points of reference in the curriculum and engendering pedagogies of solidarity that reject racial essentialisms, while confronting how white supremacy continues to inform what legitimate knowledge is in schools, in academia and in everyday life.
(Zembylas, 2018, p. 98)

Kristy Dellebuur O'Connor

I am a second-generation settler: my grandparents migrated to Canada from the Netherlands, Sweden, and Northern Ireland in the early 1900s. My parents were born on Treaty 1 territory in what is now known as Manitoba, on the traditional territories of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.

I was born in Treaty 4 territory in Saskatchewan on the traditional territories of the Nêhiyawak, Anihšīnāpēk, Dakota, Lakota, and Nakoda, and the homeland of the Métis/Michif Nation.

I currently reside on the unceded traditional territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Watuth), and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations of the Coast Salish peoples. I am a faculty member in CYC and a doctoral student in educational philosophy.

As a White cis-female able-bodied person I come to this discussion with curiosity about the ways we are positioned and position ourselves within institutions as teachers and learners influence our ability and willingness to engage racism and White fragility in our learning encounters. I have an undergraduate and master's degree in CYC and my identity as a CYC practitioner is central to my professional sense of self. At the same time, I experience tension and discomfort with the histories and present-day narratives and practices in CYC that reproduce injustice and harm in the name of “professional care”.

As an instructor in a CYC undergraduate program, I often experience myself as caught between the expectations of the institution I work for, the canon of CYC, my students' needs, and my own ethical commitments and aspirations. The ways I have learned and continue to learn to work in alliance with my colleagues toward decolonizing praxis have not adequately prepared me to navigate the complexities involved. Inevitably, there are failures. I often process these in isolation and find myself unsure about how to behave differently. Recognizing that my silence and isolation serve to reproduce White supremacy within CYC, I am compelled to resist both. Because of the work of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) scholars and allies the CYC curriculum has shifted — and is still shifting — to reflect a greater emphasis on intersectional analysis of the lives of children, youth, and families than is typical in our historical literature. My own teaching and writing practices have been strongly impacted by the wisdom of my colleagues. However, assumed Whiteness continues to pervade our CYC literature, often unexamined, centred, and invisibilized. I experience a powerful tension and uncertainty about how to do ally work in ways that centre the work of racialized scholars who are marginalized by the dominance of Whiteness in CYC. How do I disrupt the narratives of White supremacy, to create spaciousness for my colleagues in ways that feel supportive, not appropriative?

BIPOC scholars continue to do the majority of the work of decolonizing: active engagement by White faculty members in the work of decolonization remains minimal (beyond the prescriptive idea of decolonizing courses by adding articles by Indigenous and racialized scholars to the syllabus). In many spaces in post-secondary education, I have witnessed racialized colleagues face

institutional and interpersonal linguistic violence when they raise the issues we must grapple with in order to move forward in decolonizing curriculum. I stumble my way through learning to be an ally and continue to approach this work with the humility that comes with making mistakes and ethically engaging in acts of repair.

I want us to imagine new ways forward for ourselves as educators within CYC, to interrogate our own ethical positions more thoroughly and find ways to enact them transparently within our teaching. This is part of the work that Jennifer, Matty, and I endeavour to do together in our conversations.

Questions for Consideration

The questions that I have been considering and will be responding to in this paper are:

- What risks do we need to take in our teaching practices?
- What are the conditions that enable or constrain these types of risk?

I'm interested in exploring the ethical dispositions of White faculty members in decolonial, anti-racist praxis in CYC classrooms and how these dispositions support the risk-taking that is required of us to decentre Whiteness and dismantle settler colonialism in CYC. I'm interested in examining the discourses that are shaping the discussions of decolonization with post-secondary institutions to find out what is stated as possible, and what is not.

One risk I believe we need to take in our work is to publicly name our Whiteness as a racial identity and to explicitly acknowledge the unexamined dominance of Whitemain ideas — ideas from White culture — in our institutions. White supremacy is rarely named in our institutions; when it is, it is often misunderstood as describing only White nationalist groups, which many of us are quick (and I think naive) to dismiss as irrelevant or inactive in our communities. Within my institution, I try to open up the discussion about the ways that White supremacy is embedded in our policies and our curriculum, and how we as White faculty embody its practices and ways of being with little awareness of our privileged positions. I try to open up self-reflexive practices with my colleagues through being transparent about my own interrogation of my embodiment of racism as a CYC faculty member and as a community member. I get it wrong a lot of the time. For example, in one of my courses I asked students to examine their social location and how it impacts their CYC practice. My intention in the assignment was to invite students to consider their relationships with power and how their own positionality influences how they engage with CYC work. In my experience, this type of self-reflective assignment is common in CYC courses.

Feedback I received from several of my students highlighted my racial privilege. They pointed out that there are differential effects, depending on one's access to power within systems of oppression, of being asked to explore the impacts of colonialism, racism, and heterosexism on one's daily life. One of my intentions was to help White students understand how White supremacy affords them particular privileges; however, I didn't pay adequate attention to the fact that BIPOC students might experience the assignment — which required them to write about their experiences

with racism as part of their grade for the course — as itself an act of oppression. In wanting to disrupt the Whitemainstream of CYC, I reproduced it by centring the experience of Whiteness, and marginalizing the experiences of BIPOC students. This feedback led me to discuss the mistake with my colleagues and my students in conversations where I could name my assumptions and the things I failed to consider because of my own racial privilege. I attempted to find ways to redress the harm that resulted from my gap in understanding. I am practising making mistakes in public, with my students, and engaging in conversations about what it means to act with good intentions that result in hurtful impacts, and engaging in acts of repair publicly, with humility. Dr. Adrienne Keane (2018), Cherokee scholar and assistant professor at Brown University, described this as consenting to learn in public.

I wish consenting to learn in public were getting easier for me; however, I continue to notice my own desire to be seen as a “good White ally” in conversations with colleagues. Intellectually, I want to examine Whiteness and settler colonialism as discourses shaping our institutions, yet emotionally, I feel pulled to perform my own racial innocence in order to demonstrate my good intentions. In their study of structures and practices that uphold Whiteness in higher education institutions, Brooks-Immel and Murray (2017) explored the frequent use of the binary opposition of racist and not racist as a discursive practice among White faculty members. Equating personal prejudice with racism, faculty members used this binary opposition to position other White people as “racist” and to establish themselves as “not like those people”. The “construction of racism as an individual phenomenon that a White person either embodies or does not serves to undermine an understanding of racism as institutional” (p. 320). This tension of wanting to be perceived as “the good kind of ally” exists for me here, in the writing of this article as well. I try to turn the volume down on that voice and recognize that in order to learn to do better as an ally, I need to hear feedback on my mistakes and missteps. Robin DiAngelo’s (2018) work on White fragility supports me to notice and interrogate this tendency in myself and to learn to risk being uncomfortable and saying uncomfortable things:

Because racism does not rely solely on individual actors, the racist system is reproduced automatically. To interrupt it, we need to recognize and challenge the norms, structures and institutions that keep it in place. But because they benefit us, racially inequitable relations are comfortable for most white people. Consequently, if we whites want to interrupt this system, we have to get racially *uncomfortable* and be willing to examine the effects of our racial engagement. (p. 135)

I think one of the conditions that enables us to engage in these difficult discussions with our colleagues and students is the creation of a culture of anti-racist pedagogy among faculty and staff within the institution. I’m interested in conversations within and without CYC about how faculty engage with race and racism in the classroom. Many of the discussions about decolonization and Indigenization in post-secondary education seem to focus on how to add topics about Indigenous people to one’s course outline or to hire Indigenous faculty members to “do the work of Indigenization”. Brooks-Immel and Murray (2017) noted that one of the key mechanisms that

sustains institutional White privilege, power, and supremacy in educational contexts is the mapping of “knowledge, responsibility and actions concerning racism onto people of color” (p. 323). The assumption that Indigenous faculty members will help non-Indigenous faculty members to “Indigenize” their courses implies a freedom from responsibility on the part of non-Indigenous faculty members to undertake our own anti-racist work to explore the ways that our courses are reflective of colonial logics and therefore need to be revised.

I think we need to disrupt this narrative about Indigenous inclusion as the only change needed to dismantle settler colonialism in post-secondary education. We need to think critically about our curricular and pedagogical choices and understand how our cultural histories and worldviews are shaping our decisions. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) suggested that most post-secondary institutions are guided by Indigenous inclusion policies that focus on hiring Indigenous faculty members who are then required to adapt to the colonial structures of the institution: these policies rarely transform universities and colleges into Indigenous spaces. Gaudry and Lorenz invited us to consider that what is required of us in post-secondary education is to engage in “*Decolonial indigenization* [which] envisions the wholesale overhaul of the academy to fundamentally reorient knowledge production based on balanced power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians, transforming the academy into something dynamic and new” (p. 226).

Mandatory class attendance policies provide an example of how cultural values are embedded in our policies, curriculum, and pedagogies. Attendance policies in CYC programs are often justified by an assertion that learning is relational (a core CYC perspective), and that we have responsibility to ourselves and others to commit to the weekly class meetings. I believe transformative learning occurs in relationships within the classroom, and am not suggesting that regular attendance isn’t important. However, I think it helpful to examine the cultural values that are embedded in mandatory attendance policies, particularly colonial, capitalist values that emphasize the importance of prioritizing work and school over the emotional, spiritual, relational, and cultural commitments in one’s life. These policies leave little room for students to live out their responsibilities to their families and communities (e.g., needing to return home for ceremony) and are often presented in ways that categorize the student as choosing either “professional responsibility to their learning” or “family and cultural responsibility”. In my experience, institutions rarely place value on “family and cultural responsibility”; more often, students are described as “not yet ready for the commitment the program requires”, a response that clearly locates the problem within the student and absolves the institution of any need to examine racism embedded within its policies. A critically reflective interrogation of the policy, its intent, and its actual and unintended consequences may lead us to different discussions with students that invite a more decolonizing approach to learning and teaching in CYC.

However, we need to engage with these complexities with a thorough understanding of the enabling and constraining structures and discourses within which we function as educators in post-

secondary environments. Questions that can help illuminate the structural and paradigmatic possibilities and constraints in this example include:

- Are we required to implement policies that penalize students for missing more than two classes simply because the institutional policy exists, or do we have freedom to create different policies in our classrooms?
- How are our beliefs about our own agency in these types of decisions grounded in colonial frames about what it means to be a faculty member in a post-secondary institution?
- What are the ethical questions we ask ourselves as we decide whether to comply or resist? As White educators, how does our racial privilege allow us the freedom to do either without the same sanctions (formal and informal) that our racialized colleagues face for making similar choices?

I believe neoliberal discourses of efficiency and productivity also shape these conversations within post-secondary education (Shore, 2008): I was recently at a meeting where the issue of land return was brought up as central to the discussion of Indigenization. We were quickly told we only had five minutes left in our discussion and needed to come up with three recommendations that could be implemented. Sovereignty and land repatriation were dismissed as “too complicated” to address in this time frame, and thus were left off the list of recommendations, despite several of us agreeing with Tuck and Yang (2012) that without the return of land, any curricular or pedagogical changes were simply settler moves to innocence that avoid true justice. Brooks-Immel and Murray (2017) highlighted the importance of understanding these moments not as “individual acts committed by individual actors who need to be replaced” but rather as examples of ways institutionally embedded social actors “recreate institutionalized racism as structure-in-process” (p. 319). I believe it our ethical responsibility to grapple with our own complicities in settler colonialism and the reproduction of White supremacy in CYC. We need to develop our capacities to engage with questions that unsettle us. Supporting each other in asking ourselves difficult questions to help us engage in socially just praxis is one way Matty, Jennifer, and I are engaging with this ethical imperative.

Matty Hillman

I have lived, practised, and learned on Sinixt territory in the West Kootenay for the last dozen years. One reason this acknowledgement is important is that it supports the declaration that, despite the claims of the Canadian federal government, the Sinixt people are not extinct. In the Kootenay region, no reconciliation with Sinixt is possible without recognition of their continued existence in Canada (James & Alexis, 2018).

From a very early age, I had a sense that the world was unjust. Specifically, I felt that I, as a male, White, able-bodied person, was somehow considered better than others. I could not articulate

why this was the case, but I remember feeling grateful that I was who I was, because it seemed that it was harder to be others. At the time I was unaware that my comfort and ease in life came at the cost of others' hardship and oppression.

My adolescent peer groups idealized and appropriated many pieces of culture from more marginalized groups. We were suburban kids who sang political punk lyrics about social activism that we did not participate in. Later, we dressed in the style of, and portrayed ourselves as, racialized minority groups rapping about life in ghettos we would never have to experience. The obliviousness of our privilege is shameful to consider.

It took me some time to find my calling to help others. Early ingrained patterns of harmful coping behaviours and recurring themes of death in my 20s and 30s prevented me from getting to know myself in any deep way.

My education has provided me with the knowledge and language to identify and name privileges that I am afforded. My undergraduate degree introduced me to the ideas of seminal writers like Katz and colleagues (2011), Crenshaw (1991), hooks (1990), and more. My years at graduate school helped me apply a critical lens to the very field I studied, through the inspiration of CYC writers like Loiselle et al. (2012) and Skott-Myhre (2017), and of post-modern thought. Through these experiences, I began to understand the institutional and cultural nature of oppression and violence, my complicity with them, and the benefits I have received from them.

Like many with a decade of experience in the helping professions, my practice experience is diverse. I have been the underprepared worker in a for-profit group home; I have worked in the underfunded community non-profit with an exorbitant case load of child welfare referrals; I have seen success with young people that has warmed my heart, and I have made decisions in my practice that have hurt others and made me question my capability and career choice.

It is through my current position as an instructor in a 2-year Human Services diploma program that I feel I make the greatest contributions to young people in my community. It is also where I have felt the most supported by a group of experienced and diverse colleagues, many of whom were previously my instructors.

As a new post-secondary educator I am increasingly aware that the institution contributes to and replicates structural inequalities through colonial, patriarchal, and capitalistic practices and policies. I am complicit in these practices through my position and privilege. As a White, cis, middle-class male, I am often the most visibly privileged person in the classroom. This contributes to feelings of tension, hypocrisy, and responsibility — responsibility to do more than simply identify this reality. I want to actively seek opportunities to use my position and privilege to educate and encourage students to identify their own privilege and begin to cultivate a critical practice in their personal and professional lives. I regularly explore classroom practices that disrupt some of these institutional norms through decentering myself and dominant Euro-Western ideas about education and human service work.

I find myself becoming increasingly aware of the unequal distribution of success, health, and well-being in the world. As my career trajectory continues, I become more and more aware of areas in my life where I have been privileged to not encounter the discrimination, oppression, and violence that others have.

Questions for Consideration

The questions I have been drawn to explore recently in our conversations are:

- How do we design pedagogies in CYC that align with a decolonizing ethic that supports learners where they are at?
- What specific actions can we take in our everyday teaching spaces in higher education to anticipate and effectively respond to White ignorance, fragility, guilt, and so on?

In my teaching, I strive to instil critical thought in students and elicit critical responses from them when examining all theoretical orientations. I often examine syllabi and consider the pros and cons for students when including historically problematic (i.e., colonial and Eurocentric) content. For example, Piaget’s developmental theory is woefully inadequate and dreadfully ethnocentric, yet it may be necessary for students to understand this concept (along with its shortcomings) in order to be relevant and informed in professional conversations while offering alternative perspectives.

I try to use myself as an example when discussing patriarchy and male privilege. My work and learning about violence against women have allowed me to reconsider past attitudes and behaviours and speak to other men, not with judgement, but with vulnerability and accountability. I do anticipate and encounter “What about violence against men?” comments from students (both male and female) when delivering violence prevention content. In responding to these comments, statistics can help but so does redirecting the conversation (through the authority of my position) and centring the conversation on the responsibility of men to end violence against women.

I have also made mistakes in attempting to use my social location in support of marginalized groups in the classroom. I often begin classes with a circle check-in activity. Students are invited to say something about themselves: their current mood, and recent successes and challenges either in relation to the course or outside of it. Anyone is welcome to pass on their turn. On one occasion I invited the students to share their preferred pronouns, first demonstrating by stating that I use the pronouns *he*, *him*, and *his*. As a class, we discussed the intention of statements like these, to identify the speaker as an ally who will respect and address others on their gendered terms. What we failed to discuss (in that moment), and what I overlooked, was the pressure and possible discomfort that an activity like this could have on someone who is not interested in sharing this aspect of their identity with the group. Upon reflection and consultation with my colleagues, I again opened the topic up for discussion when the class next met. Students were quick to identify how the activity had the capacity to hurt or even to out participants based on the responses they gave, or even their decisions to pass. I shared my feelings of embarrassment in the sharing circle, restating my intention

with the activity and identifying where I failed to have sufficient foresight. The event became a reminder to the students (and myself) that, like them, I am in a constant state of developing and am doing my best to embrace the learning opportunities I am given.

To decentre myself as the primary knowledge holder, I often bring additional perspectives to the classroom by including various pieces of media; I encourage students to take an intersectional and critical perspective when consuming media and discussing current events. Specifically, I want them to consider how intersecting themes of gender, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation impact privilege and oppression, and how dominant narratives contribute to and normalize inequality. Also important, and possibly more challenging, is anticipating and navigating emotional reactions as a result of these learning experiences occurring in a classroom primarily populated by White people.

One course has been particularly challenging to instruct from a decolonizing, intersectional, and critical pedagogy. “Core Concepts in Human Services” covers some of the foundational theoretical orientations of counselling and psychotherapy. The course moves chronologically from Freud to feminism to neurobiology, with most topics steeped in Western and colonial values and perspectives. The requirement to cover this breadth of content in a mere 14 weeks permits no more than a surface examination of each theory.

Students report that the course can feel overly theoretical and at times irrelevant. Also, despite efforts to inject supplementary resources into the syllabus and bring in guest speakers, most of the knowledge conveyed in this course is sourced from a single textbook. Colleagues who teach equivalent courses at other institutions provided helpful suggestions and anecdotes of similar challenges; after consulting with them, I turned to social media for additional inspiration.

In an attempt to create a learning activity that brings the theoretical to the personal and political, and to provide opportunities for students to engage with perspectives outside of those found in the syllabus, I created the following in-class activity. Students are tasked with interrogating various pieces of social justice discourse, all gleaned from social media outlets (memes, tweets, etc.), through an intersectional lens. First, as a class, we review some of the various forms of intersecting oppressions and ideologies of colonization, neoliberal capitalism, and White privilege. Following this, the students are divided into small groups and each group is provided with a printout of a different meme or tweet. The small groups are given two guiding instructions:

1. Research the context of this message. What is happening? Who is involved? And so on.
2. Applying an intersectional perspective, what dominant ideas are supported or countered within the message?

A memorable example of this activity occurred when the class interrogated a meme tweeted by Feminist Next Door ([@emrazz](#); 2018), a self-described friendly feminist whose posts often

provide topical social justice commentary. The meme showcased photos of convicted college rapist Brock Turner beside recently appointed Supreme Court Judge Brett Kavanaugh with the caption: “Brock Turners grow up to be Brett Kavanaughs who make the rules for Brock Turners.”

Themes that surfaced in the discussion following the Turner–Kavanaugh meme interrogation included: the self-supporting nature of power, White privilege within the judicial system, the presence of rape culture myths, and how the perpetrators’ socioeconomic status impacted the verdict.

Feedback indicated that students gained insight into the intersecting nature of the various powers and oppressions revealed through the activity; however, some students became uncomfortable with the subject matter and requested more explicit trigger warnings in the future. Due to the homogeneously White demographics of the class, this reaction is neither a surprise nor undesirable. Many of the memes explore how marginalized groups experience violence through the very ideologies from which most of the class, myself included, benefit.

I see students’ feedback to this activity as supportive of several pedagogical objectives. First, by being exposed to social justice discourse gleaned from current media creators, learners are exposed to voices outside of those traditionally found in this course — including mine. By providing a stage for those involved in activist fronts (whether in real spaces or virtual ones), I am working to decentre myself as the primarily knowledge holder and conveyer. Second, the distress that some students experience during this activity is an outcome in line with a pedagogy of discomfort (Zembylas, 2018) — the notion that social and political awareness and ultimately personal transformation is encouraged in a learning environment where discomfort is embraced. Applebaum (2017) suggested that educators should encourage students to “stay in the discomfort” that vulnerability creates. Through highlighting how intersections of identity simultaneously benefit ourselves and oppress others, White students and teachers can begin to consider our complicity in oppressions, ultimately moving towards actions that disrupt these inequalities.

Discussion

Most White people do not have to think about the impact of racism because it does not impact us in any tangible way on a daily basis (Daniel, 2017–2018). Yet it is absolutely endemic in the academy; it is embedded within the leadership, faculty, and board members; it can be found in the administrative and staff levels; it is the foundation of many policies and procedures.

Daniel (2017–2018) suggested that addressing racism in post-secondary institutions is fraught with challenges including the self-absorption of academics and the fear of exclusion and loss of employment, especially for BIPOC. As such, plans for change and resistance to injustice must include self-care, mentorship, solidarity, and a strict adherence to one’s moral compass. Each of the perspectives presented in this paper explores some of the issues produced through injustices created or supported by post-secondary institutions and provides examples of how the authors have

wrestled with their own complicity in supporting these injustices. To this end, we have shared experiences where we have fumbled in our not knowing and have also shared promising teaching and learning practices, in the hope that this might prompt readers to engage in similar conversations with their colleagues.

As White CYC educators one action we can take to dismantle White supremacy and engage in decolonizing praxis is to use our skin privilege to name racism and its deep embeddedness in our systems, structures, and institutions. We can identify the ways we are complicit and benefit from these arrangements as we have tried to do here. If our institutions would provide support and resources for us to have these conversations with each other as instructors and faculty colleagues (e.g., guidelines for critical conversations on Whiteness, professional development workshops, pedagogical consultation, and exemplary modelling from academic leaders and administrators), we believe the conditions would be conducive to making the kinds of shifts and taking the kinds of risks we are envisioning.

In this era of Truth and Reconciliation, taking steps towards decolonizing praxis — which must go beyond territorial acknowledgements to include calls for repatriation of Indigenous homelands — is not optional work. It cannot be left to a small group of progressive, radical, justice-oriented CYC scholars, educators, activists, and practitioners. It is collective work that requires effort, energy, and attention from all of us in this professional field. As White people who benefit immensely from our unearned skin privilege, we can use our privilege to speak out against oppression, structural racism, and colonial violence in all its forms. In this way, we have particular responsibilities that are unique to us.

For example, as White educators, scholars, and practitioners, we can no longer say that this type of social change work is somehow not relevant to our mission as a CYC field —we know that our collective life depends on reckoning with our fraught pasts and being accountable to our joint futures. This includes recognizing our field’s complicity in replicating dominant, racist, and Eurocentric views of “normal childhood development”. It includes acknowledging our role in removing Indigenous children from their families and communities, under the auspices of “helping”. It includes working towards a more just, dignifying, and life-sustaining future for all.

Our hope for this article is that it provokes reflection about the types of risks that are necessary if we want to engage ethically in the classroom in ways that nurture decolonial and social justice praxis. We believe that we need to support each other, hold each other accountable, and act with humility in our not knowing. We need to be curious about the ways we are implicated in power structures that uphold settler colonialism. We need to think deeply with our colleagues about what justice for marginalized peoples means in the present moment in Canada. We want to think deeply about what it means to teach students in ways that support critical thinking and action that is socially just, in our classrooms and beyond.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2014, October 17–19). *Brick walls: Racism and other hard stories* [Keynote address]. 14th Annual Critical Race and Anticolonial Studies Conference: “Unsettling Conversations, Unmaking Racisms and Colonialisms”, University of Alberta, Edmonton. <https://vimeo.com/110952481>
- Applebaum, B. (2017). Comforting discomfort as complicity: White fragility and the pursuit of invulnerability. *Hypatia*, 32(4), 862–875. [doi:10.1111/hypa.12352](https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12352)
- Boud, D., & Walker, D. (1998) Promoting reflection in professional courses: The challenge of context. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23(2), 191–206. [doi:10.1080/03075079812331380384](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079812331380384)
- Brooks-Immel, D. R., & Murray, S. (2017). Color-blind contradictions and Black/White binaries: White academics upholding whiteness. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 39,315–333.
- Canadian Encyclopedia. (2019). *Overlanders of 1862*. Retrieved on June 18, 2019 from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/overlanders-of-1862>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. [doi:10.2307/1229039](https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039)
- Daniel, B.-J. (2018). Racism is a thing! Re-examination of the concepts of care and relational practice in the preparation of child and youth care practitioners. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 31(3), 31–42.
- Daniel, B.-J. (2017–2018). Knowing the self and reason for being: Navigating racism in the academy. *Sexual Violence in Education: Transnational, Global and Local Perspective*, 32, (1–2).
- de Finney, S. (2015). Playing Indian and other settler stories: Disrupting Western narratives of Indigenous girlhood. *Continuum*, 29, 169–181. [doi:10.1080/10304312.2015.1022940](https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2015.1022940)
- DiAngelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 54–70.
- DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon.
- Fellows, M. L., & Razack, S. (1998). The race to innocence: Confronting hierarchical relations among women. *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice*, 1, 335–352. Retrieved from https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/faculty_articles/274
- Feminist next door [@emrazz]. (2018, September 26). The Brock Turners grow up to be Brett Kavanaugh who make the rules for Brock Turner [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/emrazz/status/1045102831760486401?lang=en>

International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies (2020) 11(2): 40–60

Gallaher, B. (2002). *The journey: The Overlanders' quest for gold*. Touch Wood Editions.

Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(3), 218–227.

[doi:10.1177/1177180118785382](https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382)

hooks, b. (1990). Future feminist movements. *off our backs*, 20(2), 9.

James, M., & Alexis, T. (2018). *Not extinct: Keeping the Sinixt way*. Maa Press.

Katz, J., Heisterkamp, H. A., & Fleming, W. M. (2011). The social justice roots of the Mentors in Violence Prevention model and its application in a high school setting. *Violence Against Women*, 17(6), 684–702. [doi:10.1177/1077801211409725](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801211409725)

Keane, A. (2018, February 27) *On consenting to learn in public* [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://nativeappropriations.com/2018/02/on-consenting-to-learn-in-public.html>

LeDuc, J. (Ed.). (1981). *Overland from Canada to British Columbia: By Mr. Thomas McMicking of Queenston, Canada West*. UBC Press.

Loiselle, E., de Finney, S., Khanna, N., & Corcoran, R. (2012) “We need to talk about it!”: Doing CYC as politicized praxis. *Child & Youth Services*, 33(3-4), 178–205. [doi:10.1080/0145935X.2012.745778](https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2012.745778)

M. (2016). From charity to solidarity: A critique of ally politics. *ROAM*, 8. Retrieved from <https://roarmag.org/essays/ally-politics-racism-solidarity-critique/>

Metcalf, V. (1970). *Journey fantastic: With the Overlanders to the Cariboo*. Ryerson Press.

Mignolo, W., & Walsh, C. (2018). *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics and praxis*. Duke University Press.

Reynolds, V. (2014). Centering ethics in therapeutic supervision: Fostering cultures of critique and structuring safety. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1, 1–13.

Reynolds, V. (2010). Fluid and imperfect ally positioning: Some gifts of the queer theory. *Context, October*, 13–17.

Saraceno, J. (2012). Mapping whiteness and coloniality in the human service field: Possibilities for a praxis of social justice in child and youth care. *International Journal of Child, Youth & Family Studies*, 3(2/3), 248–271. [doi:10.18357/ijcyfs32-3201210869](https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs32-3201210869)

Shore, C. (2008). Audit culture and illiberal governance: Universities and the politics of accountability. *Anthropological Theory*, 8(3), 278–298. [doi:10.1177/1463499608093815](https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499608093815)

Shotwell, A. (2016). *Against purity: Living ethically in compromised times*. University of Minnesota Press.

Skott-Myhre, H. (2017). *Youth and subculture as creative force: Creating new spaces for radical youth work*. University of Toronto Press

Smoke, P. (2019, March 28). Indigenous land acknowledgments one won't advance conciliation, say critics. *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/land-acknowledgments-reconciliation-1.5061778>

Todd, Z. (2016). An Indigenous feminist's take on the ontological turn: "Ontology" is just another word for colonialism. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 29(1), 4–22.
[doi:10.1111/johs.12124](https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12124)

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, 1(1), 1–40.

White, J. (2019). Hello cruel world: Embracing a collective ethics for suicide prevention. In M. Button & I. Marsh (Eds.), *Suicide and Social Justice: New Perspectives on the Politics of Suicide and Suicide Prevention* (Ch. 11). Routledge.

White, J., Kouri, S., & Pacini-Ketchabaw, V. (2017). Risking attachments in teaching child and youth care in twenty-first-century settler colonial, environmental and biotechnological worlds. *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*, 6(1), 43–63.
[doi:10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2017.v6.1.004](https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ijsp.2017.v6.1.004)

Zembylas, M. (2018). Affect, race, and white discomfort in schooling: Decolonial strategies for 'pedagogies of discomfort'. *Ethics and Education*, 13(1), 86–104.
[doi:10.1080/17449642.2018.1428714](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2018.1428714)