

Looking Inward to 21st Century Pedagogy

Pédagogie au 21^e siècle : examen de conscience

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Volume 51, Number 3, Fall 2016

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1039636ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039636ar>

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Publisher(s)

Faculty of Education, McGill University

ISSN

1916-0666 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this note

Doerksen, R. (2016). Looking Inward to 21st Century Pedagogy. *McGill Journal of Education / Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 51(3), 1197–1203.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1039636ar>

Article abstract

Through the lens of a student, this Note from the Field responds to a historical research project which engages pre-service teachers in critical citizenship and social imagination. Looking inward facilitates a personal learning experience of identity that is applied to learning in the 21st century. When 21st century pre-service teacher education looks inward rather than forward and outward, we learn to live in the 21st century rather than envision it.

LOOKING INWARD TO 21ST CENTURY PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT. Through the lens of a student, this Note from the Field responds to a historical research project which engages pre-service teachers in critical citizenship and social imagination. Looking inward facilitates a personal learning experience of identity that is applied to learning in the 21st century. When 21st century pre-service teacher education looks inward rather than forward and outward, we learn to live in the 21st century rather than envision it.

PÉDAGOGIE AU 21^E SIÈCLE : EXAMEN DE CONSCIENCE

RÉSUMÉ. Exprimant le point de vue d'un étudiant, cette Note du terrain s'inscrit dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche historique qui implique de futurs enseignants au cœur d'un processus de citoyenneté critique et d'imagination sociale. Cet examen de conscience rend possible une expérience personnelle identitaire, en lien avec l'apprentissage au 21^e siècle. Lorsque de futurs enseignants, produits du 21^e siècle, abordent l'éducation de manière intime plutôt que détachée ou encore, en se projetant dans le futur, cela permet à tous de vivre pleinement le 21^e siècle, plutôt que de simplement l'entrapercevoir.

The sharp blades graze my blotchy and tear-drenched cheek so that I smell their acidic metal. The edges are cold and they make the hairs on the back of my neck stand tall. I watch the blades come together as her fingers and thumb meet. In one swift sweep, it falls. My beautiful locks tumble to the cracked cement floor. I gaze down to their lifeless existence, limp and heavy. My mother used to braid that hair, gently massaging it through her fingers as she crossed one strand with another. While she braided, she sang our family's songs to me. My voice joined hers and I patted my fingers against my toes in the summer months by the fire. My little brother used to hide in that hair – tug it with his tiny fingers. I used to laugh at his giggles and the pleasure he took in peeking through it while I carried him past the fields behind our home. My father used to pat his strong hand on that hair. His palms smelled like buffalo leather and I breathed in every lingering hint before he left to hunt. My older sister used to tuck those delicate strands behind my ear and whisper her dreams into my memory. That hair danced gracefully with the sweet summer winds, just one hunting season before. The long dark strands were infused with life and caressed by love. (Excerpt from *To Kill the Indian in the Child*¹)

To the diverse and many cultures from which Indigenous children were stolen, hair represents a person's identity and spirit (Fontaine, 2010). Despite this sacred connection, during Canada's official policy to "civilize" the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island in 1842, staff forcibly cut Indigenous children's hair upon their arrival at residential schools (Milloy, 1999). The interpretive vignette that opens this article is my own embodiment of that experience, which I understand that, as a non-Indigenous person who did not attend residential school, I will never wholly comprehend. I recorded the vignette's words and they sang from small computer speakers for a dramatization in the education course, *Foundations of Indigenous Education*. Little did I know while writing or recording, a spiritual visitor from our past would grace these words with his or her presence.

In 2012, Wolf published her chapter, "Critical Citizenship, Popular Theatre, and the Social Imagination of Pre-Service Teachers" in the midst of her teaching career at Lakehead University to describe how she engaged predominately non-Indigenous pre-service educators in social justice work throughout her Indigenous education courses to disrupt 21st century master narratives. Wolf (2012) described master narratives as stories that "provide the meaning and value within which people position their social and national identities" (p. 39). Pre-service educators who attended Wolf's education courses largely identified with these dominant narratives. Through the lens of a student, I respond to her Indigenous teachings of empathy and wisdom – in contrast to the fragmented content education inherent in pre-service teacher education programs (Sanford, Hopper, & Starr, 2015) – through a remembering of my own experience in her class. Subsequently, I relate this experience to a spiritual 21st century teaching and learning pedagogy, "a way of knowing and educating that might heal rather than wound us and our world" (Palmer, 1993, p. 2).

COLLECTING SOURCES

Like Wolf's (2012) former students, my research team and I participated in a historical research project where we "learned the content of Indigenous stories as [we] researched and studied primary sources, including documents, maps, photos, diaries, and others" (p. 41). Through this exploration, we narrowed our search to one historical event that expressed ways in which Indigenous peoples in Canada lived their storied lives. Having chosen to research the transition that Indigenous children experienced when admitted to a Canadian residential school, we connected with an Anishinaabe elder who generously met with us several times and shared her own story of transition. Along with the requirement in Wolf's (2012) research project, we applied our interpretation of primary sources to the script of a one-act dramatization that we would present to our peers. In her chapter, Wolf explained that she was not as interested in the absolute accuracy of our dramatization from a purely factual standpoint as

we were building an artistic expression from historical documents that would range from complete to incomplete. She was more interested in our “capacity to take the perspective of another person, and the degree to which [we]... represented the presence of agency” (Wolf, 2012, p. 42). In this way, theatre presents itself as a vehicle to engage in research (Conrad, 2009).

DRAMATIZATION

On the day of our dramatization, our team arrived early, collected our props and signed a gift for the elder who joined our peers and Dr. Wolf in the audience. Once settled, we dimmed the lights. Our team’s narrator contextualized Canada’s residential school system to the crowd while our five remaining team members hid in the hallway. “Wiiji’ishin!” “Maamaa!” “Nibaabaa!” we cried out in Anishinaabe as the dramatization portrayed us being taken away from our families. Upon arriving at the residential school, my sister, brother, and I huddled closely together and moved rigidly from the hallway onto the stage. A nun greeted us with a stern tongue we could not understand. She separated my brother from my sister and me, called us “Number 2” and “Number 3,” then shoved me into a chair that occupied center stage. Immediately, the computer speakers echoed the opening vignette. I fidgeted in my chair while the nun tried to cut my long wig. In that moment of the dramatization, the world outside of the spotlight that I sat in lost its meaning to me. I began to feel a soft prickling sensation that lightly burned my forearms. The vignette ended and the nun harshly pushed me aside to scrub my brother’s skin. Standing on the edge of the stage, I reached back to find that my long wig remained intact. The dramatization continued and the audience applauded at the end.

INTERPRETATION

After the dramatization, I was not sure how to interpret the sensation in my arms; along with the majority of students in Miller and Athan’s (2007) article, “perhaps [I] had misread the situation; it was likely a fluke; ‘just a coincidence’” (p. 25). Chickering, Dalton and Stamm (2005) reason that my hesitation to reflect on this experience comes from my roots in an education system that ignores inner development and rather teaches that reality exists outside of the self (Palmer, 1993). Seemingly coincidental, I shared my story with a peer the following day. This fellow student insisted that I had been thanked by an Anishinaabe ancestor for empathizing with and honouring the little girl in the dramatization. Igniting emotional interest, I continued to converse with others over the following months. I began to view these conversations as gifts and recorded them in a personal journal as they transpired. One particular conversation with a peer who played the nun in the dramatization remains with me. She reminded me that while we rehearsed, she successfully cut the wig that I wore. Why then, using the same wig and scissors, could she not cut

through the synthetic hair while we presented? By weaving these conversational gifts together, I have come to interpret that on December 1st, 2015, while the nun attempted to cut the wig that I wore, I was visited by an ancestor who protected my identity, my spirit.

Wolf (2012) explained that it was common for her former students to experience “perizhivanie” (p. 43), where methods of artistic expression such as theatre enable us to live the intense experience of another. The wig became my hair; the nun was attempting to take away my spirit. When I opened myself to this vulnerability (Chickering et al., 2005) and discomfort (McCain, Ylimaki, & Ford, 2010), according to Wolf’s (2012) intent to disrupt the dominant narrative, I allowed truth to find me (Miller & Athan, 2007; Palmer, 1993). Truth emerged as the importance of my spirit in Indigenous education, despite my non-Indigenous status. This experience is significant because at the time of the dramatization, I was struggling to find my place as a non-Indigenous student in an Indigenous education specialization program. Under the guidance of several Indigenous mentors, I acknowledged and accepted this encounter by offering a tobacco tie to the ancestor who facilitated my protection and learning opportunity. It is through this text that I continue to practice vulnerability: “Allowing such an ‘illogical’ experience and its resultant meaning to be brought forth into the world is indeed an act of courage to be respected, and honoured” (Miller & Athan, 2007, p. 33). This experience may be viewed as “illogical” only because we see and think with the mind in our master narrative that which is predictable and safe (Palmer, 1993).

SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy encompasses more than the mind, curriculum or knowledge, for “knowing draws not only on our senses and reason, but on our intuitions, our beliefs, our actions, our relationships, and on our bodies themselves” (Palmer, 1993, p. xxiv). Working exclusively from an Indigenous pedagogy, Wolf (2012) sought wisdom and empathy from her pre-service teachers rather than facts and knowledge through the historical research project. From my engagement in this “critical, respectful and inclusive pedagogy” (p. 40), I learned how to see with more than the mind to follow my own path (Miller & Athan, 2007). Other Indigenous researchers have connected to spiritual pedagogy such as Battiste and Henderson’s (2009) learning journey and Cajete’s (2000) finding face. Munroe, Borden, Orr, Toney, and Meader (2013) demonstrated how this holistic approach is rooted in Indigenous knowledges. This is not to claim that non-Indigenous researchers have neglected spiritual pedagogy. McCain et al. (2010) described spiritual pedagogy as instinctual while hooks (2003) discussed an emotional awareness. Looking inward is a unique process that often cannot be expressed in words. Although spirituality is difficult to define, “one knows intuitively when one has had a spiritual experience” (Lawrence & Dirkx, 2010, p. 148). Perhaps the taboo or “illogical” categorization of spiritual pedagogy

comes from its association with religion (Lawrence & Dirkx, 2010). Spirituality, as distinct from religion, looks inward to understand who we are in order to become more authentically true to our relations (Lawrence & Dirkx, 2010). For teachers, spiritual pedagogy is learning to release control and facilitate so that students find their own path to walk rather than walking that of their teacher (Miller & Athan, 2007).

21ST CENTURY TEACHER EDUCATION

When we discuss 21st century pedagogy, we talk about the international marketplace (Stewart, 2010), sustainable futures (Cloud, 2010), and innovation (Anyon, 2005). Although valid, common threads in these ideas include looking outward and forward. When we discuss educational reform, we speak to exterior structures such as programs, policies, curricula, resources, and facilities, leaving little attention for interior structures (Chickering et al., 2005). These exterior structures are important, but Sanford et al. (2015) have asked us to stop and consider what innovation means in relation to pre-service teachers, in relation to human beings. The reality is that innovation, no matter how creative or advanced, cannot penetrate human beings as deeply as our own authentic and spiritual selves (Chickering et al., 2005). Change comes from looking inward (Palmer, 1993). Relations come from looking inward (Miller & Athan, 2007); when we understand ourselves, we learn to understand others (Chickering et al., 2005). When we understand others, we story and re-story our lives (Bishop, 2003) so that the future is not to be *envisioned* as a static knowledge, but *lived* as a continual and interactive process.

CONTINUATION

The experience that I share in this text exists in relation with my storied life, so I continue my narrative rather than claim its conclusion. In this continuation, other people will interpret the sensation in my arms and the intact wig from the unique space, place, and time that they occupy. In addition, my own interpretation of the experience will certainly contort through time: “seldom do we live up to the truth we are given, but that does not mean that we must cease speaking the truth” (Palmer, 1993, p. 106). I understand this to be the way that we engage in the dynamic process of knowing, never able to fully reach the truth but in continual interpretation of it. As educators, “we teach who we are” (Palmer, 1998, p. 1) so it is with spiritual pedagogy that I continue to interpret who I am in order to improve my practice for my students to walk their own paths. Although any singular pedagogy cannot wholly address 21st century pre-service teacher education (Sanford et al., 2015), looking inward is one way that I have released the limitations of exterior and forward-reaching 21st century assumptions in my own journey as a student. It is through looking inward that we have the capacity to *live* in the 21st century rather than simply envision it.

NOTES

1. The dramatization was a collaborative (unpublished) project designed to apply primary and secondary research methods to a mode of artistic expression. The group worked together to research the history of residential schools in Canada, after which we wrote and presented a short skit to our peers. This except is my written contribution to the group dramatization.

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