

**Moving From the Margins: Culturally safe teacher education in remote northwestern British Columbia**  
**Sortir de la marge : une formation culturellement sécuritaire des enseignants dans le lointain nord de la Colombie-Britannique**

Edward B. Harrison, Alexander K. Lautensach et Verna L. McDonald

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Résumé de l'article

En 2007, l'Université du Nord de la Colombie-Britannique a mis sur pied un programme de formation des enseignants à l'élémentaire d'une durée de deux ans, à son campus nord-ouest, situé à Terrace, en Colombie-Britannique. Ce programme a été conçu pour répondre aux besoins spécifiques de la communauté du nord, dont les inégalités existantes en termes de sécurité culturelle des enseignants et des élèves autochtones. Les auteurs partagent trois collaborations entre collègues issues du programme. Celles-ci ont contribué à améliorer la sécurité culturelle dans les écoles maternelle à secondaire 5 et à relever les défis de justice sociale présents dans les communautés de la région. L'attribution culturellement sécuritaire de l'espace a été mieux comprise, les conséquences affectives de l'apprentissage ont été reconnues comme des déterminants importants de la sécurité culturelle et les gestes des enseignants valorisant la sécurité culturelle dans leur classe ont été soutenus dans divers contextes.

# MOVING FROM THE MARGINS: CULTURALLY SAFE TEACHER EDUCATION IN REMOTE NORTHWESTERN BRITISH COLUMBIA<sup>1</sup>

EDWARD B. HARRISON, ALEXANDER K. LAUTENSACH &  
VERNA L. MCDONALD *University of Northern British Columbia*

**ABSTRACT.** In 2007 the University of Northern British Columbia initiated a two-year elementary teacher education program at the Northwest Campus in Terrace, British Columbia. The program was designed to meet specific community needs in the North that arise from inequities in the cultural safety of Indigenous teachers and students. The authors share three collegial inquiries into the program's contribution toward improving cultural safety in K-12 schools and meeting social justice challenges in the region's communities. Culturally safe allocation of space became better understood, affective learning outcomes were recognized as important determinants of cultural safety, and teacher action in classrooms towards cultural safety was scaffolded for various settings.

**SORTIR DE LA MARGE: UNE FORMATION CULTURELLEMENT SÉCURITAIRE DES ENSEIGNANTS DANS LE LOINTAIN NORD DE LA COLOMBIE-BRITANNIQUE**

**RÉSUMÉ.** En 2007, l'Université du Nord de la Colombie-Britannique a mis sur pied un programme de formation des enseignants à l'élémentaire d'une durée de deux ans, à son campus nord-ouest, situé à Terrace, en Colombie-Britannique. Ce programme a été conçu pour répondre aux besoins spécifiques de la communauté du nord, dont les inégalités existantes en termes de sécurité culturelle des enseignants et des élèves autochtones. Les auteurs partagent trois collaborations entre collègues issues du programme. Celles-ci ont contribué à améliorer la sécurité culturelle dans les écoles maternelle à secondaire 5 et à relever les défis de justice sociale présents dans les communautés de la région. L'attribution culturellement sécuritaire de l'espace a été mieux comprise, les conséquences affectives de l'apprentissage ont été reconnues comme des déterminants importants de la sécurité culturelle et les gestes des enseignants valorisant la sécurité culturelle dans leur classe ont été soutenus dans divers contextes.

Local school districts in British Columbia's northwestern region are characterized by a high percentage of First Nations students (Coast Mountain School District [CMSD], 2011). Meeting student needs arising from the current sociopolitical context, which includes a formal federal apology for the harmful

effects on First Nations of forced residential school attendance, a three year controversy prior to the 2010 Canadian endorsement of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous peoples, and continued treaty negotiations in BC for autonomy on traditional territories, requires a great deal of attention to an agenda of cultural safety. Hence, in this article, the central concept on which the three authors' program case studies converge is *cultural safety in teacher training*. We define cultural safety as:

- The effective teaching of a person / family from another culture by a teacher who has undertaken a process of reflection on his / her own cultural identity and recognizes the impact of the teacher's culture on his / her own classroom practice (adapted from Nursing Council of New Zealand [NCNZ], 2011, p.7).
- "Unsafe cultural practice is any action that diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and well being of an individual" or group (National Aboriginal Health Organization [NAHO], 2006, p. 3).

Thus, cultural safety may be identified with effective cross-cultural teaching or the absence of unsafe practices, actions, and reactions. In the context of public education, the definition of cultural safety refers primarily to the cultural identity and well being of groups.

In this collaborative paper we investigate three of the cultural safety dimensions that emerged from the UNBC teacher training program for elementary teachers we teach; they concerned the allocation of physical space in the classroom, the roles of affective learning outcomes in the hidden and formal curricula, and strategies for strengthening cultural safety in the community context.<sup>2</sup> We focus specifically on the program's progress in facilitating cultural safety for student teachers. Cultural safety can transform power imbalances, neutralize institutional discrimination, and address the effects of colonization. Efforts to achieve cultural safety necessitate respect and trust, and they proceed in a non-linear continuum through the stages of cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural competencies, and ultimately to cultural safety (Ramsden 2005).<sup>3</sup>

At the very heart of classroom practice is the issue of how a university classroom environment could be structured to optimize cultural safety for the fifteen student teachers from under-served groups. Hence, our first focus area was the physical classroom environment. We first describe events that promoted cultural safety in the teacher education program. Our observations are presented on the role of space and place in defining and asserting cultural identity in the classroom, using the example of our two cohorts of teacher candidates.

Accommodating the needs of diverse groups in light of cultural safety necessitates that educators and students openly discuss and respect the values and dispositions that each culture brings to the classroom. This accords with Madsden's (1996) dictum that "all action is goal-directed and all goals are value-selected"

(p.80). Our second focus area addresses the affective learning outcomes (values, attitudes, motivations and interests) pursued in the program and their contribution to promoting cultural safety. Standards of professional practice subtly limit the influence a particular value can have (BCCT, 2008). This reasoned attention to tolerance and respect represents in itself a value – an important affective learning outcome that too often receives limited attention.

Much of the educational distress for students from cultural minorities is caused by inadequate consultation and sporadic follow-up between the educational institution and their communities. The main concerns of those communities with respect to schooling and professional training are often not taken into account in institutional policy. Cultural safety requires that those gaps be closed. In the third section we identify avenues to cultural safety explored through action research projects begun by experienced teachers and our School of Education faculty.

The need for new ways of teaching cross-culturally is evident across the province in high rates of high school non-completion for First Nations students. The northern rate of incompleteness has been variously described as 40 per cent, as half of the students, and as approaching 60% (the latter was reported by BC Stats, 2011). For some local bands incompleteness is closer to 80 per cent (C. Guno, Education Director, Kitsumkalum band, personal communication, June 18, 2011). The data on completion rates indicates a real need to address cross-cultural dynamics and cultural safety.

Forty-six per cent of 18 year olds in the area's Coast Mountain School District didn't graduate in 2006-2007, compared to a provincial average of 26.2 per cent. Across B.C., First Nations people are much less likely to graduate - 43 per cent of First Nations people between 25 and 64 years have not completed high school. (Hyslop, 2011, para. 26)

Sleeter (2005) stated: "Failure of students to learn or participate may say more about students' resistance to the curriculum (or to the teacher) than about their ability to learn" (p. 65). A lens of cultural safety allows teachers and teacher educators to deconstruct the school context from the student's perspective and partner with communities towards student completion.

## **PROGRAM CASE STUDY I: MOVING FROM THE MARGINS: SHIFTING PLACES AND SPACES**

### ***Beginnings***

In an address to music educators in 1990 Ted Aoki said the following:

There are two questions we would like Bobby Shew to speak to, sing to or play to. The first question is "When does an instrument cease to be an instrument?" and the second question is, "What is it to improvise? What is improvisation?" (p. 367)

Aoki (1990) went on to ask: “could improvisation be a way to create spaces to allow differences to show through?” (p. 369). The Aboriginal group in the UNBC Teacher Education Program became a reflection of Aoki’s vision of improvisation.

Most students in this cohort were of European background. Of the twenty-nine students, seven were self-identified Aboriginal, and of those, six were Gitksan people from Hazelton (Gitanmaax, Gitanyou and Kispiox). Their presence in the program raised two important questions. First, how do we support the First Nation people in the program? “Support” encompasses the concept of providing a culturally safe environment where First Nations students feel their cultures are recognized and accepted within the program and their contributions are of value to the class. Second, how do we support all the other teacher candidates to comfortably work with all First Nations teacher candidates in the program?

While the program team strove to integrate First Nation values and knowledge into the various courses, the First Nations students themselves were also working to create a space and place in which they could feel comfortable. This section of the paper considers how that was achieved.

*Opening day: Education 390.* On the very first day the instructor organizing the introduction to the practicum course in schools took the students to Kitsumkalum reserve. There, on the banks of the Kalum River, two First Nations leaders spoke to the students of the important task they were embarking upon. This event took the familiar and made it unfamiliar (Tuan, 1986). Students usually expect to stay in the classroom, be handed syllabi, and be told what will occur throughout the courses. It was a surprise to the teacher candidates to be wrenched from the safety of the Terrace Campus building and transported to the banks of a river: a journey to a “foreign place.” The river bank was “foreign,” since many students had passed by the place without really seeing it. They had travelled this road in their cars many times before, and it had become familiar. Now here, amid pouring rain, they gathered on the banks of this place with two strangers walking up to greet and engage in a short dialogue with each student in the circle. The instructor described this as a “magical moment”; “magical” for here the local First Nations had experienced their ancestors coming and going in their canoes over the centuries. In the 1890’s steamboats came to this place and took away wood to burn. Twenty years later, a railway demanded right of way through the graveyard, and still later a highway bisected their land. Now here were the students, partaking in part of the healing process as traditional welcoming to the territory was being re-instated.

*Dividing the group.* To underline the importance of the First Nations in the region, most students took a course entitled *Introduction to First Nations Education*. Three of the First Nations women took this course. The other four Gitksan

women had taken UNBC's Culture and Language program and started an Early Childhood Education Degree. This meant that Gitksan students would take some courses in common with the full group but others would not since they had already taken these as part of their other program. The other four would take Education 396. This course was listed as a seminar course, but it still needed development of an outline and focus. This was my (the instructor's) first contact with the four Gitksan women. When Aoki asked those two questions – what is it to improvise? what is improvisation? – he was speaking directly to me that night. After the introductions, I really wasn't sure where the course would lead.

One of the first lessons, I decided, was to listen carefully to what was being said. It was clear by the end of the two hours that these women knew what they wanted: to run or open elementary schools in Gitksan territory where Gitksanimax would be the foundational language. We began a journey that would weave itself through their program for two years. Within this journey food would become one of the main connecting elements. We would all come with our offerings for the night. Other students would often pass by the room as our Thursday night banquet was laid out. Food plays an important role in Gitksan society. "Family and food are a priority. When we get together we all bring food" (Audrey, February 22, 2009). One does not exist without the other. As one student commented: "Where there is a gathering of people, there is always food as it helps us to keep focused on the issues that we have come together to address" (Audrey, September 6, 2009).

The Gitksan students later commented that they would bring food to share with the whole group, usually on Fridays but that the other students in the class didn't contribute. Whenever food was needed for other student led events "we organized the food basically" (Audrey, February 22, 2009). Three of the non-First Nations students "got it" and so they would move physically and socially closer to the group. They were "adopted," that is, accepted as if they were a First Nations person in the class. This opening across cultural identities was visible, yet remained invisible in the dynamics of the whole group, until the inquiry went to the instructors and was articulated. As one First Nations student commented: they "were being trained and groomed in our ways because they already had some of the components that were essential to thrive in our society" (Audrey, February 22, 2009). These components included a willingness to freely share notes and ideas with others.

*Establishing a territory within a place.* What becomes important is the way in which the back of our double size classroom emerged as a "place": an area where the values and traditions of the six Gitksan women in the course became established and recognized as "their territory," their sense of place and belonging. Tuan (1991) reminded us, "what [we] do not see and hear are the discussions and commands crucial to the process of making anything that is not so routine as to be almost instinctive" (p. 684).

At first glance, the row of tables across the back of the room is like any other back row (of a classroom arranged in a U shape). But as one of the women said: "Back of the room is our turf"... "it was territory because Gitksan's are territorial" (Audrey, March 18, 2009). The territory came with unspoken rites and traditions. To understand the traditions we need to understand how the back of the room, became a "territory" and how that territory became linked to overall student success in understanding First Nations generally within the teacher education program. As one First Nations student commented:

The back is where we feel comfortable and it has a homelike environment, then there is a sense of belonging within a group, then it becomes our territory. We feel a close bond with each other and, like our ancestors we closed the circle to enhance everyone and protect them in our traditional ways as family. (Julie, February 22, 2009)

The territory emerged from the need not to turn one's head back and forth to see speakers. The sides of the room required this motion. Audrey Woods described it in this way:

Visually we had a view of all sides.... Others at the back say it's just comfortable.... As a Gitksan person, we are trained and groomed to observe, listen and be sure of what we say before we say it. This is also a liability in a university environment because we are considered not to be participating. We are taught not to say things unless we mean it because we don't get a second chance and we can never take back our words. Also we are taught to only speak once on a topic. (Audrey, March 18, 2009)

The back of the room actually began as a "tradition of the back room," since in the beginning there was a row in front of this row. The "back row phenomenon" was explained this way: "In church my Grandmother would always sit in the back to listen.... We have a humble modesty" (Audrey April 10, 2009). The back row suited the situation.

Over time, however, the original front row was folded into the two sides. The back row became the front row on that side, now visible to all. But its existence was practical and pedagogical. As mentioned earlier, the four women didn't take all of the courses in the program at the same time the other students did.

At first glance this wasn't important, but in fact was very significant for the missing course was often blended into the next course they took. The four found they needed to understand the missing course in order to make sense of the current course. So they had to buy books and borrow notes in order to catch up. The two non-First Nations students, one on each wing of the territory, freely lent them their notes. They understood, and so they became part of the territory. They were adopted.

A third non-First Nations student was also adopted. "She had the traits we have like our own life style, beliefs and function" (Audrey, February 22, 2008). They would laugh and playfully call her by a Gitksan variation of her name.

Beyond this they supported her and helped her to gain the confidence to speak out when she needed to.

The students at the back always sat at the same place.

Our seating arrangement is like at the feast hall – you were designated where you would sit... We liked to come early so we had our place.... If we didn't sit together we 'didn't feel the strength when we didn't sit in the same place.' (Audrey, April 10, 2009)

The significance of the territory is not to be underestimated. Tuan (1975) suggested its power when he states:

To know a place fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another. At a high theoretical level, places are points in a spatial system. At the opposite extreme, they are strong visceral feelings. Places are seldom known at either extreme: the one is too remote from sensory experience to be real, and the other presupposes rootedness in a locality and an emotional commitment to it that are increasingly rare. (p. 152)

Over time, even if a few were late, their seats wouldn't be occupied. "This showed a mutual respect from the other students" (Julie, February 22, 2009). At the same time there might have been a feeling of fear at play. As one First Nations student suggested: "Respect or fear? We all definitely have a very powerful aura in the way that we conduct ourselves. Many times we don't even have to say a word. Our presence speaks volumes." (Julie, February 22, 2009)

The classroom space as territory was recognized by the group. Was it resented? "I don't think so. I had so much on my plate. I just don't have time to think about it" (Audrey, April 16, 2009). This left the Gitksan students with the security they needed to feel welcome within the group. It had over the course of the two years become "their space". From their territory they openly shared their knowledge and food with the rest of the group. It permitted them to speak out, in powerful ways, about their views on teaching and learning. That the stability of the territory was important to the women is reflected in the following comment: "No one would occupy that space even if we [Gitksan students] were away" (Audrey, April 10, 2009).

### *Shifting spaces*

These next few months revealed shifting spaces. There were two events that uncovered this. One was the death of the father of three of the women. This man was a world renowned carver. All of the Gitksan students would travel for the funeral. Two returned to the class briefly to pick up a flower arrangement and a card. They were surprised that some of the remaining students had "occupied" their seats, their space. "They didn't even let them get cold." The occupiers would have moved for them but "we were only there for a few minutes" (Audrey, February 22, 2009). This event raises the question of how secure the back territory really was within the class, or whether or not the



rest of the students understood its significance to the First Nations students. Although, as Audrey commented,

It really didn't matter because we know who we are and where we come from. When some of our group were away, it felt like a link was missing and that we were not complete. This is the reason we all left to go to the funeral. We felt like we were sisters and needed to be there to provide support for our sisters. (Audrey, February 22, 2009)

The second event occurred in a Fine Arts methods course. Students divided into two groups for their presentation. One group presented a series of individual talents. The other group presented a First Nation legend contributed by one of the Gitxsan students. Only six European background students were involved. To the Gitxsan students this suggested that "many were getting tired of First Nations" as a theme. (Audrey, February 22, 2009). The class seemed to divide.

### *Thoughts*

The space that Aoki foresaw as a possibility opened up, but not in the way some might imagine. The Gitxsan students certainly improvised in a way that the instructors could not have predicted at the beginning of the program. There were few open reactions to the creation of the territory within the classroom. Their point of view could be viewed as follows: "united we have strength and no one can abuse us, but divided we can be conquered" (Audrey, April 16, 2009). Further, the Gitxsan students didn't feel there was hostility to "their territory." From the instructor's point of view the emergence of a functioning territory in the cohort meant that the program provided the necessary, culturally safe environment, to not challenge its existence. As the program moves forward the values and lessons related to creating a culturally safe environment have encouraged the instructors to move forward in very positive and open ways. In many ways the heart of the program is the on-going dialogue between the UNBC School of Education (Terrace) and the First Nations communities.

### **PROGRAM CASE STUDY 2: AFFECTIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES FACILITATING CULTURAL SAFETY**

At the center of the dialogue between UNBC and the First Nations communities are values, attitudes, dispositions, motivations, and interests that constitute affective learning outcomes (ALOs). Many educationists (e.g., Stiggins, 2008) classify all ALOs under the concept of dispositions, as do we in this paper. Characteristic action verbs include appreciate, become interested in, engage with, value, defend, advocate, choose, adopt, identify with. In Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Anderson et al, 2001) the affective domain is organised into the five levels of receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterising. While the taxonomy of ALOs in its original form did not specifically take into account cultural diversity, much of its content is primarily

defined by cultural influences, both in the curriculum and in the background behaviour and learning of each student. Cultural safety requires educators to take into account the values and attitudes of all learners when implementing an educational program.

In recent years, the curriculum debate has moved away from ALOs and focused primarily on the cognitive domain (Bebau, 1993). One possible reason may lie in the emergence of a certain moral pluralism that moved educators to perceive moral instruction as too problematic and to make greater efforts to steer clear of ideological conflicts. Other reasons may be the widespread partiality for the logical positivism that accompanies modernity (which tends to marginalise alternative values) and the general obsession with individual autonomy and rights (Lickona, 1991). As well, ALOs have always been notoriously difficult to teach and to assess. This has caused many ALOs to move into the hidden curriculum (Contenta, 1993), which makes it more difficult to address the affective side of cultural safety issues.

The hidden curriculum is responsible for the implicit transmission of ideological content that serves to reproduce and perpetuate dominant power relationships (Contenta, 1993; McLaren, 1994), as well as ideologies and cultural traditions (Giroux, 1985). The hidden curriculum includes assumptions, beliefs, values, and ideals that exert their influence between the lines of curriculum documents and learning materials, and from unspoken rules and practices in school culture and beyond. Its significance cannot be overstated. Many ALOs are transmitted through implicit assumptions, priorities, judgments, prejudices and expectations. It seems appropriate to target the hidden curriculum as a major source of those ALOs that compromise cultural safety, to render those implicit messages explicit and subject to appropriate revision.

As stated above, the widespread inattention to dispositions has caused many ALOs to move into the hidden curriculum as implicit parts of behavioural outcome statements. For example, a grade 5 science unit on renewable and non-renewable resources directs students to “analyse how BC’s living and non-living resources are used” and to “identify methods for extracting or processing and harvesting” those resources (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 29). The objectives imply the materialist commodification of nature in a narrow commercial sense and the dominant, cornucopian view of progress (Lautensach & Lautensach, 2011). Thus, they represent an attempt to inculcate a specific value orientation (that of the dominant culture) without allowing for an open discussion of any values, let alone alternative ones. Clearly this move of ALOs towards the hidden curriculum contravenes the priorities of cultural safety that necessitate their explication.

In addition to the hidden curriculum, ALOs are found in explicit form in official curricula such as the one mandated by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2005). For instance, the BC elementary curriculum features ALOs

such as “identifying thoughtful, caring behaviour in families” (Kindergarten Health & Career Education, p. 30) and “developing attitudes that support the responsible acquisition and application of scientific and technological knowledge” (goal 4 of scientific literacy, Grade 7 Life Science, p. 11). Action verbs such as evaluate, show respect, appreciate, while not exactly abundant among the profusion of cognitive objectives, occur in most units. This explicitness gives a sense of direction to teaching and it guides assessment. Yet, their vagueness prevents teachers from using them to strengthen cultural safety.

The role of ALOs in curricula for teacher education has been quite different. The BC College of Teachers established eight standards of professional practice, three of which consist largely of dispositions that are explicitly described (BCCT, 2008). Specific, affective action verbs appearing in the Standards include to value, care, respect, act ethically and honestly. The BCCT requires teacher education programs to assess teacher candidates on those ALOs. To a much greater extent than in the school curriculum, ALOs are part of the explicit teacher education curriculum and addressed directly in the assessment process. However, the cultural diversity of values and attitudes, and the diversity of culturally contingent interpretations of ALOs, are still not sufficiently emphasised.

Predictably, those discrepancies created considerable confusion among our teacher candidates, which manifested in prolonged and lively discussions. The question to what extent to teach and assess ALOs in public education while strengthening cultural safety was mirrored by similar uncertainties about ALOs in teacher education. We pursued those issues through class discussions and in an essay.

### *Class Discussions*

In class discussions it became clear at an early stage that the conflicts surrounding cultural safety are primarily ideological. Ideologies, consisting of beliefs, assumptions and values, inform people’s interpretations of the world around them, and thus also their interpretations of curriculum and of professional standards (Felluga, 2003). Furthermore, the curriculum in all its manifestations contains ideological messages that people of different cultural backgrounds react differently towards. In their essays (described below), the students described specific areas where cultural safety is jeopardized by ideological conflict and identified ALOs mandated in the BCCT Standards upon which counterstrategies could be devised. A sample of themes is shown in Table 1.

Specific counterstrategies included modeling some ALOs, teaching other ALOs explicitly, interaction and communication with all students and their families, and community involvement. To implement those counterstrategies effectively, teacher candidates, through their lesson plans, deliberated on four key questions. We summarise here the conclusions from those deliberations.

**TABLE 1. Using the BCCT Standards to offset the hidden curriculum on cultural safety**

| Hidden Messages from the mandated curriculum and from traditional mainstream practice  | ALOs mandated by the BCCT Standards (numbered) of professional practice (BCCT 2009)         |
|--|---|
| Domination by Judaeo-Christian traditions  | Inclusion of and respect for all cultures (#1)  |
| Marginalisation of Aboriginal forms of cultural expression, of efforts to affirm identity, and of efforts to assert self-determination | Build cultural self-image of Aboriginals (#1, #4)   |
| Informal streaming and ranking of students and of schools along unidimensional scales through standardized competitive assessment      | Facilitate and encourage personal growth of all children along idiosyncratic paths (#1, #3) |
| Modernist ideology advocates 'reason over ignorance', 'order over chaos', 'science over superstition'                                  | Respect for the diversity of cultures, their beliefs and values (#1, #2)                    |
| Conform to established practices and norms in school culture without explicit questioning  | Contribute constructively to the profession (#8)  |

*Can specific ALOs be taught effectively? Which ones can, and which cannot?* The acquisition of dispositions during the formative years is in fact inevitable and well characterized in various stage models by Piaget (1932), Kohlberg (1973), Ornell (1980), Coles (1997) and others. It occurs in the family and community, in peer groups, through religious activities, through the media, and during general enculturation and socialisation, and it favours the values of the hegemonic culture. Teaching methods for ALOs, including role modeling, experiential learning, interpretation of narratives, and value clarification have been published and practiced extensively (Caduto, 1983; Freakley and Burgh, 2000). A formal educational effort towards certain desirable dispositions renders the process more explicit and controllable than it would be under those informal influences listed above. Moreover, formal ALOs can counterbalance the hegemonic influence. However, some values cannot be taught (such as the ones requiring years of modeling by a parent), and many probably should not be assessed, yet need to be explicated.<sup>4</sup> To ensure cultural safety, the assessment procedure and the subsequent evaluation of the student should take into account cultural differences on the definitions and applications of values.

*What are the benefits for cultural safety of teaching ALOs explicitly?* In the absence of a formal educational effort, the acquisition of values is merely relegated

to the implicit (the hidden curriculum) and other avenues mentioned above. The process also becomes less reliable. Certain dispositions that are primarily transmitted through peer contact and entertainment media are now widely considered counterproductive (e.g., the students' attitudes towards violence, or prejudices about aboriginal identity). In contrast, explicit value education can bring considerable benefits (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990), including targeted support for developing cultural sensitivity, awareness, and competencies. Striking the right balance between moral universalism (e.g., with respect to human rights or sustainability) and moral pluralism (e.g., concerning spiritual beliefs) obviously represents a challenge in that context. The BCCT Standards help define the lines along which compromises might be achieved.

Besides the need to outcompete counterproductive default dispositions, several other considerations warrant formal efforts to promote certain values over others. Many students from cultural minorities arrive in the classroom with perfectly adequate cognitive skills but low cultural self-esteem; teachers would be remiss if they did not make deliberate efforts to help them use those cognitive skills to build self-esteem (at the individual and cultural levels). This requires explicit discussion and deliberation about values. In the context of increasing dominance of a modern global culture, Aboriginal nations are struggling to maintain their cultural identity. Their efforts towards cultural sustainability deserve what support the education system can contribute, including promoting critical thinking and discussing culturally diverse alternatives. Its success hinges on finding the right methods as much as defining the right outcomes.

*To what extent are teachers' attitudes towards value education contingent on their cultural background?* Both cohorts of teacher candidates communicated frankly and frequently across cultural boundaries. Differences of opinion were freely expressed and accepted, without exempting them from academic scrutiny. Although disagreements frequently arose along cultural lines, few of those disagreements ended up unresolved, and almost all were addressed. An issue where one cohort decided to disagree concerned the teaching of respect for personal property and for truth telling in elementary classrooms; the Aboriginal teacher candidates favoured a more relativistic view of those ideals. While the disagreement on an ALO precludes attempts at teaching it, it should not impede further deliberation.

### *Essay on Addressing the Hidden Curriculum*

Teacher candidates wrote a short essay on the influence of the hidden curriculum on any one of the following issues: gender relations, cultural hegemony, cultural preservation and reassertion of cultural identities, Aboriginal self-determination, or another issue relating to cultural safety. These topics seemed appropriate for two reasons: Conflicts were evident on these issues between the BCCT Standards of Practice (BCCT, 2008) and the curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2005) in its explicit and hidden forms; and the

conflicts appeared to be mainly ideological and related to modernist assumptions (in the curriculum) contradicting the principles of cultural safety (as represented in the Standards).

The application of critical theory to ideological conflicts can direct educators towards productive questions and towards promising transformative strategies to promote their own cultural safety and that of their students. Accordingly, the content and quality of the essays submitted by the two cohorts confirmed that values and ideologies of hidden curricula took a central role in those novice teachers' conceptualisations of dangers to cultural safety. They invariably sharpened their critical skills of analysis and expressed their findings concisely.

In their essays, the teacher candidates agreed that, to the extent that cross-cultural agreement can be achieved, the teaching of certain ALOs can bring great benefits for the cultural safety of students. This potential translates into a moral obligation for the teacher to make the attempt. Among these ALOs, the cohort prioritised those that addressed the negative effects of the hidden curriculum. Table 1 lists those effects and shows how the BCCT Standards for Professional Conduct mandate the mitigation of those negative effects.

### **PROGRAM CASE STUDY 3: TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH FOR CULTURAL SAFETY**

In the third focus area for cultural safety in the B.Ed. program, McDonald led three teacher educators in a one year, teacher-action research project with ten teachers. The teacher educator's purpose was to discuss teachers' questions around Indigenous student success and to brainstorm classroom interventions. The project design included each teacher participating in brainstorming questions, focusing on a specific question, developing an intervention, collecting pre- and post-data, and presenting their findings at the closing meeting in June.

#### ***Background on the need for change***

Teachers enthusiastically discussed Leroy Little Bear's (2007) presentation on Indigenous epistemologies and the new quantum sciences at a local conference. The three project leaders wanted to build on questions raised at the conference by teachers and leaders: How do teachers experience cultural safety, their own professional safety, and action in their classrooms for indigenous student safety and success? New discussions needed to continue on items from residential schools and identity changes, to terminology (schools and government use of the term aboriginal, and First Nations leaders use of the term indigenous, for example).

Approximately 55% of the 5,050 students are identified as Aboriginal in the school district (CMSD, 2011). Conducting research on educational change and teacher action research, Kaser and Halbert (2009) found that "persistent work

on combining intense purpose, a focus on deep-learning, informed evidence-seeking, genuine inquiry-mindedness, and thoughtfully designed professional learning in the context of respectful and trusting relationships” (p. 3) results in strong outcomes for both Aboriginal students and the school community. Teacher action research was chosen as a method of inquiry because the process “treats teachers as capable of playing active roles in their own professional development and of creating new knowledge about effective approaches to instruction” (Caro-Bruce, Flessner, Klehr, and Zeichner, 2007, p. x).

The majority of teachers and administrators in northern districts are Euro-Canadian. This continuing mismatch for Indigenous children has cultural safety implications for students and families. Egbo (2009) commented on the need for teachers in cross-cultural classrooms “to create alternative visions of their classrooms. These go beyond the orthodox practices and pedagogies that are, more often than not, incompatible with the socio-demographic realities of their teaching environments” (p. 155). Oakes and Lipton (2007) called for leadership in reforming “absolute certainties and universal truths as mined from the depths of white, Western culture [which are] weak and limiting guidelines for deciding what and how students will learn in the twenty-first century” (p. 95).

The school district we teach in is unique as it is situated in the traditional territories of the Gitxsan, Haisla, and Tsimshian First Nations (CMSD, 2008). There are indigenizing efforts already underway in many schools – often following requests made by leaders of First Nations. Hopkins (quoted in Koshy, 2010) described teacher inquiry as “action research [that] combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by enquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform” (p. 8). For example, 'Na Aksa Gila Kyew adult school is based on cultural relevance in language, health and parenting events, the arts, community service, spirituality, experiential learning on the territories, and continuous academic scaffolding. Indigenous content and pedagogy in the northwest is needed in both indigenous and mixed classrooms. This need is being responded to by local teachers who are advocates of traditional knowledge. “I am advocating for attending to, valuing, learning from, and passing on a much wider array of knowledge than that which resides in traditional bodies of school knowledge only” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 8).

### *Seeking culturally congruent and community based change*

The work of bringing to light oppressive patterns and making institutional dynamics visible is central to teacher action research. Teachers work within an “institutional discourse” and must contend with the unique ways it “subsumes and renders ‘institutional’ the particularities of everyday experience” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 105). One example we discussed was parents’ experiences in “open” school district meetings on Aboriginal needs and concerns. The parents shared their immediate concerns and were silenced several times with comments

indicating that their topics were not on the agenda. Teachers participating in the meetings as parents had strong feelings and described incidents of retaliation against their children. All wanted to remain anonymous because of this fear. Researchers of community relationships have advised that “one’s first commitment as an institutional ethnographer is to an investigation of ‘what actually happens’ as those who live it experience and talk about it” (Campbell and Gregor, 2004, p. 52).

The combination of residential school histories and the related inter-generational impacts comprise the lived experience of many in the Northwest. Both experiences make interventions pivotal to student success – and also daunting if teachers are inexperienced. “While systematic, multidirectional attacks on educational inequities are most desirable, individuals do not have to wait for these to happen before taking action on their own” (Gay, 2000). When the project changed from discussions of teacher action research, to implementing action in one’s own classroom, dissonance occurred. This stress was most apparent for many of the inexperienced teachers. The projects slowed down with the additional effort required to implement action, rather than just read about possible action.

Linda Smith (2006) stated in *Decolonizing methodologies*: “The problem is not just that positivist science is well established institutionally and theoretically, but that it has a connectedness at a common sense level with the rest of society” (p. 189). The impact of perceived “common sense” over decades, with similar types, formats and concepts of knowledge and learning, is that educators may “take for granted the hegemony of its [positivist science] methods and leadership in the search for knowledge” (Smith, 2006, p. 189).

Institutional ethnographer Dorothy Smith commented on “common sense” and the need for opening “up to empirical investigation aspects of power operating in social life that otherwise lie hidden and mysterious” (as quoted in Campbell and Gregor, 2004, p. 32). Research using more culturally congruent methods, deconstructing 21<sup>st</sup> century economic and resource colonialism, and building Indigenous trust takes time and experience: often time beyond what is deemed reasonable in the structures and policies of either universities or school districts.

### *In-service teachers action research projects*

Social justice literature includes colleagues’ insights, breakthroughs and struggles in the face of macro political and economic change. “Micro level changes, such as those that take place within classrooms, are important, too” (Gay, 2000, p. 202). Once the idea of micro level change was welcomed, teachers’ questions were developed in meetings with facilitators using a critical realism lens: “What is needed and why? What is in the way? Where is it working? How do we get there from here?” (Clark, 2008, p.13).



Some of the early research questions the ten participant teachers explored were:<sup>5</sup>

- What district efforts have increased Indigenous student successes? For example, Thornhill primary students singing for a full auditorium in the Tsimshian language!
- What are the factors involved in the success of Indigenous students with Grade 12, full credits?
- What are the characteristics of successful cross-cultural teachers?
- What are some of the efforts to prevent Indigenous students falling through the cracks?
- Does the daily use of Indigenous curriculum materials, language, role models and strategies increase student achievement when compared with scores in traditional classrooms in similar contexts? For example, English 12, First Peoples.

After a specific question was chosen, each of the teachers continued individual project development by choosing their own pre- and post-data collection, intervention and methods. New outcomes occurred when inquiry questions and connected interventions included the salient dynamics impacting student success. For example, the special services' students who were pulled out of regular classes were genuinely welcomed. Students were then presented with an engaging activity with embedded and indirect behavior coaching, instead of dealing with past behaviors immediately and directly. The teacher saw successful students return to class ready to learn. In a second teacher's project, students in conflict created learning events with elders, with traditional protocols and foods used throughout the process. Conflicts were resolved, and learning as healing became a new focus for the class.

Change towards cultural safety occurred with the special education teacher and the teacher working with conflict resolution after these teachers linked specific dynamics with purposeful interventions. Both teachers clearly articulated the dynamics, their questions, the pre- and post-data, and the intervention results for the final program meeting.

The other eight teacher action research projects were incomplete due to many factors. Economic constraints in the schools and in the community led to frequent tensions. Dropping enrollment, changes in leadership, school closures, reconfigured campuses, new grade levels, reduced budgets, lay-off notices, and reduced special education support staff were some of the concerns. In addition, facing many end-of-the-school-year tasks meant teachers described themselves as overwhelmed and unable to complete the data collection, but "maybe next year."

*Thoughts.* Sleeter's (2005) work on "un-standardizing curriculum" addressed the dominance of "one size fits all" Euro-traditional knowledge and behavioral systems. Sleeter describes alternatives in thinking more complexly about multicultural curriculum, and going from "1) task definition, to 2) perspective taking, then into 3) self-reflexivity, and to a different 4) locus of decision making in successive growth stages of emerging, developing and accomplished practitioner responses" (Table 2.1, p. 33). The building of an internal locus of decision making requires the willingness to step out of one's usual zone of cultural safety as a teacher – and move into a new learner role in cultural self-reflexivity. This move can often feel like *no safety* for the teacher in an institutional tradition of power hierarchies and assumed compliance. There is a considerable difference between individual psychological safety zones developed in acculturation processes by dominant groups and cultural safety as negotiated by self-defining groups regarded as equals. The willingness to be *unexpert* in the process of re-negotiating schooling with students and community requires considerable commitment to equity and social justice outcomes. We were asking for this commitment in an era of accountability measures, increasing technology demands, eroding resources, economic threats, closing schools, newspaper publication of student achievement results, and increasing complexity in many areas of daily life.

The cultural self-efficacy required of teachers, both intra-culturally and inter-culturally with daily stresses and the challenges of working within cross-cultural contexts, would need to be strengthened and supported for more of the teachers to follow through to completion - for example, supports for the stressors impacting children from poverty backgrounds. In order for Indigenous education directors and families to see the success rate of children steadily increase, the direction of change towards cultural safety that is most needed may be support of teacher cross-cultural self-efficacy.

## CONCLUSION

The three areas of focus in exploring cultural safety in the B. Ed. program were: the students' use of classroom space, affective learning outcomes and the hidden curriculum with students, and teacher action research projects in the local school district oriented towards Indigenous student success. The broader intent for cultural safety development continues with the teacher educators now conducting workshops with in-service teachers, with student teachers, with Indigenous leaders, and with college and university professors.

The working definition of cultural safety in teacher education we started from has changed through the learning with our students. Now our definition is: "growing beyond reflecting on one's own cultural identity and the impact of that identity on one's practice, into acknowledging the dynamics in cross-cultural identities over time, and appreciating the diversity of the lived experiences in

Northwest BC. Concurrent with the explorations of identity, cultural safety also necessitates that teachers continue to strengthen, define, and empower their teaching of the affective domain, individually and collectively, in order to take action in their context”.

Compared to the definition given at the onset, this one is complemented by a sense of purpose and a focus on competencies. As our findings indicate, this purpose and focus should include considerations of autonomy in the allocation of learning space, informed deliberation on the affective influence of the hidden curriculum, and classroom action for the inclusion of the community context into the educational process.

Our collaborative work as teacher educators will continue until students from all cultural groups are showing evidence they are both strong, engaged, and successful learners, as well as active advocates for cultural safety around them.

#### NOTES

1. The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of Audrey Woods and Julie Morrison. Audrey Woods, a Gitskan woman, was a member of the cohort who largely acted a spokesperson for the group. She viewed and consented to all the comments as they occur in the first case of this paper. The case in fact emerged through an informal discussion (2009) with Audrey about “the back row.” Subsequently, these comments were gathered at a short meeting, with her permission, as we talked about her experiences of being in the cohort. A second Gitskan member of the group, Julie Morrison, was also present. She also has read and agreed with the comments. She has, as well, given permission to use her name. Audrey and Ed Harrison discussed her thoughts on a number of occasions as we reflected on the experience together. These thoughts were then brought together and presented in case one.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Verna McDonald, School of Education, University of Northern British Columbia, Terrace, BC V8G 1K7. Email: [verna.mcdonald@unbc.ca](mailto:verna.mcdonald@unbc.ca)

2. To orient the reader more clearly, there are three pedagogical questions in this paper which were the result of team inquiry questions. The three questions were: 1) What is going on with the positioning of students at the tables? 2) Given there are multiple ethnicities, house groups, and languages represented in the class, how can we facilitate both strong connections across diverse backgrounds, and strengthening of cultural, bi-cultural, and multi-cultural identities as pre-professional teachers? 3) Will stronger connections and identity clarification help experienced teachers take action to engage educational / social justice issues in their communities?
3. The three faculty involved in these collegial inquiries consist of two males and one female, one multi-lingual and two monolinguals (with conversational language skills developing in traditional Sm’algyax language), two first generation university graduates, three middle class lifetime teachers, and three European immigrant families (first generation, third generation, and seventh generation).
4. Examples include honesty, respect for personal property and for authority, tolerance of drudgery, and conforming to implicit social norms. Reasons why these should not be assessed include lack of reliability or validity, and potential stigmatization.
5. The teachers in the teacher action research project did not want to be described as our small schools and communities make recognition easy from even minimal descriptions.

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ED HARRISON worked in the public school system for many years. His degrees are in education with particular emphasis on curriculum studies. His research interests are in First Peoples language and culture and their relationship to education. He currently teaches in the teacher education program at UNBC in Terrace, British Columbia.

ALEX LAUTENSACH holds degrees in biology, education, bioethics, and environmental science. He teaches teachers in UNBC's BEd program at their Terrace campus. He is an editor of the *Journal of Human Security* and deputy director of the Human Security Institute.

VERNA McDONALD has teaching credentials and classroom experience in elementary education, learning disabilities, and severe emotional disturbance. Her degrees are in psychology, educational psychology, and multicultural education. Her research interests involve cross cultural identities, and culturally regenerative education. She currently teaches in the teacher education program at UNBC in Terrace, British Columbia.

ED HARRISON a travaillé dans le système public scolaire pendant plusieurs années. Il détient un diplôme en éducation portant sur l'étude des programmes. Ses intérêts de recherche sont la langue, la culture et le rapport à l'éducation des Premières nations. Il enseigne présentement au sein du programme de formation des enseignants de l'UNBC, située à Terrace, en Colombie-Britannique.

ALEX LAUTENSACH est diplômé en biologie, en éducation, en bioéthique et en sciences de l'environnement. Il forme les enseignants dans le cadre du programme de baccalauréat en éducation du campus de Terrace de l'UNBC. Il est le rédacteur du *Journal of Human Security* et directeur adjoint du Human Security Institute.

VERNA MCDONALD possède des lettres de créances en éducation et de l'expérience pratique d'enseignement au primaire, en contexte de difficultés d'apprentissage et de troubles émotionnels sévères. Elle possède un diplôme en psychologie, en psychologie de l'éducation et en éducation multiculturelle. Ses recherches portent sur les identités interculturelles et l'éducation orientée sur la régénération culturelle. Elle enseigne actuellement au programme de formation des enseignants de l'UNBC, à Terrace, en Colombie-Britannique.