WITNESSING AS PEDAGOGY: TRANSLATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES INTO PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT. We believe Indigenous witnessing provides an impactful exemplar of how to translate Indigenous Knowledges into pedagogy that challenges the normalization of Western knowledge systems. By sharing our Indigenizing process of witnessing with fellow educators within a mandatory post-secondary Indigenous Education course to a foundation of Indigenous Knowledges, we hope to inspire meaningful authentic practices within local context grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing. Our theoretical framework posits that transformational Indigenous pedagogies can emerge from educators' ethical positioning and ability to see possibilities between the specific educational aims of their course(s) and translating local Indigenous Knowledges into practical pedagogical approaches.

LE TÉMOIGNAGE COMME APPROCHE PÉDAGOGIQUE : METTRE EN PRATIQUE LES SAVOIRS AUTOCHTONES

RÉSUMÉ. Nous croyons que le témoignage autochtone offre un exemple marquant de la manière dont les savoirs autochtones peuvent être transposés dans une pédagogie qui remet en question la normalisation des systèmes de savoirs occidentaux. En partageant notre processus d'autochtonisation du témoignage avec nos collègues éducateurs dans le cadre d'un cours obligatoire sur l'éducation autochtone axée sur les savoirs autochtones, nous espérons inspirer des pratiques authentiques et significatives dans le contexte local, fondées sur les modes de connaissances autochtones. Notre cadre théorique postule que les pédagogies autochtones peuvent émerger du positionnement éthique des enseignant·e·s et de sa capacité à voir les possibilités entre les objectifs éducatifs spécifiques de leurs cours et la traduction des savoirs autochtones locaux en approches pédagogiques pratiques.

Over the last decade, many Canadian teacher education programs have established compulsory Indigenous education classes as part of the required skill sets for new teachers (Rodríguez de France, et al., 2018). Prior to this, universities offered optional Indigenous education courses that varied widely

in participation, impact, and delivery (Dion, 2016; Whitinui, 2018). Contemporary classes have risen out of a growing recognition of historic and present-day manifestations of oppression affecting Indigenous Peoples and their experiences with, and in, education. The need for these courses is often framed as a response to the persistent achievement gap of Indigenous students (La Pierre, 2019; Ponting & Voyageur, 2001; Richards, et al., 2010), yet is more accurately attributed to gaps in educator preparedness for engaging with Indigenous students and knowledge systems (Archibald, et al, 2010; Louie et al., 2017). As Indigenous education courses become a norm in teacher education programs, they need to progress beyond content-based approaches focused on what we teach and instead consider *how* we teach.

Indigenous education was successfully practiced for millennia in community (Bird, 2014; Cajete, 2011; Little Bear, 2011; Miller, 2018), yet as a field of formal study is relatively new to post-secondary institutions. Given the historic marginalization of Indigenous peoples in developing Indigenous courses in post-secondary institutions (Absolon, 2019; Rice, et al., 2022), we are still learning wise practices. Those in charge of developing the curriculum often feel pressure (both external and internalized) to align their curricular and pedagogical design with the faculties and universities they work within (Kalifa, et al., 2019). This article offers one example of Indigenous educators challenging conventional pedagogy. We have argued elsewhere that decolonizing must precede Indigenizing efforts (Poitras Pratt, et al., 2018), and we see a need to articulate *how* such Indigenizing might take place. As part of a group of Indigenous colleagues who regularly collaborate, we have shared Indigenizing approaches that we have taken up in our classroom practices (Louie, et al., 2017) and here, we share one very important and powerful Indigenizing practice, that of witnessing.

We believe that through Indigenous witnessing, we have developed a productive and impactful exemplar of translating Indigenous Knowledge into pedagogy. One component of decolonizing is disputing Western knowledge and culture as universal representations of all global cultures (Louie, 2024). Our hope is that educators can replicate our approach to witnessing in their own practices, or apply this theoretical model by translating other Indigenous Knowledge traditions into impactful pedagogy.

POSITIONALITY

As educational researchers, we have collaborated on a number of research projects over the years. From 2013-19, we worked together to design and finetune the mandatory Indigenous education course that is part of the teacher training program at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. We deem it essential to restate our positionality in order to honour the ancestors who have come before us and to ethically situate ourselves. Moreover,

our relationship to identities is not static and continues to evolve and become refined as we learn more about our own stories. In an earlier article, we shared Indigenizing and decolonizing pedagogies unique to each of us (Louie, et al., 2017); the approach presented here is the next logical progression to our shared work. In what follows, we ground ourselves in our respective ancestral and kinship lineages and speak to the people and systems that have shaped our thinking. The Knowledge Keeper who inspired our engagement with witnessing, Terry Lynn Luggi, has joined our team to contribute to this article. Previously, Knowledge Keepers such as Terry Lynn would be cited as personal communication sources, yet we felt her inclusion as co-author would more respectfully acknowledge the Indigenous Knowledges she carries that inspired the creation of our pedagogical approach.

Dustin Louie (Dakelh)

I am a Dakelh First Nations scholar who is mixed race and an assistant professor and director of the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at the University of British Columbia. I trace my Indigenous family lineage through the Nations of Nadleh Whut'en, Nee Tahi Buhn, Lheidli T'enneh, and Saik'uz. As a member of the Beaver Clan in the Balhats, I recognize the hereditary system that has been practiced in my communities for millennia prior to contact. I research and teach in areas of Indigenizing and decolonizing education. The Dakelh tradition of being called to Witness served as the inspiration for our pedagogical approach and I am proud to share this unique cultural tradition with those receiving their teacher training at post-secondary institutions.

Yvonne Poitras Pratt (Métis)

I am a Métis scholar whose family roots trace back to Red River with both parents born and raised in the Fishing Lake Métis Settlement in northern Alberta. Some of the more prominent Métis names in my family tree include Poitras, Parenteau, Fayant, Tait, and Calliou, where great-great grandfather Pierre Poitras served on the 1869 Provisional Government. In 2009-10, I worked with members of the Fishing Lake Métis settlement community to create a series of 19 intergenerational digital stories; several of these are now shared as open teaching resources.[1] I was recruited to Werklund in 2013 as part of an Indigenous cluster hire where our first task was to design a mandatory Indigenous education course for our education students. I have researched the impact of this course on students and instructors (Poitras Pratt & Hanson, 2020) and I continually seek innovations to improve Indigenous education alongside kin, friends, and colleagues (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019).

Terry Lynn Luggi (Dakelh)

I am a member of the Stellat'en First Nation residing in her grandmother's Lheidli T'enneh traditional territory (Prince George). I am a Tseke zah or a hereditary Chief born into Lhts'ehyoo (Frog clan) with the name Yabalee given to me by my great grandfather Maxine George when I was a young girl. Currently employed by Nadleh Whut'en Indian Band as the Indian Residential School Project Manager for work on the Lejac Indian Residential School, I am passionate about healing for my people and is also a trainer with Returning to Spirit ~ a non-profit organization formed with the objective of unfolding reconciliation from the impacts of residential school.

POSITIONING IN POST-SECONDARY

We recognize there are inherent tensions in being a diverse set of instructors taking up Dakelh and other Indigenous Knowledges in Blackfoot territory, and we offer our own experiences with humility. Scholars in Indigenous education have a unique responsibility to recognize teachings from the land in which we teach, but we are not limited in our responsibility to only those Nations on whose land we reside, since we work in public institutions that educate students from diverse communities and who will one day teach in diverse communities that represent a multitude of Indigenous peoples and knowledges.

Teacher educators are asked to model innovative forms of teaching that adhere to the ideological values of their education programs and respond to societal needs. As Métis scholar Aubrey Hanson (2020) describes it, "the term Indigenous education [is meant] to bundle together a range of endeavours related to Indigenous people and perspectives within educational theory and practice" (p. 7). Those involved in the delivery of Indigenous education courses face a paradox: pedagogical innovations are called for, but they can be restricted by the university setting. So, although educators are calling for transformation in light of the truths they are learning about Canada's colonial past, they are faced with the orthodoxy of a rigid institution. Over the years, our challenge has been how to authentically include Indigenizing practices in this setting, beginning with witnessing

The practice of witnessing occurs when named individuals are placed in the role of listeners, who then have the responsibility of relaying what they heard to another audience. Adopting such a practice can elevate the importance of the collective learning process. In acknowledging Indigenous conceptions of witnessing as the philosophical foundations of our course, we conceive our collective vision as an actionable commitment to decolonize as well as Indigenize education spaces. Indigenous practices of witnessing are living values we can embody, much like Blackfoot conceptions of honesty (Little Bear, 2011), Métis ways of understanding kinship (Carrierre, et al., 2021), or any other way of knowing foundational to Indigenous peoples. By sharing our

classroom practices of witnessing, we are taking up the charge to translate Indigenous Knowledges into pedagogy.

We recognize other Indigenous academics who have employed Indigenous Knowledges as pedagogy in Western educational spaces (e.g., Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Our willingness to explore and expand on a framework for a witnessing pedagogy originated in the Indigenous Knowledges of the Dakelh people and expanded to include diverse representations of witnessing as understood by other Indigenous groups. The distinct aspects of our approach rest on a combination of: the translation of an Indigenous Knowledge into practice; the formal application of this approach across an entire program (rather than a single class or lesson); the intentional alignment between aims of Indigenous education and pedagogy; and, finally, the reliance on multiple Indigenous cultures' perceptions of this Indigenous knowledge tradition of witnessing, thereby constituting an inclusive approach but one that challenges pan-Indigenous representations.

Questions and concerns of appropriation or inappropriate applications of Indigenous knowledges and protocols are serious matters. Since the genesis of our approach is based upon Dakelh traditions, and one of us is Dakelh and received guidance from a respected Dakelh Knowledge Keeper, authentic and appropriate protocols were followed to seek permission and guidance in our scholarly approach. In the expansion of witnessing practices beyond Dakelh, we aspired to be inclusive and respectful of our student populations while taking direction from diverse Indigenous peoples of Canada. We have been vigilant in relaying the teachings of these communities through pertinent scholarly works; we have not enacted tribal protocols. For example, in Dakelh, transparency is central to our ways of being and this value is manifested in our balhats[2] protocols. Scholars would not have the rights to enact the protocols of balhats, but they would be encouraged to take guidance from its teaching of transparency in an act or practice that is meaningful to them. In other words, although we are not Knowledge Keepers, we can nevertheless take inspiration from the teachings—as can others.

Who, then, is our imagined/real audience for this pedagogical work? Clearly, we would never assume to tell Indigenous community members how they should embody the role of Witness or carry their own Indigenous Knowledges. The embodiment of teachings of witnessing is one way in which education programs can heed repeated calls to Indigenize our practice. However, such learnings are separate from the community systems that form and hold these knowledges. In our experience, most students in our teacher education programs are non-Indigenous, so it can be argued that our approach is constructed as a pedagogy for Settler teacher education students to meaningfully engage with Indigenous Knowledges. To some extent, this is accurate. However, in practice I (Dustin) have used this pedagogy with myriad

Indigenous learners, including Dakelh, who bring their own teachings and enrich our understandings, refine our process, and deepen our engagement. Most Indigenous students have never enjoyed the freedom to practice Indigenous Knowledges in mainstream education and are keen to walk alongside educators in indigenizing approaches. Moreover, due to colonization, some Indigenous people have been separated from traditional knowledges, experiencing them for the first time in school environments. We view our contributions here as a form of indigenization of the academy through the application of witnessing within Western or colonial education systems. The following sections trace the development of our pedagogical approach and the emergence of our theory. The comprehensive explanation of witnessing that follows represents the rigour required to translate Indigenous Knowledges into practice. To conclude, we discuss the implications of our witnessing practice as a form of translating Indigenous Knowledges into pedagogy within broader teaching and learning approaches.

DEVELOPMENT OF OUR INDIGENOUS EDUCATION COURSE

We wanted to embed Indigenous pedagogy into a mandatory Indigenous Education course comprised of 450 students taught across multiple sections (in-person and online). As a design group, the authors of this paper, along with colleagues Aubrey Hanson and Gregory Lowan-Trudeau, discussed how we might move away from the standard academic essay as the primary summative assessment. We felt it was hypocritical to ask our students to challenge the status quo through decolonizing and Indigenizing ways then assign a standard research paper. If our course was to have credibility and integrity, we agreed we must indigenize in earnest.

As a team of Indigenous scholars, we challenged one other to design a new pedagogical approach. After days of deliberation and discussion, we developed exciting ideas but always seemed to conclude with '*... and then the students will write about it.*' It was evident that our formal training in the academy made it difficult even for us, as Indigenous scholars, to privilege and imagine Indigenous approaches.

We then asked ourselves: what are the fundamental aims of our Indigenous education course? This intentionality helped guide the course re-design. We identified the following student aims: 1) gain understanding of the histories and colonization of Indigenous peoples; 2) be exposed to diverse Indigenous cultures and ways of being; 3) position themselves within Indigenous education; 4) become motivated to take up Indigenous education; and 5) acquire the skills and knowledge to begin Indigenous education in their own classes. Setting out the aims allowed us to focus on appropriate pedagogy and assessments thereby honouring the generations of Indigenous and allied scholars who had battled to have Indigenous education made compulsory in

teacher education programs. We needed to lead this process by being intentional about our stated aims, ensuring that curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment were aligned with those aims. Collectively, we decided that our students would benefit from witnessing one another's learning journeys throughout the term in a group setting. The term would conclude by sharing these learning journeys with one another through a final presentation and a learning artefact.

DAKELH CONCEPTIONS OF WITNESSING

I (Dustin) began by having extensive conversations with my cousin, Terry Lynn Luggi, who holds a name Yabalee in the Frog Clan of the balhats system of the Dakelh people. Terry Lynn stated that one of the critical roles of the Dakelh people is that of a Witness; the word is capitalized here deliberately to respect the importance of the role within Dakelh culture. Being a Witness is a critical responsibility since we are an oral people. In order for the complex balhats system to be maintained, the next generation must be Witnesses throughout their lives so they can one day take on leadership responsibilities. The protocols for welcoming guests into a balhats are complex and key to the success of the ceremony. Knowing these extensive protocols requires a lifetime of witnessing and participating.

The second aspect of being a Witness for the Dakelh is bringing power to an occasion through active participation. Envision a celebratory event, such as a marriage or graduation, where not a single invited guest attends? The absence of guests would relay an important message in terms of the community's feelings about these institutions or those being honoured. Through the witnessing of events, we are showing that the event itself is important, as well as the people involved. The same is true in the balhats system where we witness vital life events: a person receiving a ceremonial name; having a headstone erected; a communal decision-making gathering; paying off debts; or any other number of important ceremonies.

Finally, witnessing is important because it ensures transparency: since decisions are made in the open for everyone to witness, there can be no questions about alternative motives or how consensus was arrived at. These explanations of the balhats system are intentionally abbreviated as we cannot do justice to the protocols, importance, and values associated with Dakelh witnessing in this short paper. Through the teachings, instructions, and permission of Yabalee, we have engaged with witnessing in Indigenizing teaching that has been influenced by Dakelh ways of knowing. It is critical to note that we are not embodying Dakelh witnessing based on the protocols of the balhats and other traditional ceremonies and systems. Instead, we are inspired by the teachings and embody the underlying philosophies in our own practices in the classroom.

Here, we provide a brief history of the balhats so the reader can better understand the system from which Dakelh conceptions of witnessing emerged. Varying forms of witnessing in the balhats are taken up by First Nations across central and coastal British Columbia (Davidson & Davidson, 2018). Contrary to the modern-day chief and council system imposed on First Nations by the Canadian government with colonization, the balhats system aligns with our traditional ways of being and knowing, which allows representative and ethical leadership to guide our people. The Canadian government outlawed the balhats in 1880, citing the so-called frivolous nature of gifting and the impediment these practices presented to assimilation (McGuire, 2022). The Indian agents who reported on the 'uncivilized' nature of the system failed to understand its complexity and remained willfully ignorant to its purpose (Fiske & Patrick, 2000). Ultimately, the outlawing of the balhats posed an existential threat to the Dakelh and other First Nations people, since the system is foundational to a functioning and healthy culture and the reproduction of central values. The ban remained in place until 1952; however, many Nations surreptitiously maintained the system, often holding events during inclement weather to ensure a visit from the Indian agent could be avoided (Fiske & Patrick, 2000). Other Nations lost their connections to the balhats during the ban. Nadleh Whut'en, the Nation that I (Dustin) come from, still maintains the balhats system alongside the Chief and Council system. Blackfoot Elder and scholar, Leroy Little Bear (2011) contends that Western scholars have been adept at describing Indigenous ceremonies, but have failed miserably at understanding the meaning behind these practices. The role of the Witness is integral to the balhats system and everyone who participates has dispersed responsibilities in these roles. Notably, the heads of the clans, or those with Uzah names, are designated Witnesses who carry significant responsibilities that adhere to strict protocols they are expected to pass on oral through history.

We recognize our fortunate position in having strong connections to our communities where we can continually learn and collaborate. We deem it our responsibility to value our respective knowledge traditions and to share them with each other, including in our roles as academics and educators. It is important for us to reiterate that we do not envision Indigenizing practices in classrooms as carrying on the legacy of these knowledges, but instead as imagining a new place for these knowledges to live and inform our practice as educators. Despite the Dakelh people being situated in what we now call central British Columbia and our institutions being elsewhere, we believe this knowledge tradition has value and resonance with diverse places and peoples including global peoples. We honour and thank Terry Lynn for sharing her traditional knowledge of witnessing with us as we worked to Indigenize our teaching and learning practices. In keeping with a spirit of collectivism, we approached Terry Lynn to ask if she would share her thoughts on witnessing

and join us as a co-author on this paper. She agreed, and the following are Terry Lynn's thoughts on witnessing.

The very act of witnessing and being a witness is integral to humanity. Events happen and words are spoken every day, for everyone. Witnessing is acknowledging events and the truth. It is acknowledgment of importance requiring ceremonial validation and displays of gratitude, thanks and appreciation. In the context of this approach, it is acknowledging the act and process of being a witness that is both ceremonial and sacred. As witnesses, we listen attentively with our minds and our hearts, as affirmation of what we are seeing and hearing as being significant. It is not necessarily incorporated or held only as a way of learning or knowledge but as a way of being, permeating within us. Facts, information and data are easily regurgitated, but a personal process of symbolic importance comes to fruition in a person's life. To witness is the culmination of that process. People are honoured when you witness their life event. Witnesses are honoured by virtue of witnessing that life event. Witnesses are honoured and held in high esteem. The witnessing process, however, does not cease there.

Dakelh culture, which abounds in oral tradition, has witnesses share their personal experience of what transpired. The Supreme Court of Canada affirmed that testimony provided by Wet'suwet'en Azahne and knowledge holders was accepted for the first time in Canadian history as legal evidence. Testimony is a concept that has a subtle nuance contrary to its meaning in mainstream culture, where personal stories are often held in the pretense of shame, mistrust, personal secrecy and fear. It is without a doubt this practice was eroded by the effects of colonization and residential school. Nevertheless, the stories are compelled to be affirmed, respectfully validated, and held as a responsibility, by every witness thereafter. It is my view that it is not necessarily the responsibility of the witness to make a detailed verbatim account akin to a financial accounting but rather to capture the essence and spirit. The power of the truth does not rest in a single person. The power of the truth rests with all. It is not lost on me that the structure of our balhats seating system is strategically and metaphorically designed in a circular fashion. Contemporary learning theory states a person is considered to have learned effectively when they are able to share in a spirit of culmination along with mutual and reciprocal understanding.

Life is witnessing. This is life. This is humanity. Our Dakelh customs and practices place high regard and compelling cultural significance on this value.

Starting with the inspiration gained from Dakelh conceptions of witnessing, we have since expanded our understandings to include perspectives on witnessing from diverse Indigenous peoples across Canada.

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF WITNESSING

The witnessing scholarship we have developed emerged organically through conversations with Knowledge Keepers. However, it is imperative we recognize the growing corpus of knowledge on this topic on the part of Indigenous that

includes Métis, and settler scholars, and how witnessing can refer to different kinds of practices, depending on the context.

Kwakwaka'wakw scholar, Sarah Hunt (2018), drew inspiration from the potlach system for her framing of witnessing scholarship, stating, "Witnessing is part of a larger system of maintaining an oral culture, and just as the role of the dance and singer is embodied, so too is the role of the Witness" (p. 282). Hunt also positions her work within her own community: "my framework of witnessing … is distinguished by its specific roots in Kwakwaka'wakw potlach traditions" (p. 288).

One of the more compelling examples of witnessing in contemporary times has taken place through the profound testimonies shared with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) by over 6000 residential school survivors. Envisioned as far more than victim-centered trauma sharing, survivors sharing their stories with commissioners was a beginning point for truth-telling:

> To determine the truth and to tell the full and complete story of residential schools in this country, the TRC needed to hear from Survivors and their families, former staff, government and church officials, and all those affected by residential schools. Canada's national history in the future must be based on the truth about what happened in the residential schools. One hundred years from now, our children's children and their children must know and still remember this history, because they will inherit from us *the responsibility of ensuring that it never happens again.* (p. 16, emphasis added)

Métis scholar Judy Iseke (2011) characterizes her work in digital storytelling with Elders as one of *pedagogical witnessing* that "includes acts of remembrance in which we look back to reinterpret and recreate our relationship to the past in order to understand the present" (p. 311). This includes understandings of present-day "colonial, oppressive, and dominating behaviours [that] may still be witnessed and experienced or even prevalent in educational institutions and practices" (p. 322). As Iseke (2011) describes it, "the listener will also experience struggles of his or her own in the process of acting as witness to the trauma witness (storyteller)" (p. 323). In similarly drawing upon Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholarship, Poitras Pratt and Daniels (2014) encourage educators to engage in a "deep listening of history – one that would mean living our lives as if the lives of others really mattered" (p. 186).

In a 2020 *Human Rights Review* article, Nipissing University settler scholar Rosemary Nagy (2020) set forth a theory of "settler witnessing, which denotes a specifically ethical process" (p. 222). Rather than "merely 'watching,' 'learning about,' or, worse, 'consuming' trauma narratives" (p. 222-223), especially "within the parameters of settler colonialism" (p. 227), Nagy seeks to connect 'settler' with Indigenous witnessing. She draws on Felman and Laub (1992) on witnessing the testimony of Holocaust survivors and Oliver (2001) on response-

ability and responsibility as embedded in the act of witnessing. She connects both to Indigenous storytelling (Archibald, 2008) and Indigenous principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016) for what is shared orally.

We see our education classes as one way to bring truths to those who carry the potential to change how the next generation listens to truths and acts on these truths.

DESIGN OF WITNESSING IN OUR INDIGENOUS EDUCATION COURSE

Next, we outline our application of witnessing as pedagogy in a mandatory Indigenous education course offered within a mainstream teacher education program while we were both (Dustin and Yvonne) teaching at the University of Calgary. Our pedagogy included three components inspired by Dakelh witnessing. Subsequent iterations of the course expanded to include Indigenous ways of knowing from other Nations across Turtle Island. The original design, based on Dakelh conceptions of witnessing, was as follows: (1) students joined a small group that remained constant throughout the semester. These groups met weekly to discuss the course content, how they were processing new ideas, what they were struggling with, and how they were imagining the course would inform their future teaching. (2) Each week one member of the group took on the role of the Witness, someone who did not speak and only listened, or witnessed, the group conversation. Once the weekly session was over, the Witness recorded a short audio or video message of what they witnessed that was kept for their group (3) Lastly, at the end of the term, each group reviewed their short witnessing clips to reflect on their progress. In response, they commit to the claim that Indigenous education makes on them; we explain this more in a later section.

The subsequent teachings were based on diverse Indigenous ways of knowing and included: (4) Prior to each week, groups were presented with, discussed, and planned for embodying a different Indigenous perspective on Witnessing that could enhance their understanding of witnessing and provide a direction for how they could engage in the process that week

In what follows, we give a more comprehensive explanation of this process.

Witnessing Groups

From our experience, students begin taking up Indigenous Knowledges in earnest when they recognize its value to their future teaching. Our course is often their first experience with Indigenous knowledge traditions. The content of our Indigenous education course addresses histories of colonization in Canada, introductions to diverse Indigenous peoples, and the history of Indigenous education movements across Turtle Island. As mentioned, students are placed in groups of five and asked to meet weekly to discuss what they have

learned relative to the learning theme of that week, and to share successes and barriers along with their emotional learning (Poitras Pratt et al., 2018) We follow the Dakelh witnessing traditions, as described above. When one member assumes the role of Witness for an assigned week, it means they actively listen to the others in conversation and attend to what is significant in what their peers share, rather than contributing through speaking. At the end of the weekly witnessing session, the Witness is asked to create a brief oral statement of what they witnessed from their peers in the form of a video or audio recording. As Dakelh Knowledge Keeper, Terry Lynn, reminds us, this witnessing is not a detailed accounting but rather an attempt to relay the spirit of what was shared. This component of the pedagogy aligns with Dakelh approaches that require collective exposure to knowledge creation as a pre-requisite for one day leading. In the following week, a new member is assigned the role of Witness and undertakes the same process. By the end of the term, each student will have served as a Witness for their group at least once. At the end of the course, each group will have an archive of short witness recordings that represents their collective learning journey. Through the life of the course and in the recordings, we witness the growth of student understanding and shifting perspectives, and often their changing internal dynamic, in which trust and vulnerability grow.

In our approach to witnessing there are strong connections to experiential learning. By engaging our students with an active form of Indigenous Knowledges, we reach beyond the limitations of theoretical approaches and honour Indigenous traditions of active forms of learning (Fiske & Patrick, 2000). Cajete (1994) contends that, "Tribal education revolved around experiential learning (learning by doing or seeing)" (p. 33). Witnessing requires students to actively engage with diverse Indigenous Knowledges of witnessing, while seeing the valuing of Indigenous ways of being in colonial institutions.

Making a Commitment to Indigenous Education

In the final week, students listen to their group's witnessing clips from across the term to identify significant shifts and to assess their overall learning progress. This learning journey is shared by way of a class presentation by each group and concludes with their intentionality, which we refer to as a *claim* as to how they will take up the work of Indigenous education in their future classrooms. These claims are presented in any medium students feel comfortable with: a standard slide presentation, a debate, a performance, a talking circle, or any creative format that students may imagine. These sessions also serve as a celebration, honouring the learning students have achieved over the term. These sharing sessions engender excitement, commitment, and passion in our students in a way that writing an essay never could.

As with Dakelh conceptions of witnessing, the act of making a claim aligns with the notion that we gain power from witnessing. When we make claims in public spaces with fellow educators, our statements gain power through the collaboration of Witnesses. Our words and claims accrue greater value due to the presence of Witnesses and their responsibilities to hold us accountable and support our lifelong commitment to Indigenous education.

Artefact

As the final step in the witnessing journey, we have students create an artefact that they can bring into their future classrooms as either a reminder of their commitment to Indigenous education or to represent a set of skills involved in this work. This artefact is created in collaboration with their witnessing group members. Students have produced resource lists, lesson plans, unit plans, manifestos, annotated bibliographies, communication networks, artwork, and various other creations. The creation of an artefact represents the further development of practice based on Indigenous Knowledges while also building on Dakelh conceptions of Witnessing by establishing a transparent process through which future teachers will make good on their commitments to Indigenous education.

Diverse Witnessing Prompts

As we continued to develop the course, we began to include additional prompts and instructions for our students. While the first iterations of the course were inspired by Dakelh conceptions of witnessing, we soon expanded to engage with diverse Indigenous perspectives. We began providing a different approach to witnessing each week. We were intentional in our sharing so that students could experience more than one Indigenous knowledge tradition (Iseke, 2011). Each mode of witnessing was distinct to the particular Nation or tribe, thus avoiding any perception of pan-Indianness.

As one example of an Indigenous Knowledge we embodied, a Coast Salish definition of witnessing states that:

> The role of the Witness is to record the message of the event in their hearts and minds, and afterward, remember and validate the special occasion by carrying the message and sharing it with their friends, neighbours, and community members. (Koptie, 2010, p. 114)

After sharing this Coast Salish concept of witnessing, we engaged in a class discussion unpacking the meaning. Once we established a shared understanding of the Nation's perspective on witnessing, we negotiated how we could actively embody this knowledge in our witnessing that week. In this example, students often decided that in order to honour Coast Salish forms of being a Witness, the witnessing student will demonstrate accountability by saving the message and session in their hearts and minds, and then holding a discussion with one person outside of class regarding what they witnessed.

Another Indigenous approach to witnessing that we have applied in our course was a Métis conception that has proven to be helpful in especially difficult moments. While our course is intentionally designed as strengths-based, it is impossible to give a holistic account of Indigenous education without discussing the residential school era. During the week assigned for this difficult topic, we watched the film *We Were Children* (Wolochatiuk, 2012), a documentary/re-enactment of the experiences of two residential school survivors who endured unspeakable horrors. The students in our course are often shocked by the film and many are overcome with emotion. Witnessing sessions this week prove critical, since they give students an opportunity to debrief about the film, share their reactions, and process their emotions. The small group witnessing sessions also provide an alternative, even necessary, safe space. The connections and bonds students created through their witnessing groups built in a level of safety and comfort that ultimately served them well in difficult learning.

In the pursuit of a diverse set of witnessing principles and practices, I (Dustin) also discovered an article by Métis scholars Richardson, Carriere, and Boldo (2017) that I have used during the week that focuses on residential schools.

> Those who sit in the role of witness must be aware that safety is something that is re-negotiated in each interaction[;] it can never be taken for granted… Given that the teller sits in a position of vulnerability, how then do learners or listeners [witnesses] offer something back in a way that metaphorically wraps the teller in a blanket of care, acknowledgement and love? (p. 193)

In the emotionally charged witnessing session that followed the screening of *We Were Children,* students were prompted to enact their witnessing responsibility by wrapping one another in a metaphoric blanket of care that allowed them to be vulnerable. This Métis conception of witnessing provided students with the tools to negotiate their feelings and emotional reactions in a healthy, supportive, and productive manner.

Another witnessing approach that I introduced to our students came from Witsuwit'en Knowledge that I (Dustin) was gifted by a member of the Nation in the form of a community-constructed text (Morin, 2011), which included a teaching that guides Witnesses to challenge assumptions. Yet another that I have used is based on a Cree perspective that I (Dustin) encountered in the Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary (LeClaire & Cardinal, 2002) and was later explicitly modeled and explained to me by Cree Matriarch, Barb Ward-Burkitt; the teaching reminds us that witnessing shared across generations can become more powerful than first-hand accounts. Yet another is the Ktunaxa witnessing practice, which is an Elder's knowledge published in Ktunaxa scholar Codie Morigeau's thesis (2020)on the revitalization of Indigenous Knowledges. While working with the Ktunaxa community and school district, I (Dustin) discovered

the following quote (Morigeau, 2020), which I used as a central teaching around which I built a teaching session:

> The beauty of Ktunaxa belief is that even though some ceremonies, practices, or songs have been lost or forgotten, there was a belief among all of the participating Elders that they will come back. ...The second Elder described how the songs are at the tops of the trees and that when they get lonely, they will come down to us to sing. (p. 46)

A Tsilqot'in form of witnessing we learned from Kunkel and Schorcht (2014) was based on interviews with Elders and included a teaching about relationship to place and land by considering *where* we witness in addition to what we witness. There are many other Indigenous perspectives on witnessing that we engaged with in our teaching. By the end of the term, each of the student groups collectively worked towards making a claim to their responsibilities to Indigenous education based on their witnessing experiences.

In recent iterations of the course, I (Dustin) have added a component of gifting to witnessing sessions, where each participant provides a small gift to the Witness in recognition of their contributions. Based on multiple Indigenous communities' traditions, including Dakelh, the gift serves as a reminder to the Witness of what they learned and reconnects them to the day in question, ensuring the experience remains close to their heart. While being aware of multiple communities' use of gifting, I (Dustin) was reminded of this practice, directed, and given permission by Dene Knowledge Keeper Charles Lafferty, in the witnessing component of the Transformative Reconciliation program I created for the Federation of Social Services. Since gifting rests on a protocol, permission in this instance was important to ensure we were not appropriating a practice and that our process was happening in a good way.

In each of these instances we aspired to learn from the rich teachings of diverse Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. By exposing students to the teachings and collaboratively working together to embody the spirit of the teaching, we refrained from overstepping cultural protocols and instead discovered ways to meaningfully embody transformative Indigenous Knowledges in ways that were respectful and appropriate. Moreover, it bears repeating, this approach builds on an original Dakelh foundation of witnessing in our pedagogy, even as the course ensured that students understand there are many unique approaches to witnessing created in community.

THEORETICAL MODEL

In the process of translating Dakelh and others' conceptions of witnessing into pedagogy, we have reverse engineered a theoretical model that we hope will be useful to other scholars and educators. Our work posits that transformational Indigenous pedagogies can emerge from: 1) the specific educational aims in the course(s) and education program; 2) the Indigenous Knowledge being

translated into pedagogy; and 3) the positionality and ability of the educators to translate the Indigenous Knowledges into a practical pedagogical approach. This process must be led with intentionality and integrity, meaning each aspect of the framework needs to align with rigorous classroom practices in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. We look at each element in turn.

Identifying aims of Indigenous education

By initially asking ourselves what we were attempting to achieve through our course, we made intentional space for Indigenous Knowledges in our design. In re-visiting the five aims of our course[3], we were reminded of our own dedication and commitment to making the course as impactful and transformative as possible for our students. By setting out the aims of the course, we had an orienting framework to apply to any pedagogy or assessment we developed.

As educators, we understand the need to align course objectives with practice and pedagogy. Based on our collective years of teaching this course, we discerned that students were not achieving course aims through the written assignment. Conversely, by being called to serve as Witness, all of our aims were being enacted. Thus, the first step for teacher educators who wish to Indigenize their courses is to identify their key aims.

Indigenous Knowledges

The second aspect of our theoretical approach asks educators to consider the fit of the chosen Indigenous Knowledge tradition with the aims of the course. In other words, practitioners must recognize that Indigenous Knowledges are as diverse as the First Peoples within Canada. So, while it is common practice to see recycling of the same models or practices, such as the ubiquitous medicine wheel, we challenge colleagues to explore beyond the familiar tropes. We are not disparaging or devaluing the medicine wheel and its usefulness and primacy for many Indigenous peoples. We are simply acknowledging that it does not represent all Indigenous people.

A community-based experience shared by a colleague comes to mind that cautions against misapplication. In the context of a far northern community, a well-intentioned individual was using the medicine wheel model to help a group of Elders organize their teachings. Since the medicine wheel was not culturally relevant to this place, it landed with a thud. Some of the Elders voiced that this approach was too 'new age' for them. So, while the medicine wheel is often viewed by non-Indigenous folks as a widely accepted Indigenous model, it became abundantly clear that this was not always the case. Thus, educators must ensure that their chosen Indigenous Knowledge forms are culturally appropriate and meaningful to the local context when working with an Indigenous community, and, similarly, that the knowledge traditions being utilized support their course aims and objectives.

Positionality

Finally, there is the need to consider the positionality of the educators or designers of the course or program. Who is involved in the development of Indigenizing course material? How these educators are positioning themselves relative to Indigenous Knowledges? This is not to say that non-Indigenous or allied colleagues cannot engage but that they must understand their own positioning. In our Indigenous education course, we have allied scholars doing a wonderful job of leading course sections, yet the course design was intentionally left to those who come with lived experiences as Indigenous peoples. In this regard, we acknowledge the initial witnessing concept arrived from the First Nation of one of our design team members (Dustin), whose close familial and/or community connections provided an opportunity to seek permission to pursue this approach and ask clarifying questions. Even with this strong community connection, we still felt some apprehension as we realized we are academics and not Knowledge Keepers. Understanding our own limitations, we relied on the expertise of a local Knowledge Keeper to guide us in a good way.

Educators rightly fear appropriating or not getting correct the interpretation of Indigenous knowledges. We understand and value this ethical positioning. While these risks are real, we have found the process of ethically and humbly positioning ourselves before starting this work to be helpful. Recent controversies around public figures whose Indigenous identity has been called into question "show how important and complex issues of community, representation, and responsibility can be in relation to Indigenous writing [and Knowledges]" (Hanson, 2020, p. 16). We sometimes feel the need to name all of our connections, kinship, or genealogy when engaging with Indigenous Knowledges, which can come off as an exaggeration of our positionality yet is meant to ethically situate ourselves within the work. We ask the same of other educators no matter the stage of learning.

Another wise approach is to seek the ongoing guidance of Knowledge Keepers who have expertise in the Indigenous Knowledge that you wish to enact as a teaching and learning practice. For example, if you are in Stó:lō territory and want to translate their principle of storytelling into practice, seek out and collaborate with Stó:lō Knowledge Keepers. Their inclusion will ensure that what you are imagining is an accurate and appropriate interpretation of Stó:lō ways of knowing. You will also ensure that this knowledge tradition is appropriate to share and to teach. An example can be found with Métis mathematician Kori Czuy. Kori worked collaboratively with Treaty 7 Knowledge Keepers in developing an Indigenous approach to mathematics to ensure Indigenous Knowledges were appropriately interpreted and applied (Czuy & Hogarth, 2019). Similarly, Métis scholar Vicki Bouvier (2019) has worked closely with Piikani Elder Reg Crowshoe in developing understandings

of pedagogy and practice emerging out of Blackfoot Knowledges to ensure ethical and appropriate application of longstanding knowledge traditions. In each of these cases, we name the sources of our teachings to honour Knowledge Keepers. Following these steps ensures we are taking up the work in a good way.

As a contribution to our field of study we are thrilled to be one part of a confluence of Indigenous educators who are enacting Indigenous Knowledges in historically colonial spaces, here through Witnessing. Witnessing is one component of an oncoming deluge of Indigenous Knowledges that will overwhelm the rigidity of Western systems. We live in exciting times in which we get to witness our brothers, sisters, and cousins insisting on representation and agency in the reimagining of education.

NOTES

1. See www.metisvoices.ca
2. The balhats, through which witnessing is practiced for the Dakelh people, is simultaneously a governance, economic, legal, and social system.
3. The five aims we have shared should not be considered universal and they will not necessarily be applicable to your course or approach. Each learning context has unique circumstances that may call for aims specific to learning needs.

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