

In this report we describe the journey this project has taken us on, the ways we understand our 'accomplishments' from this project given what we learned, and how we plan to sustain this new learning.

**Overarching objectives:** We intend to build capacity among instructors in the School of Social Work for teaching and learning about Indigenous-Settler relations; we also aim to enhance all instructors' abilities to appropriately integrate Indigenous practices of healing, helping, community building and activism into the social work curriculum development.

From September 2014 to April, 2015, a group of seventeen members from the School of Social Work, consisting of sixteen full-time/sessional faculty members and one PhD student who was the project coordinator, met monthly for seven months. In the series of seven gathering, we engaged in different activities with the intention to forward our envisioned objective stated above. A planning group consisting of six members from the larger group of seventeen established the broad content of the monthly gatherings. The planning group met once, at times twice, a month. The content of the gatherings was planned iteratively depending on the themes and learning needs that had emerged from the previous meetings. The planning group always maintained that while we would provide some structure, such as readings and guest speakers, we would allow the group to direct the learning from these meetings to meet our collective needs.

The gatherings typically involved a speaker or speakers to stimulate thinking on the specific focus of that gathering (at one meeting, for example, we listened to an audio recording of a Massey Lecture by Thomas King; at another, we had a presentation by Adam Barker, author (with Emma Battell Lowman) of a forthcoming book 'Settler: Colonialism and Identity in 21st Century Canada), followed by reflection /conversation in the form of sharing circle. Most gatherings are accompanied by key readings related to the focus of the gathering.

We were aware early in the process that the form of the gatherings needed to also reflect indigenous ways. We invited Renee Thomas Hill, an Elder from the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, to invoke our series of gatherings with ceremony and teaching. We appreciated the support of Rick Monture and the Indigenous Studies Program's Elder In Residence program in making Renee's participation possible. We again invited Renee to our last gathering to conclude the series of gatherings with ceremony and teaching.

Each gathering began with a time called "visiting" in which we shared food together in a circle and got (re)acquainted with each other, in the indigenous spirit that learning is to take place in a context of community/relationships. This awareness has come to a sharper focus during the course of our planning process. We have come to a conscious understanding that in our pursuit to integrate indigenous ways of knowing and practices in social work education, both content and form/ process need to be decolonized. This is one of the reasons that led to a latter decision of making drums at the end of the seven gatherings instead of visiting a Six Nations residential school as originally planned in the proposal. While indigenous learning is experiential and often through doing things, the dominant mode of learning in most of our gatherings remained that of dialogue and reflection. This realization has become an important part of our learning through this project.

### **How the process altered our understanding of the pathways to capacity building:**

As mentioned, the planning group adopted a flexible stance and let the larger group to shape the direction of our collective learning. We soon learned that the process we had thought we would undertake and the one we actually were going to undertake were very different. The conversations in the gatherings were honest and thoughtful. Recurring themes included a sense of discomfort/ unease (as ingrained habits and self-knowledge necessarily disrupt comfort) and a sense of being 'not ready' or 'not there yet' in term of integrating indigenous perspectives/ knowledge in teaching practices given the 'settler' position of most in the group. There were definite moments the conversation took us to explore 'little' ways we could put into teaching practice in the spirit of indigenizing, but the conversations inevitably kept coming back to the common themes surrounding self-knowledge, such as "unbecoming", "disrupting habits", "dismantling our capacity" (as so many of our 'capacities' are aligned with dominant modes of knowing and being and doing) and "undoing what is familiar".

This shaped and shifted the direction of our gatherings towards a greater focus on settlers' experiences than indigenous experiences. We began this gradual realization that we cannot genuinely move forward without first stepping back to recognize and undo embedded, familiar learnings. We realized that we need to first dismantle before we can rebuild. Indigenizing requires the works of decolonizing to lay the foundation. There were bigger questions that needed to be asked first: how are we a part of the colonization process? What has that taught us about ourselves, education and Indigenous people and knowledge? How does this impact our teaching? This is the gap of readiness that we did not fully foresee when envisioning our overarching objective and goals.

### **Our evaluation of the project given the newly emerged realization and new directions:**

Not only did the process shape a different understanding of the objective of this project, it also shaped a different way we understand 'accomplishment' for this project. The new realization and direction the process has taken us necessarily preclude achieving our envisioned goals, as stated in the proposal, of mapping concrete pathways to change in teaching practice and curriculum content. But in the light of the new understanding the project has offered us, we came to reconceptualize our 'accomplishments' as follows:

- As already expressed, we learned through this process that building capacity requires first undoing certain of our existing 'capacity.' This is particularly true in the context of indigenous-settler relations where colonization and settler self-knowledge meet, and where decolonization and indigenization must go hand in hand. Having identified this part of the scaffold towards our envisioned goals is in itself progress.
- Inasmuch as we realize unlearning as an important step to new learning, we see building the capacity to unlearn as a crucial part of building capacity for an honest engagement with indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Bringing to consciousness what is accepted as 'natural' and or 'goes without saying' is hard work on its own. We see this project as having set us on the path to continuous conversations about this worthy task.
- The project has also prompted us to think about broader themes in social work education as it contains insights (or challenges existing insights) about how people change and develop, and this can potentially help map a course of change for the School:
  - ✧ The project has drawn us to rethink what it means to educate for social change: for example the idea of non-interference has been important in our journey. It is an idea of opening the opportunity to learn but not controlling or dictating the path to reach that learning; people have to come to a readiness in their own way in the learning journey.
  - ✧ The idea of unlearning has prompted us to think about how social work education can be a form of *creative disruption* and *potential healing* (towards reconciliation)?

In more pragmatic terms, we have since presented our learning from the project in the Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE) Conference in June 2015 and the MIIETL conference in December 2015, and publishing learnings from process remains a possibility.

**Going forward:** We explored ways to carry on the process and conversations. The possibilities that emerged:

- to find a way to integrate members of BISASWE, and learnings from BISASWE, into the Circle for Indigenous Social Work Action (a standing committee of the School of Social Work)
- to organize informal events that facilitate indigenous-settler relations and dialogues, including craft-making, potlucks, etc.
- to make the themes of our meetings, and well as key written resources and resource people, available to the wider School of Social work instructor community
- to find ways to support the integration of insights from this project, as well as specific resources to support student learning, into the wider School community and the social work curriculum

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## FINANCIAL REPORT

Received from FWI: \$4820

Expenditures:

Research/Gathering Facilitator (Oct 2014-May 2015)	1864.00
Catering for BISA Meetings	1200.00
Adam Barker - honourarium	250.00
Honouraria, travel and accommodation for drum making facilitators	2013.00
Parking for participants	126.00
	\$5453.00

(extra costs covered by Experiential Education)