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## **More than Bannock and Button Blankets: An Invitation to Dialogue about Decolonizing Home Economics Education**

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses the topic of developing ethically defensible curriculum and pedagogy in relation to current initiatives in British Columbia that aim to include “aboriginal<sup>1</sup> perspectives and knowledge” and “historical wrongs” (BC Ministry of Education, 2016). The colonial role of education and curriculum has been well documented. Much history has been hidden or suppressed unintentionally and intentionally and Battiste (2013) suggests that there is so much ignorance needs to be overcome. The paper is framed as an invitation to dialogue that explores our own histories and lack of knowledge, biases and prejudices in order to develop a decolonizing framework for home economics education.

### **Introduction**

Since the BC Ministry of Education announced that an intent of BC’s designed curriculum was to include “aboriginal perspectives and knowledge” and include “historical wrongs,” I have heard home economics teachers discussing how to address this in their courses. Such discussions often mention that students in textiles classes could make mini button blankets and students in food studies courses could make bannock and that would fulfill the requirements. While I am probably overgeneralizing, these kinds of comments have prompted the title of my paper as an invitation to consider what is really required to right historical wrongs and to include indigenous knowledge and perspectives without “re-colonizing,” perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes and/or generally doing more harm than good.

### **Setting the Context**

Despite a growing body of literature on the representation of Indigenous people in education, I have limited contextualizing the topic to recommendations from three major

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I use Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Nations, and First Peoples interchangeably. I recognize that there are subtle differences and each has its advantages and disadvantages. For example Aboriginal, when used in the Canadian context refers to the first inhabitants of Canada, and includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and is not to be confused with the common term for the Indigenous peoples of Australia. First Nations is useful because the emphasis is placed on the plural recognizing the diversity of people but it doesn’t recognize Metis. Indigenous is a term used most frequently used in an international, transnational, or global context, for example UN documents. I do not use the term “Indian” preferring instead to name the “nation” identity, e.g., Gitksan, Blackfoot, although the term “Indian” can be used as legal identity of a First Nations’ person who is registered under the Indian Act.

documents: the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007); the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (2012), and the BC Ministry of Education's Orientation Guide to BC's Redesigned Curriculum (2016).

### **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) describes both individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples around the world. It offers guidance on cooperative relationships with Indigenous peoples to states, the United Nations, and other international organizations based on the principles of equality, partnership, good faith and mutual respect. It was adopted by the General Assembly on Thursday, 13 September 2007, by a majority of 144 states in favour, four votes against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States) and 11 abstentions (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burundi, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Samoa and Ukraine, it was adopted by the General Assembly. The four countries that voted against all share very similar colonial histories. Their common concern at the time was that the autonomy recognized for Indigenous people could undermine the sovereignty of their own states, particularly in the context of land disputes and natural resource extraction (Hanson, 2009). All four eventually reversed their position. In November 2010, Canada issued a Statement of Support endorsing the principles of the UNDRIP. In November 2015, the Prime Minister of Canada asked the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs and other ministers to implement the declaration and in May 2016, Canada officially removed its objector status making Canada a full supporter without qualification of the declaration. This meant that they were in favour of the two articles related to education:

Article 14: Establishment of educational systems and access to culturally sensitive education Indigenous peoples have the right to set up and manage their own schools and education systems. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the same right as everyone else to go to school and cannot be left out because they are indigenous. This means that governments must ensure that **indigenous peoples – particularly children – living in, or outside of, their communities get the same benefit from the education system as others in ways that respect indigenous cultures, languages and rights.** (emphasis added)

Article 15: **Accurate reflection of indigenous cultures in education. Indigenous peoples have the right to their cultures and traditions being correctly reflected in education and public information.** Governments will work with indigenous peoples to educate non-indigenous peoples in ways that **respect indigenous peoples' rights and promote a harmonious society.** (emphasis added)

This also means that all educational institutions should include studying the Declaration in their curriculum and enacting the recommendations for curriculum and pedagogy.

*An invitation to dialogue: In what ways could recommendations of the UNDRIP be integrated into home economics courses? How can indigenous cultures be represented “accurately” and “correctly”?*

### **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action**

In 2007, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), the largest class action settlement in Canadian history to date, recognized the damage inflicted by residential schools, and established a multi-billion-dollar fund to help former students in their recovery. The multi-faceted agreement was intended to compensate survivors for the harms they suffered in residential schools and to work towards a more just and equitable future for Indigenous peoples in Canada. As a result, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was created to provide opportunities for individuals, families, and communities to share their experiences (Marshall, 2012). This commission released a document, *Calls to Action*, in 2012. The first of the Commission’s ten principles of reconciliation is, “The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.” The *Calls to Action* recommendations related to education are:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

Make **age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada** a **mandatory** education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students (emphasis added).

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on **Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools** (emphasis added).

This means that age-appropriate information and activities on residential schools, treaties and Aboriginal history and contributions to Canada should be included in mandated provincial curricula.

*An invitation to dialogue: In what ways could the TRC’s Calls to Action be integrated into home economics courses? Is information on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contributions to Canada included in current home economics courses? If so, is the information accurate and correct?*

### **BC’s Redesigned Curriculum**

British Columbia's Ministry of Education started a sweeping curriculum revision in 2010. All curricula from K to 12, were updated and rewritten following a standard theoretical framework. This framework was explained in a brochure prepared for the public in 2016. It featured five highlights of the redesign:



Fig. 1 . Highlights of BC's Redesigned Curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 1)

The two highlights that are relevant to the topic of this paper are Historical Wrongs; and Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge. The injustices experienced by First Nations people are noticeably absent from Historical Wrongs. This is particularly troubling, especially in light of the IRSSA and the TRC.

Aboriginal Perspectives and Knowledge mentions First Peoples [sic] Principles of Learning. These are listed in a different publication as:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge. Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations (First Peoples Principles of Learning, BC Ministry of Education, n.d.).

Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives are further elaborated in another document titled *Curriculum Overview*:

Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge are a part of the historical and contemporary foundation of British Columbia and Canada. British Columbia's education transformation therefore incorporates the Aboriginal voice and perspective by having Aboriginal expertise at all levels, ensuring that Aboriginal content is a part of the learning journey for all students, and ensuring that the best

information guides the work. An important goal in integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula is to ensure that all learners have opportunities to understand and respect their own cultural heritage as well as that of others. (BC Ministry of Education, n.d. para. 41)

New mandated curriculum for Kindergarten (K) to Grade 9 began implementation in fall of 2016. With Grade 10-12 curricula beginning in the fall 2018 (Grade 10) and fall 2019 (Grades 11 and 12).

This means that from Kindergarten to graduation, all students should be experiencing Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and First Nations' Principles of Learning in their education programs.

*An invitation to dialogue: In what ways are mandated directions related to Indigenous knowledge, perspectives and First Nations' Principles of Learning integrated into home economics courses? Are the historical wrongs experienced by Canadian First Nation included?*

### **Theoretical Framework**

To enrich the dialogue. I share three “sketches” or stories and explore their meaning for professional practice and curriculum and pedagogy in home economics education. I characterize these as personal history self-studies (Samaras, et. al 2004) and as critical incidents (Tripp, 2011). Self study personal history involves situating ourselves as socially constructed individuals, and naming the ways our experiences have influenced practice. “When the past-personal is used to connect our lives to the present, a deeper understanding can develop” (Krall, 1988, p. 475). Critical Incidents describe a significant event that signals an important change or a shift in one's thinking. They are small “ah-ha” moments that enable people to see themselves, others, or phenomena, with greater clarity or in a completely different way. They are moments or events that allow you to stand back, ask questions and examine your beliefs and your practice critically.

#### **Sketch 1 – “Why didn't we know?” – So much ignorance to overcome.**

*I spent my younger years in a small town in northwestern BC attending elementary school there in the 1950s. Although I moved from there in 1957, I still meet a couple of my classmates from that time, two or three times a year for lunch. At our last meeting, our discussion wandered to residential schools. We looked back at our school that was in traditional Tsimshian territory, and wondered why only two Indigenous students were in our class. Why were they able to attend a public school and where were all the others? One of my classmates said, “Why didn't we know”? and we began to list all the things that we didn't know, for example, how were reserves formed in BC? When? Who was allowed in public schools and why? Were they non-status? Living off reserve? Did their mothers marry out? Had their fathers been enfranchised in order to fight in World War II? How is status determined? By whom? What is the difference between treaty and non-treaty? What is the history of land claims? Who went to residential school? How*

*was that determined? What are the details of the 60s Scoop? The Indian Act? When was the potlatch banned? When were Indigenous people allowed to vote? Buy liquor? And so on.*

None of this had been covered in our education.

*An invitation to dialogue: What history has been hidden or suppressed in your education? In home economics education? How can we overcome our ignorance?*

### **Sketch 2 – “Who came here first?” - Unsettling the Settler Teacher**

*My second year of teaching was in Hazelton, BC where the school was located on the Gitanmaax reserve and serviced both the non-native community and children from the reserve. It was the second community in BC to have amalgamated schools. Previous to amalgamation, the Gitksan children went either to the local Indian Day School or residential schools. I had a grade 4 class and was teaching social studies. In my one-year teacher education program we were taught to start local and work out to global. So my first lesson in history started with the question “who came here first?” I got all kinds of answers but not the one I expected. My students said “the Hudson Bay Company”, Cataline, the famous the pack train driver, the miners, and so on. But none said that their people were here first. I was at first puzzled but I eventually realized that I asked the wrong question. These children knew their Gitksan history very well, they had been taught that they had been there since time immemorial so of course they never “came” here.*

I use this sketch to illustrate how important it is to acknowledge settler colonization and our roles as settlers. Settler colonialism is a distinct type of colonialism that functions through the replacement of indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty (Barker & Battell Lowman, n.d. para. 1).

*An invitation to dialogue: In what ways has settler colonialism influenced home economics education and research? In what ways has home economics education been complicit in settler colonization? How can we “unsettle” the settler teacher?*

### **Sketch 3 – We are not all the same – The Diversity is Great**

*In the 1980s, The World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) was held at UBC and I was a student at the time so I volunteered to assist. One of my tasks was to host sessions, introduce the speaker, take questions, etc. One session was two Vancouver teachers describing an alternative program for First Nations students. At the end of the session a Maori guest questioned the project for not including language as part of the curriculum. The First Nations teacher said, “What language would I teach? We are not all the same.” He went on to explain that the First Nations students in this urban setting were from all over the province and all over Canada.*

*Once when I was teaching home economics also in an urban setting, I made a comment to a First Nations student who was involved in a foods lab. I can't remember the comment that I made, but I do remember her reply, "We are not all the same, you know."*

The diversity is great. British Columbia alone is home to 203 First Nations communities and an amazing diversity of Indigenous languages. Approximately 60% of the First Nations languages of Canada are spoken in B.C. (First Peoples' Language Map of B.C.). Yet Aboriginal peoples of Canada are often characterized as a homogenous whole by researchers and writers, without their diversity acknowledged and with little reference to the colonial contexts that have so dramatically changed their situations and their living, learning, and potentials (Baptiste, 2013). Textbooks and educational resources also suffer from tokenism and othering (Kivel, 2002). Tokenism includes actions such as – adding a few names or pictures of people of colour to a textbook (this is often problematic as it is common to only select those people who fit a certain mould or support traditional values) or using a few "artifacts" (e.g., recipes, dream catchers, moccasins, button blankets) from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of ethnic or racial equity. Othering is a process that identifies those that are thought to be different from oneself or the mainstream. It can reinforce and reproduce positions of domination and subordination. Often little attention is paid to the fact that the term "First Nations" is plural with vast cultural and language differences. Making a mini-button blanket or bannock is not going to address that diversity. More likely it will reinforce stereotypical beliefs about First Nations people and encourage the appropriation of culture.

If we don't recognize the diversity within and between First Nations peoples we risk continuing the colonization of the past, a process of "orientalism" (Said, 1978), "cognitive imperialism" (Battiste, 2011) and "neo-colonialism" (Ryan, 2008). Orientalism involves essentializing societies as static and undeveloped that can be studied, depicted and reproduced by the dominant society which is developed and superior. Cognitive imperialism seeks to validate one source of knowledge and is considered successful when the result is assimilation of the dominant values and norms, languages. Neo-colonialism refers to actions that continue to maintain the colonial influence. In education it is the continued dominance of the models of education of the colonial rulers.

*An invitation to dialogue: In what ways has home economics curriculum and instruction acknowledged/not acknowledged the diversity of Indigenous people? How can we avoid tokenism, othering and the appropriation of culture? How can we prevent continuing colonization?*

### **Toward a Decolonizing Framework for Home Economics Education**

Roots of a decolonizing framework lay in resistances to colonialism and colonization in all its past and present forms. I will highlight three possibilities as a place to start:

1. Begin with Self Work - Decolonizing needs to begin within the mind and spirit of educators so that they can seek to accept that there are worldviews that exist other than the dominant Western perspective and acknowledge that current Canadian systems of education exist within a Eurocentric framework (Smith, 2016).
2. Seek methods to “decolonize” and “reconstruct” our curriculum content and pedagogy (Battiste, 2012). For curriculum content consider the recommendation in UNDRIP and TRC Calls to Action. Teach students to be critical of privileging and othering. For pedagogy Madden (2015) suggests four pathways that could be a start: learning traditional Indigenous models of teaching; pedagogy for decolonization; indigenous and anti-racist education; and place based education.
3. Decolonize our research – Use the *Decolonizing Methodologies*, outlined by L. T. Smith (1999) and others and take into consideration that research for indigenous people has been a negative experience, a metaphor for colonialism. Therefore we need to learn to conduct research “in ways that meet the needs of Indigenous communities and are non-exploitative, culturally appropriate and inclusive, or we need to relinquish our roles as researchers within Indigenous contexts and make way for Indigenous researchers” (Aveling, 2013, p. 204).

We should all start now.

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