

# Illuminating Meshworks of Pre-Service Teachers' Curated Co-Living Learning Spaces

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[See table of contents](#)

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## Article abstract

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## ILLUMINATING MESHWORKS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' CURATED CO-LIVING LEARNING SPACES

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### ABSTRACT

*Learning spaces in higher education are fraught with colonial barriers such as teacher-centered, front facing, stark, feelingless, and unwelcoming classrooms that diminish students' feelings of well-being. For pre-service teachers, these are also the types of classrooms that they often inherit as they foray into the profession. Three Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) assistant professors investigate how pre-service teachers' well-being shifted when collectively (re)imagining and (re)envisioning a colonial university classroom space in a faculty building that is over 100 years old. They then share the findings of their a/r/tography, action research inquiry that captured the co-living, metabolic experiences and relational meshworks of both participants (n=11) and researchers documented through reflexive journaling, artistic artifacts, interviews (n=3), and contemplation. The researchers embody decolonizing praxes through intentional interpretation and writing scholarship as they weave their storied inquiry. They conclude with transformative urgencies for how B.Ed programs can recalibrate their physical learning spaces to better support and sustain teachers' well-being in their future profession.*

**KEY WORDS:** Arts-based action research; Co-living learning spaces; Decolonization; Meshworks; Metabolism; Pre-service teachers; Well-being

## INTRODUCTION

Pre-service teachers, now more than ever, are on the “front lines of mental health” (Collier & Burke, 2021; Weist et al., 2013), especially since provincial teacher certification institutions (e.g., Ontario College of Teachers [OCT], Nova Scotia’s Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, New Brunswick’s Department of Early Childhood and Education, among others) are provisionally certifying teachers *before* they have completed their Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) program due to significant system teacher shortages (Nova Scotia Teachers Union, 2022; OCT, 2023). Pre-service teachers (PSTs) and teachers alike, are increasingly being called upon to take an advocacy and responsive support role in ameliorating the mental health of their students, while juggling their fledgling careers and own well-being and self-care (Atkins & Rodger, 2016). While research pre-COVID-19 revealed that 12% of newly certified teachers leave the profession before completing their first year, 28% leave before the end of three years, and 41% decide to quit before their fifth year (Ingersoll et al., 2014), the current situation is even more alarming with provisionally certified teachers already fulfilling compounding responsibilities while teaching in schools. With COVID-19 shifting into the rear view, issues of teacher wellness and attrition from the profession continue to rise. According to Tardif et al. (2021), a study conducted with over 2000 Québec teachers found that 40% of respondents felt they experienced emotional exhaustion on a weekly basis and 47% are currently experiencing mental health fatigue as a consequence of their work. These dire statistics impel the question, are teacher education programs preparing future teachers for this heavy mental health burden? It is time to interrupt the modern-colonial tendencies of teacher training programs in which pre-service teachers’ well-being is habitually thought of as a singular course topic that can be covered. To move beyond such limited understandings of well-being, PSTs need to *experience* well-being as an element of their own teacher agency that permeates practice.

In this study, three action researchers who identify as white settlers and Treaty People in Mi’kma’ki, with positionalities as assistant professors at a small, rural Atlantic Canadian university, explore the ways in which PSTs come to understand well-being and self-care as essential in teaching through the spaces they co-create and the relationships—with self as teacher, and between and among their peers—that evolve in those spaces. To consider this research curiosity, we utilized a contemplative theoretical framework of meshworks (Ingold, 2010) that was embodied to unearth holistic wellness possibilities (Latremouille et al., 2016) tied to “metabolism” (Stein et al., 2023, p. 56) and curated co-living spaces (Morin, 2022). A community of co-curators (hooks, 2003) including the research investigators (e.g., assistant professors) and participants, were fully immersed in the exploration with the vision that PSTs can learn to “recalibrat[e] [their] vital compass[es]” (Ahenakew, 2019, p. 43) in meaningful, experiential, and sustaining pedagogical ways (Aebersold, 2022). Our guiding question for the study was: What are the ways in which pre-service teachers (re)envision and (re)imagine a learning space whereby the mental health and wellness of their unique identities are nourished?

## ARTS-BASED METHODOLOGY

We used a reflexive, arts-based action research methodology that entangled both participants and research investigators into meshworks of “interwoven lines of growth and

movement” (Ingold, 2007, p. 35; Ingold, 2010). Since the research investigators and participants were learning with and from each other in the co-living space, both in class and during the wellness meetings held during the lunch hour, Ingold’s reflexive and experiential meshworks honoured the relational nature of connection and action between all parties. Participants (n=11) were an invited coalition of Year 1 and Year 2 PSTs who were welcomed to co-curate, engage, and move with the research investigators in wellness discourses, idea-making, and (re)imagining learning spaces capturing the relational process of “knots or bundles” (Ingold, 2007, p. 35) that formed through these engagements, interactions, and curations. Using an a/r/tographic method—*a*(artist), *r*(researcher), *t*(teacher)—communicative forms such as reflexive writing, poetry, photography, digital media, and other visual representations were invited so participants could document their well-being experiences during the living wellness inquiry. All artistic materials were provided to participants to explore and engage with (i.e., clay, paint, drawing materials, etc.) during the investigation. The research investigators quested to discover alternate meanings of well-being spaces and habits of mind (Zapata, 2020; Altan et al., 2019) that could live and be sustained within pre-service teacher praxis long after they have graduated. Within this article, we explore thematic ‘knots,’ others’ way of knowing, and offer transformative praxes that PSTs can ruminate and individually choose to embody with the hope that they will become more resilient to the daily stressors within the current education system to live and grow well as future teachers. We embrace decolonial habits of mind in our action research praxis through our writing intentions (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Tynan & Bishop, 2023), and look to disrupt Westernized views of teacher-directed learning spaces (Greeson et al., 2022).

### **WEAVING A STORY AND SITUATING OURSELVES**

Since the mid 1800s, one of the oldest buildings in Canadian higher education is the home to a B.Ed program, a teacher accrediting, undergraduate program that is two years in duration. It is situated on Turtle Island in a small, rural Atlantic Canadian town and serves as the ‘place’ of focus for this action research. While renovations were undertaken to convert the building into a full-time learning and office space, it is home to almost 200 B.Ed students, over 30 Education faculty and staff, and the current condition of the building is institutional and uninviting. The Faculty of Education also offers off-campus B.Ed, online M.Ed and other university partnered PhD programs, but the majority of the classroom spaces are used by the B.Ed program. Most B.Ed classes are taught face to face within the classrooms located on the first, second, and third floors of this 140+ year old building. For anonymization purposes, this building will be referred to as “Red-Brick Hall” (RH, a pseudonym) which stands proudly on the edge of the university campus with many original features still visible. It has picturesque window panoramas and exterior dormers, vintage bathroom stalls and sinks, original flooring in some spaces, water heaters with visible water pipes running along the open ceilings, reinforcing structural pillars in the middle of classroom spaces, and an ivy covered exterior of red bricks complete with a roof top octagonal cupola. RH is iconic and the namesake of the institution. However the building is showing its advanced age even with recent enhancements such as new windows and painted walls. Using Stein et al.’s (2023) notion of “metabolism” (p. 53), the research investigators respect and learn from Indigenous ways of knowing that RH is a living, breathing space of relations that is nourished from the

storied lives of its inhabitants (Gouldhawke, 2020). The energy, oxygen, humanity, and respectful care exchanged by its inhabitants contribute to how the space is fed, revitalized, and nurtured. As research investigators living within RH in various capacities as teachers, researchers, and service contributors, we acknowledge that the interrelations and social connections made within the building by both current students and faculty is strong. RH’s metabolism *is* being fed and sustained by this reciprocal exchange of its inhabitants; however noticeable fractures in the physicality of the space (e.g., classrooms) are evident as RH continues to grow older with the institution allocating minimal funding for repairs. A question that surfaces is how can the spirit of a space continue to grow when its physical form is failing. Looking at this dissonance through a holistic lens of wellness, RH’s metabolism is being impacted. PSTs and faculty alike have commented on its aging infrastructure and its lack of inspiring and welcoming classroom spaces.

**SLOWING “METABOLISM” AND CONNECTIONS TO WELL-BEING**

The impact of a slowing “metabolism” (Stein et al., 2023, p. 53) due to the physical limitations of RH was audited early in the study with written responses provided by PST participants (see Figure 1). Participants commented on the uncomfortable learning environments within RH stating, specifically one classroom which was the focus of this investigation, that classrooms are too hot/too cold, have uniform seating, are sterile learning spaces, noisy, cluttered, teacher-centered vs. learner-engaged, inaccessible, lack community feeling, and have unreliable technology/Wi-Fi, poor sight lines, etc. The research investigators agree with these comments as teachers who facilitate their courses and co-live within RH classrooms. Collectively, we are intertwined with RH’s slowing metabolism and wonder how it is impacting our PSTs’ well-being.



**Figure 1.** Word Cloud of Physical Limitations of RH Shared by PST Participants.

In line with research that suggests an environment’s learning conditions have a direct correlation on teacher well-being and self-care (Scherer et al., 2001; Stark et al., 2022), our commitment as transformative action researchers compelled us to listen and be responsive

to PSTs' well-being since they are learning and co-living within the classroom spaces of RH. Across the Atlantic Canadian provinces and beyond, there is an urgency to support pre-service teachers' ability to thrive in their future work as teachers and who can sustain in the profession even when faced with challenges such as the tumultuous shortages of human resources (e.g., teachers, substitute teachers, teaching assistants, etc.) (Laroche, 2022; CAPTTO, 2022) combined with increasing concerns about student violence in schools (Gorman, 2023; MacLeod, 2023). Additionally, conflated with the political scrutiny of being teachers (Stark et al., 2022), educational institutions with B.Ed programs like ours in a rural setting, need to (re)imagine classroom spaces so that well-being and a sense of satisfaction while learning to become a teacher (Seligman, 2011) can flourish and be sustainable. When learning spaces are not conducive to supporting well-being, burnout can spread among teachers (Meredith et al., 2020) and this ability to experience and sustain positive emotions reduces their confidence as teachers and their commitment to remain in the profession (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Nwoko et al., 2023).

#### **NARRATING THE CLASSROOM SPACE WITH RH**

Collectively, the research investigators chose to focus on one space within RH that they could co-live and (re)imagine alongside their PST participants—RH 126 is a learning space on the first floor of Red-Brick Hall that accommodates a class size of approximately 36 PSTs. Due to the number of classrooms in RH that could be (re)imagined, the research investigators intentionally chose to explore only one classroom space within the building. The relational work of centering well-being within a space was emphasized so that the metabolism of the space could be felt and reflected upon during the inquiry. RH 126 was selected as the focus for this action research inquiry as all research investigators interacted with PSTs within this classroom space.

RH 126 has five windows, approximately 12ft x 3.5ft in dimension, a chalkboard with a pull-down LCD screen overhanging it, two whiteboards, and four well-used cork bulletin boards. Two open bookcases surround one of the white boards. Shelves house random items including unused coffeemakers, a fire extinguisher, previously used flipchart papers and they also collect lost and found items and excess class handouts. Lights are fluorescent and not dimmable. Noisy air conditioners and air purifying units, remnants from Covid-19 protocols, are plugged in to the limited electrical outlets often required by 36 students who use laptops in the space. Although new windows were recently installed in RH, the room, overall, is tired and uninviting. The furniture includes awkwardly shaped trapezoid tables, uncomfortable plastic and metal legged chairs, and an instructor podium with a computer system that sits at the 'front' of the classroom. Three pillars run down the center of the space, often blocking students' view of the LCD projector screen and of the students on the other side of the room (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Photos of RH 126 prior to the Research Investigation

RH 126 is Westernized and colonial (Greeson et al., 2022). It is a teacher-directed space with little comforts and necessities needed for effective adult learning (Knowles, et al., 2005). The space is antithetical to current teaching pedagogies that embrace flexible seating, promote learner autonomy and student agency, foster empowerment, nourish individuals' well-being, and more. Sadly, RH 126 is quite reminiscent of what emerging teachers into the profession may experience within colonial school systems, specifically, stark, worn, dated, under-resourced, and anti-engaging passive spaces for learning.

### **RELATIONAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

We, as researchers in this study, are cognizant of the colonial learning spaces in which we teach and how the influence of these spaces have become normalized and accepted (Greeson et al., 2022). We are also aware of the importance of decolonizing learning spaces and (re)imagining classrooms as rich, inclusive environments. As part of decolonization at the post-secondary level, we need to begin with decolonizing our research practices. Tynan and Bishop (2023), discuss the importance of seeing a literature review as gifted through relationships with people, places, and knowledge. In this research, we see the value of utilizing the stories shared from/with our PST participants to guide this research. Similar to Tynan and Bishop (2023), we aim to make visible the “conversations, reflections, hesitations, and stories” (p. 499) of those we spent time co-living with while (re)imagining our classroom space. As Omidire et al. (2021) state, “human beings are relational beings, therefore, teaching and learning are not only an individual cognitive process, but it enhances the social interactions, commitments and collectivistic nature of people” (p. 219). In this study, we began from a relational place, where action researchers and participants made decisions together. We considered individuals as “not just topics, disciplines, and literature” (Tynan & Bishop, 2023, p. 503) and ensured that the metabolism of RH 126 was being nourished.

### **Belonging and Trust**

In Bjorklund Jr. et al.'s (2021) study about pre-service teacher well-being and its relationship to belonging and trust, they claim that relational trust increased a sense of belonging and in turn feelings of subjective well-being. This shows the significance and connection of relationality to developing and supporting co-living—a community of learners living and walking together—honouring teacher and student togetherness. To diminish any perceived power imbalances between the action researchers and PSTs during the inquiry, we embraced Wenger's (1998) Community of Practice (CoP), as its relational protocol is premised on fostering a knowledge sharing community that honours the unique identities of its members and is grown upon discovery, participation, living collectively through an invested experience. During each wellness meeting, the CoP protocol was shared and reviewed by the inquiry community. This contributed to the trust building and sense of belonging we envisioned through the experience.

Aligned with Bjorklund Jr. et al. (2021), we also believed that it was important to consider the PSTs well-being as it “can potentially buoy their learning, resilience, and motivation” (p. 2). During wellness meetings, PSTs were offered an art provocation or invitation including canvas painting and clay sculpting. PSTs were observed to be continuing to engage in these activities outside of the meetings and some even asked for additional materials to continue with their creativity. PSTs were seen meeting together within RH 126 on their own time, which supports Bjorklund Jr. et al. (2021) findings that “a sense of belonging could also increase individuals' positive feelings about themselves and their chosen path” (p. 8). Similarly, Gillies (2017) claims that: “Belonging is sensed and experienced through feelings and relationships with others and can be a strong determinant of school success” (p. 19).

### **Joy and Creativity**

Closely connected with a sense of belonging and relationality is joy. Muhammad (2023) talks about how joy is the personification of sustained happiness and claims that we can “only get to learning and experiencing joy when we have an intentional and authentic purpose to dismantle oppression (hurt, pain, or harm) in the classroom through criticality” (p. 18). According to Muhammad, collaboration and sharing with peers in a shared space promotes joy in both learning and teaching. We were hopeful from the beginning of this study that the (re)imagining of RH 126 would foster a sense of belonging and joy. Aligned with Omidire et al. (2021), we also believe that learning is more effective when we work together and share ideas and that there is then a greater chance to experience joy through the inquiry process.

### **Well-Being as Being and Identity**

There is a need for teacher education programs and researchers to focus more attention on the well-being of educators, including pre-service, early career, and veteran teachers (Bjorklund Jr. et al., 2021; Nwoko et al., 2023). According to Bjorklund Jr. et al. (2021), “contributing to the well-being of preservice teachers can add to their resilience, their success as teachers, and their longevity in the profession” (p. 10). To move beyond such limited understandings of well-being, PSTs need to experience well-being as an element of teacher agency that permeates practice. It is the responsibility of the Faculty of Education programming to support PSTs in acknowledging and exploring their own self-care through



space and pedagogical practice. Palmer (2022) states that teacher "self-care is not an indulgence" (para. 4) and that teachers need to practice "new tiny habits" (para. 6) that impact their pedagogical practice. Palmer insists that there is no one size fits all practice, so PSTs need to explore their own understanding and identity while learning from and alongside others. According to Lemon (2021), well-being and self-care are crucial aspects for teacher preparation. Utilizing the walls of the classroom, including the space within and outdoors, pre-service programs should aim to build professional resiliency of teachers so that their well-being is strengthened through immersive contemplation, practice, and sustained self-care action well beyond their time at RH.

### **DECOLONIZING OUR KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND SHARING**

In honouring our quest to offer decolonizing perspectives related to our own qualitative research, specifically through this action research inquiry, we chose to explore alternate methodological applications. Positioning ourselves as white, Canadian-born settlers, it is our responsibility within academia to fracture colonial legacies and the epistemic oppression of a singular knowledge system or way of research writing (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Zavala, 2013; Thambinatha & Kinsella, 2021). Just as we chose to flatten power hierarchies alongside our PST participants throughout this inquiry, we also choose to shift the power of Westernized singular view of scholarship sharing (Thambinatha & Kinsella, 2021). Instead of the traditional Westernized research report sections of methodology, methods, analysis, and discussion/recommendations, we embraced Thambinatha and Kinsella's four practices of:

1. exercising critical reflexivity,
2. reciprocity and respect for self-determination,
3. embracing 'Other(ed)' ways of knowing, and
4. embodying a transformative praxis (p. 3).

Each are expanded upon and connected to our inquiry.

### **Exercising Critical Reflexivity**

As reflexive action researchers, we strove to engage in critical reflexivity throughout the inquiry. From maintaining reflexive journals, to frequent discussions with one another, we worked to situate ourselves and acknowledge our epistemological assumptions by addressing power dynamics that might surface in a co-living experience between PSTs and their instructors. We also identified colonizing barriers to our work including researching in an academic space that has not been (re)imagined before, limited budgetary restrictions to enact visioning that PSTs wished for, and being unsettled by reporting upon the conditions of our teaching spaces. We knew we needed to remain strength-focused in our action research, so we chose to infuse "meshworks" (Ingold, 2010) as the guiding frame of our inquiry as it permitted our research community (e.g., PSTs and action researchers) to honour the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) protocol as we entangled together (Lemon et al., 2018), (re)imagining RH 126. "Meshworks" is a conceptualization by Tim Ingold (2010) that highlights the complexity of partnerships and interactions of individuals who are working collectively towards a common field of inquiry. Since action research involves an entanglement of human activity such as "speaking, gesturing, and moving around" (Lemon et al., 2018, p. 83) a complex space, being able to mesh during the (re)imagination of RH 126 was paramount. Tied to the relational frame of meshworks, we utilized a reflexive, arts-

based action research methodology (e.g., a/r/tography) that entangled both participants and research investigators into “interwoven lines of growth and movement” (Ingold, 2007, p. 35; Ingold, 2010). Taking on the roles of A/R/T—artist, researcher, teacher—participants were able to adapt these three roles to their pre-service wellness experience throughout the inquiry in meaningful and authentic exploratory ways such as: 1) Theoria—knowing, researching, theory; 2) Praxis—doing, learning, teaching; and 3) Poesis—making/creating art.

### **Reciprocity and Respect for Self-Determination**

Since PST participants accepted the invitation to co-curate, engage, and move with the action researchers through wellness discourses, idea-making, (re)imagining the learning space, etc., we honoured Thambinatha and Kinsella’s (2021) second practice of reciprocity and respect for PSTs’ self-determination by affectively listening with our hearts and minds (McDermott, 2013) during the four wellness meetings and other informal entanglements within RH 126. During the wellness meetings, we listened to PST participant voices even when their messaging was difficult to hear about the state of RH 126. We were contemplative and individually journaled about the relational process of our inquiry through our wellness meeting engagements, interactions, and artifact curation. We met often as a research team to share and discuss the reflexive notes jotted in our journals. Due to different intersecting identities of both researchers and participants, we also facilitated semi-structured interviews (n=3) so that PST participants could share the meaning and interpretation of their artistic creations. The interview asked the question: What are the ways in which your artistic creation represents your understanding of your own mental wellness and how the relational process of (re)envisioning and (re)imagining a learning space has contributed to nourishing your own mental health needs? This rich data (e.g., a/r/tographic creations, validated interview transcripts, wellness meeting discussions, reflexive journaling & contemplation by researchers) was then meaningfully discussed and analyzed by the research team. “Knots or bundles” (Ingold, 2007, p. 35), or eventual themes, began to emerge through an iterative process of coming back to the data until no more knots emerged, or saturation was reached.

### **Embracing ‘Other(ed)’ Ways of Knowing: Thematic Knots**

In order to explore a “pool of meaning (Marton, 1994, p. 4428), the data collected was holistically considered during our analysis. The data included PST participant reflections from their wellness meeting experiences, reflections on the wellness meetings and (re)imagination work within RH 126 by the investigators, artistic expressions of the participants, and interview transcripts. To identify knots, or themes, we looked for the places of entanglement, where PST participants were wrestling with ideas, knotting and unknotting their thinking. Exploring the emerging knots, where the participants tied their learning, we practiced Thambinatha and Kinsella’s (2021) third construct, *embracing ‘Other(ed)’ ways of knowing* during the knotted/unknotted, thematic analysis. This decolonizing practice again asked us as action researchers to center the voices speaking to us through the data and to be respectful of how the space and metabolism of RH 126 was shifting and changing. We embraced this “other(ed)” perspective to sense how the physical space and its energy spoke to us through our own emotions and sense of well-being while within the space.

Our analysis revealed three interwoven bundled ways of knowing that well-being might be understood and experienced by PSTs in response to the (re)imagined conditions of co-living in a Westernized university classroom. These conceptualizations of well-being included:

1. well-being as experiences of relationality with those in the space and with the space itself;
2. well-being through experiences in response to shifts in thinking about their learning in the space;
3. well-being that provoked thoughts of self-care in other areas of their lives, extending into how they think about their future teaching practice.

In the following section, these three conceptualizations of well-being are further described and offered as bundled ways of knowing. These bundles interweave how intricately well-being and the physical space of RH 126 impact PSTs' learning experiences.

### ***Well-Being is Experienced as Relationality***

In sharing about how they experienced well-being in RH 126, PSTs clearly indicated that relationality was essential. The data highlighted relationality between them and other students, and the relationships between other students that were enhanced when the space was changed. The data also indicated that colonial structures of classrooms did not reflect the relationality that PSTs desired in their learning spaces in order to support well-being. The following sub-themes speak to well-being as relational.

**Well-Being as Acceptance.** We consider relationality as the affective domain of teaching that encompasses the relationships between teacher and student, between PSTs, between PSTs and learning spaces and between PSTs and the ideas with which they engage. When PSTs were describing their experiences of well-being in the space, words such as “accepted,” “belonging,” and “feeling seen and heard” and “connected” were indicators of relationality. When PSTs used these words, they indicated changes in how space impacted their feelings of being part of a community. Well-being has long been associated with belonging (Bjorklund Jr. et al., 2021; Gillies, 2017; Muhammad, 2023; Omidire et al., 2021) and relationality (Omidire et al., 2021; Tynan & Bishop, 2023). One of the researchers reflectively described watching the PSTs coming into the (re)imagined RH 126 (see Figure 3), they noted increased “chatter... eye contact... laughter, and people sitting in different tables.”

Through their interactions in RH 126, the PSTs showed that there was a change in how they were feeling. One participant (Marco) commented on their own response in that classroom, saying: “I felt quite a bit more at home in the re-created space. I felt more welcome.” This indicates a stronger relationship with those in the room and as a result, a different experience of well-being.



**Figure 3.** Collage of Photos of the (Re)Imagined RH 126

**Well-Being Emerging Through Challenged Classroom Structures.** The PST participants also described their feelings coming into RH 126 and their encounters in the (re)imagined space as “welcoming,” “the arrangement felt more like a community,” and “feeling at home in the recreated space.” It is understood that spaces communicate beliefs to PSTs about the power structures and expectations about interactions in that space, and, as McPherson and Saltmarsh (2017) indicate, educational spaces also speak to policies, attitudes, and beliefs of those who own the spaces, and permeate interactions between those who inhabit the spaces. Or, said another way, the micro-politics of classrooms are clearly communicated through classroom structures and learning spaces (Mulcahy & Morrison, 2020). For PSTs who had attended class in the space for a full semester, they had previously felt and experienced the effects of colonial infrastructure on their understanding of themselves. As evidenced in

Figure 2, prior to the (re)imagination of RH 126, messages about power structures, authority, position, and control were all communicated through its traditional, colonial classroom setup. Other micro-politics that the RH 126 space communicated were: the professor takes a prominent place at the front of the classroom; all attention is on a screen or board containing content deemed important by an authority; and where information is transmitted from those in power in the classroom (the teacher/professor) to those with the least power, the students. Feelings of powerlessness and being oppressed by a person or institution are in opposition to feelings of well-being as they highlight fractured and unhealthy relationships that exist in such spaces (Mulcahy & Morrison, 2020). The invitation to participate in (re)imagining the physical classroom and then co-living in the space as a class provoked in the participants an experience described as “walking into the room and having a totally different feeling come over [them] ... a comforting feeling of connection ... and a space to include every individual” (Jordan). Such feelings support the understanding that when PSTs co-construct and co-live in spaces that challenge traditional classroom structures, relationality is encouraged, and their well-being is supported and enhanced (Nwoko et al., 2023).

### ***Well-Being Shifts in Thinking About Learning in the Space: Habits of Mind***

PSTs described the ways they connected their feelings of well-being to the work in which they were engaged as part of the research study and as students in RH 126 when the changes had been implemented. Altan et al. (2019), who draw upon Dewey (1922) and Costa (1991), describe habits of mind in teacher education, as “intelligent ways of thinking when confronted with unknown situations...that come from interactions between our cognition and emotions” (p. 171). In other words, habits of mind are the ways we make sense of situations and think about how they might influence future practices. PSTs descriptions of their well-being aligned with three habits of mind: metacognition, gathering data through all senses, and creatively seeking solutions to a problem.

**Habit of Mind: Metacognition.** As the PSTs explored their experiences in the co-created and (re)imagined space, they described well-being through a shift in their own learning or developing a habit of mind. Phrases like “doing things differently makes me feel better” (Kai), “...takes my mind off things ... and you feel a whole lot better after” (Jordan) and experiencing a “new kind of creativity” (Xi). These expressions of well-being related to habits of mind that support PSTs to consider how their own experiences might be reframed and pulled forward to their own practices (Altan, et al., 2019; Zapata, 2020). In describing the connections made to their experiences during the inquiry and the creative element of representing their ideas artistically, PSTs connected how they felt in those moments to intentionality to continue such activities outside the research sessions. Thinking metacognitively about their experiences and how to bring them into other situations was a habit of mind that was a clear knot of connection for the participants.

**Habit of Mind: Gathering Data Through All Senses.** Data collected as part of the inquiry revealed PSTs’ joy and engagement with expressing their ideas creatively. They created artifacts to express what they wanted a classroom to be for them if it were to support their well-being. Their artifacts allowed them to both share their ideas about (re)imagining RH

126 and to participate in the co-creation of ideas, as PSTs also shared their ideas creatively. They used words like “represent,” “resemble,” “display my thoughts,” and “different ways of being creative.” These words referred to the ways they used color, ideas, metaphors, and poetry to communicate an idea about what changes they needed in the classroom. Their artistic expressions and artifacts exhibited the change they were experiencing from the beginning of the term (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Jordan’s Painting Artifact

Jordan used the dark colors in their painting to represent a room that was “bland” and “uncomfortable.” The light colors on the painting represented the (re)imagined classroom, a “place you wanted to enter”. The use of creativity to gather the data from their co-participants about how the room could be (re)imagined to support their well-being was a second habit of mind that was obvious in the data.

**Habit of Mind: Creatively Seeing Solutions to an Unsettling Problem.** The unsettling problem of RH 126 and its impact on learning was obvious to PSTs. When the research sessions began, they could clearly conjure images of the first few weeks of the term, describing the room as “empty,” “inaccessible,” “lacking emotion,” “stinky,” and “teacher focused” (see Figure 1). The challenge to (re)imagine the classroom as a different space, to think about it from a lens of well-being was challenging because all their school experiences had been in colonized, institutional classrooms or classrooms that were created for them, not with them. Seeking solutions to a problem they identified with both fiscal and architectural limits on the room was a creative endeavor—it asked them to think imaginatively and creatively. When the changes were implemented in RH 126, PSTs used words like “welcoming,” “calming space,” “inclusive,” and “inviting” (see Figure 5). The metabolism of RH 126 was becoming more alive through our collective interactions and relational, purposeful work.



Two other artifacts shared by PST participants were of a rainbow-colored lollipop, full of twists and turns of various hues (see Figure 6) and a heart-centered, colorful human entity (see Figure 7).



**Figure 6.** Marco's Rainbow-Coloured Lollipop Artifact

Both artifacts used similar colors of the rainbow and highlighted the 'center' of the artifact with a heart (see Figure 7) or a point of final destination (see Figure 6). In the lollipop, each color spiral is reminiscent of the 'self-care' work needed to reconnect oneself to the center of well-being.



**Figure 7.** Ana's Heart-Centered, Colourful Human Entity Artifact



The human entity artifact holding its heart at center showcases the vulnerability of self-care and how collective experiences and interactions with others, as evidenced by the variety of hearts, nurtures one's own well-being. Both thoughtful and vibrant artifacts showcase that well-being is sustained not by a straight path of 'doing,' but rather through the shared, co-living experiences of connections, purpose, and joy with others.

Lastly, PSTs also connected their co-construction and co-living in the space to how they envisioned their future teaching. "I would like my future classroom to be that warm and inviting spot like with all the things that we've done, like a variety of different set-ups" (Marco). The connection to how they felt in RH 126 with a few changes to seating and ideas to create a more flexible space that would support their well-being also provoked them to think about employing a similar approach to their future imagined and co-curated classrooms.

### **EMBODYING A TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE**

In Thambinatha and Kinsella's fourth practice entitled, *Embodying a Transformative Praxis*, Kovach (2010) urges action researchers to "open up space for decolonizing lenses" (as cited in Thambinatha & Kinsella, 2021, p. 6) and embody change-making actions. We need to ask, what does our institution/faculty need to unlearn in order to embrace anti-colonial spaces for learning? RH has had over one hundred years to 'change' and evolve its learning environments for students. Failing to attend to the well-being of PSTs by not addressing the ways spaces make them feel, is a disservice to them. We need to offer them learning experiences of how physical spaces can support their well-being, thus enabling them to embody that perspective in their own emerging practices mitigating conditions that contribute to attrition (Scherer et al., 2001; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Stark et al., 2022). Within the short duration of our inquiry, we 'felt,' experienced, and heard from our PST participants about their enhanced well-being during the (re)imagination inquiry. We were witness to richer, more interactive relations among PSTs in RH 126 and strive to sustain the momentum of these new other(ed) ways of knowing. As assistant professors in RH, it is our professional responsibility to continue to mesh with PSTs to determine what further (re)imagination is needed in other RH classrooms. We commit to continuing to weave meshes with other invested faculty colleagues who too feel that a revolution to grow and (re)imagine space within. RH is needed so that our PSTs' well-being is prioritized. We will walk through unsettling dialogue with faculty and institutional leaders related to financial constraints and the preoccupation with colonial legacy that honours Red-Brick Hall as it always has been.

### **EVOLVING RESEARCH**

Each of the PST participants' artifacts reflexively represented their own identities and understanding of their mental health and wellness journey through the (re)imagination of RH 126. However, one PST participant's poetic artifact (see Figure 8) clearly identified specific ways in which the learning space promotes change in how she feels. Clara wrote:

A place where ...

I feel seen.

I feel heard.

I like to learn.

People are represented.

We are welcome.

I'm going to grow.

I'm encouraged to have a voice.

It's free of judgement.

I'm free to be me.



**Figure 8.** Clara's Poetic Artifact

We, as transformative action researchers, seek to evolve and grow this meshwork connection of well-being and learning space research by continuing to learn, unlearn, and relearn from Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and decolonizing scholars about how metabolic spaces like classrooms can reciprocally and holistically nourish both students and teachers' well-being who entangle within their walls. Well-being is oxygenized when we *experience* collective purpose, such as being welcomed, having a voice, and being "free to be me." When students and teachers collectively and relationally curate a classroom full of humanity, it CAN become "A place where ..." well-being flourishes. ■

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