

The Importance of "Love" in Authentic Decolonization Work and SoTL Practice

Courtney Gariepy and Carolyn Bjartveit

Volume 3, Number 2, 2023

A Decade On

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1109355ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29173/isotl702>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Mount Royal University Library in partnership with University of Alberta Library

ISSN

2563-8289 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Gariepy, C. & Bjartveit, C. (2023). The Importance of "Love" in Authentic Decolonization Work and SoTL Practice. *Imagining SoTL*, 3(2), 2–15. <https://doi.org/10.29173/isotl702>

Article abstract

The definition of “decolonization” is contextual and relational, and it holds multiple meanings (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015; Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2012), but it is seldom associated with the term “love.” This article explores how creating “ethical spaces” (Ermine, 2007) for engagement with Indigenous partners and community organizations has helped Bachelor of Child Studies (BCST) students at Mount Royal University (MRU) to understand the deeper meaning of decolonization and its connection to love in the context of academic and professional practices. During the 2021/22 academic year, four students collaborated with their professor and a community partner, Wee Wild Ones (WWO), a nature-inspired school, on decolonizing the organization’s early childhood education curriculum. The teachings of Elders and knowledge holders at MRU and within the wider community challenged the students’ understanding of decolonization and shifted their focus from an efficiency driven, goal-directed project approach towards building authentic relationships rooted in love, respect, and inclusivity. This article explores the meaning and role of love in the context of student-community partnerships, decolonization work, and scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) practice.

© Courtney Gariepy and Carolyn Bjartveit, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

The Importance of "Love" in Authentic Decolonization Work and SoTL Practice

Courtney Gariepy and Carolyn Bjartveit
Mount Royal University, Calgary, Canada

ABSTRACT

The definition of “decolonization” is contextual and relational, and it holds multiple meanings (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015; Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2012), but it is seldom associated with the term “love.” This article explores how creating “ethical spaces” (Ermine, 2007) for engagement with Indigenous partners and community organizations has helped Bachelor of Child Studies (BCST) students at Mount Royal University (MRU) to understand the deeper meaning of decolonization and its connection to love in the context of academic and professional practices. During the 2021/22 academic year, four students collaborated with their professor and a community partner, Wee Wild Ones (WWO), a nature-inspired school, on decolonizing the organization’s early childhood education curriculum. The teachings of Elders and knowledge holders at MRU and within the wider community challenged the students’ understanding of decolonization and shifted their focus from an efficiency driven, goal-directed project approach towards building authentic relationships rooted in love, respect, and inclusivity. This article explores the meaning and role of love in the context of student-community partnerships, decolonization work, and scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) practice.

Keywords: decolonization, love, ethical space, traditional protocol, SoTL practice

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29173/isotl702>

KEY TERMS AND TRANSLATIONS

While English and other colonial languages require consistent capitalization and grammatical formatting, the Cree language does not follow the same English rules. It has its own rules that Courtney has not been given the right to share. For the purposes of this paper, Cree language is written using the English alphabet and will follow typical sentence structure (i.e., capitalization at the beginning of sentences and when applied to specific people).

Kiteyahk: Cree term for old people or knowledge holders.

Mosom/Mooshum: Cree and Michif word meaning “your grandfather.”

Kokom/Kookum: Cree and Michif word meaning “your grandmother.”

Nokom/Nookum: Cree and Michif word meaning “my grandmother.”

Michif: One of the Métis languages as well as one of the many ways the diverse communities of Métis peoples identify themselves. Some Métis will not say Niya Michif (I am Michif) as this is expressed based on their dialect’s geographical context.

Iskwe: Cree and Michif word for woman.

Wahkohtowin: Good relations with all of creation.

Sakihitowin: Loving and caring for one another and all things.

Shakihi: Michif term for love.

Ikkimapiiyipitsiin: Blackfoot term for sanctified kindness as shared with Courtney by Michif MRU Professor Vicki Bouvier, who learned and was given the right to share from Blackfoot Elders.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Too often in academia, the contributions of people involved in the learning and research process go unacknowledged as they are not the ones the institution defines as research authors or contributors. These individuals can be family members, friends, kiteyahk, or community partners who make our work as scholars possible. The project on which this article and our research findings are based highlights the criticality of ethical relationships in SoTL practice, research, and dissemination. It is important to acknowledge that we did not conduct a study *on* people, but *with* them (Peltier, 2018). As such, this section of the paper will include acknowledgements of individuals who supported the authors in their initial project process as well as in their continued learning and reflections regarding the topic of love and its importance in decolonization work. We hope that by strengthening our community connections and relationships we can actively challenge colonial power structures designed to reinforce hierarchy through notoriety and privilege based on academic status and qualification.

First, we would like to honour the teachings of the kiteyahk who helped guide both the capstone project and us as we have continued to move forward with this work and our own personal journeys. Thank you to Hal Eagletail (Dene Elder), Hayden Melting Tallow (Siksika Elder), and Clarence Wolfleg (Siksika Elder) for guiding the students, the professor, and their community partner, Wee Wild Ones (WWO), through each phase of our project. These kiteyahk shared teachings, protocol, and ceremony that helped us to achieve our goals, and they all continue to participate in an ongoing relationship with WWO in the form of an Elders Advisory Circle. We would also like to acknowledge Medicine Trail Coordinator, Dion Simon (Nehiyaw leader) and Espoom tah, Roy Bear Chief (Siksika Elder) at MRU for their support and guidance throughout the project. We want to recognize the other students who worked on this project: Gemma Bayne, Hiba Almopta, and Kyla Tailfeathers (Blackfoot/Kootenay), and WWO's educators, Katherine Kaiser and Hannele Gordon.

Courtney would like to acknowledge four kiteyahk who guide and teach her through ongoing relationships and ceremonies. Each individual plays a crucial role in her mental, emotional, and spiritual growth and continues to share their knowledge in a good way through laughter, conversation, direction, and ceremony. These kiteyahk are her nookum Edmee Comstock (Michif), mosom Rick Lightning (Nehiyaw), and kokom Inez Lightning (Anishinaabe). Courtney also recognizes kiteyahk Marvin Littlechild (Nehiyaw) for the teachings he has shared regarding the importance of our stories and education, her partner Ferrada Lightning (Îethka/Nehiyaw), and her closest friends Anita Krasni and Robyn Deschamps (Nehiyaw) for keeping her accountable. Through honouring and respecting traditional protocol, Courtney was granted permission to share the teachings of the kiteyahk that are included in this paper. Without these people, we would not have the knowledge to write this paper in a good way.

THE AUTHORS' SOCIAL LOCATIONS (EXPERIENTIAL/LIVING CONTEXT)

Courtney Gariepy

Taanishi, asiniiwachee nipi y iskwe dishiniikawshoon, niya Michif. My name is Courtney Gariepy, and I am Michif (Métis). I was born and raised in Treaty 7 Territory, in Mohkinstis (Calgary), on the traditional territories of the Siksikaitsitapi, which include the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani Nations, the Tsuu T'ina Nation, and Îethka Nakoda Nation. Calgary is also part of the historic Métis homeland and is home to Métis Nation Region 3. My father's family is Michif, from Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, and my mother's family is of settler descent, from Windsor, Ontario. I grew up outside of my community due to legacies of intergenerational violence, which continued into my upbringing. As a result, I grew up knowing I was Métis, but without knowing the responsibilities that being Michif Iskwe carried. However, in the last six years I have returned to my people and reconnected with living members of my Michif family and community here in Mokiinstis and across the homeland, learning about our lifeways, dances, and traditional knowledge. I was adopted by Michif Kiteyahk Edmee Comstock as her granddaughter and have also built relationships with kiteyahk in Maskwacis, such as Mosom Rick Lightning and Kokom Inez Lightning, through my relationship with my partner Ferrada Lightning. I have received my traditional name and have the right to participate and learn in ceremony and to speak to this knowledge as a Métis person.

Carolyn Bjartveit

My name is Carolyn Bjartveit. I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Child Studies and Social Work at MRU and teach courses in the BCST degree program. I was born in the city of Dawson Creek in northern British Columbia, the ancestral territory of the Sekani and the Dane-zaa (Beaver) peoples. I have lived in several provinces across Canada but feel most connected to Calgary, Alberta, where I have lived with my family for 30 years. I am a settler of northern European ancestry and grateful to live, learn, and work on Treaty 7 Territory. My SoTL research and partnership with students is focused on human rights and social justice and the complex intersections of the self (identity of students and educators) with the curriculum in culturally diverse early childhood education post-secondary classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the meaning and role of love in the context of student-community partnerships, decolonization work, and scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) practices. It is important to preface this work with an

acknowledgement of the ongoing and living nature of learning. We submitted this article for review several months after it was presented at the SoTL conference in Banff, Alberta (2022).¹ Since then, we have had time to cogitate and grow in our own explorations of what love means in both personal and academic contexts. This work is meant to be revisited, reworked, and, if necessary, amended to accommodate new learnings in each of our lived experiences. As such, we have written the article as a narrative and organized it in a way that allows us to think about the work that we did prior to the conference and to share what we have learned in the period following the conference presentation and discussion. Our guiding purpose in this work is to understand decolonization in connection to our understanding of love in SoTL practice and in relation to Felton's (2013) SoTL principles. In this article, we respond to the following questions:

- How do shifts in language create ethical space and challenge Western colonial ways of being, knowing, and doing?
- How might reciprocity and “love” be understood and enacted in the context of SoTL research and teaching practices?
- What is the role of student-community partnerships in understanding the complex meanings of “decolonization”?

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Wee Wild Ones (WWO),² a nature-inspired preschool, wanted to explore what it would look like to decolonize their curriculum and practices. To do so, the staff connected with MRU's faculty and students and participated in a capstone project, which was part of a fourth-year course. During the 2021/22 academic year, a team of four students (including Courtney) in collaboration with their professor (Carolyn) and their community partner (WWO) examined the meaning of decolonization and Indigenization. The staff at WWO did not initially know how they understood or defined decolonization when they proposed to weave Indigenous worldviews with the organization's current curriculum and *Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* (Makovichuk et al., 2014).

During the year-long project, the students, their professor, and WWO staff and educators bridged their learning from academic literature and their own lived

¹ This article describes post-secondary project work that was part of a larger SoTL research study entitled, *Untangling Post-Secondary Students' Understanding of Decolonization Through Community-Based Projects With Indigenous Partner Organizations*. The research study has received ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Board at MRU (Application Number #102977). The project was shared at a conference session at the SoTL conference (Banff, Alberta, 2022).

² Wee Wild Ones (WWO)/Wilderfutures Institute (WFI) is a non-profit organization based in Treaty 7 Territory, that addresses intersecting social issues by empowering organizations, families, educators, and the next generation of leaders with the tools and resources they need to make meaningful changes in Calgary communities.

experiences with kiteyahk and each other. The group came to understand decolonization as contextual, relational, and holding multiple meanings (Andreotti et al., 2015; Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2012). Nehiyaw scholar Willie Ermine (2007) and his explanation of creating “ethical spaces of engagement,” significantly influenced the work as it helped the group to understand that the key to engaging in decolonization work with Indigenous peoples is to forget preconceptions and expectations and come into dialogic spaces where no perspective is privileged above another—not above you, not below you, but beside you. The students who participated in the capstone project, some of whom were Indigenous, felt they did not have the knowledge or authority to speak on behalf of First Nations and Métis peoples in Treaty 7 Territory. This led to the first project shift from focusing on specific curriculum changes to the development of a WWO Elders Advisory Circle. Following key meetings both with kiteyahk and with organizations such as the Métis Calgary Family Services, the group again confronted their own colonized actions and approaches. Without realizing it, they had approached both kiteyahk and Indigenous organizations in a manner that was transactional. The group had emailed them with a specific request and task that was related to timelines, an outcome, and a project deliverable, before establishing a relationship or telling kiteyahk who they were. The Indigenous leaders of the organization could see that the group had good intentions, but their actions did not reflect them.

Felton (2013) stated that “good practice in SoTL requires the intentional and rigorous application of research tools that connect the question at the heart of a particular inquiry to student learning” (p. 123). Our approach, with its application of thoughtfully prepared scripts, interview questions, and politely worded emails, would be considered “methodologically sound” (Felton, 2013, p.123) in a colonial academic setting. However, it was not effective with members of the Indigenous nations whom we sought to involve. Consider the words of Mosom Rick Lightning:

It’s an entirely different world. What you learned in that world doesn’t apply here. ... These people need to understand that they need to come to us, put the effort in, and find elders that fit the topic. If it’s education, if it’s culture, it’s different. Elders all have different knowledge in different areas. It’s not a pan-elder thing. We all have different strengths. (personal communication, January 2, 2023)

We had asked kiteyahk to come to us, expecting them to put in the effort instead of making the effort ourselves. It was through mistakes like these and the guidance of the kiteyahk that we were able to relinquish the idea of being experts and shift our collective focus from an efficiency-driven, goal-directed project approach towards building authentic relationships rooted in love, respect, and inclusivity. It was only when we had the humility to accept that our way—the colonial academic way—was not working that the tools we used began to align with the goals of student learning and our methods started to change and become sound.

WHAT DOES DECOLONIZATION MEAN ANYWAY?

Tuck and Yang (2012) caution academics about reducing the word decolonization to a “metaphor” or buzzword, explaining that by doing this people risk decentring whiteness. However, we argue that decolonization inherently centres whiteness as “decolonization” itself is a term that was created by white society to describe the act of liberating societies from colonial processes and impositions that they themselves created. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis points out “that the structure of a language determines a native speaker's perception and categorization of experience” (“Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,” 2023). This means that if the words we use to communicate ideas in academic discourse remain in English, French, Spanish, or any colonial language we will always, by default, be centring colonial worldviews and whiteness. Consider Felton’s (2013) principles and the inherent implications of the language used to describe them: “appropriately public and sound methodology” (p. 123), “relevant theory” (p. 122), and “in partnership with students” (p. 12). To those who come from Western-colonial academic backgrounds, it may be difficult to identify the oppressive and violent implications of this phrasing. The Western-colonial paradigm defines what is considered appropriate, sound, or relevant in our society, thereby leading to the inherent exclusion of Indigenous and diverse paradigms in all aspects of how knowledge is defined, validated, and reproduced. Another consideration applies to our personal praxis, specifically how we view and understand relationships. When applying the SoTL principle “in partnership with students” (p. 12), which person—student or professor—has declared their relationship a partnership, and can these partnerships be equal?

In Courtney’s experience as an Indigenous student in a Western-colonial institution, these partnerships were usually declared/initiated most often by non-Indigenous professors who held assigned power over her. Additionally, these relationships were often accompanied by promises of academic accolades, recognition, and valuable experience. However, consider the implications of using the word “valuable” in this context. What is truly more valuable to Indigenous students and scholars—struggling to voice their Indigenous truths in an academic body that is inherently designed to erase them or spending time with the kiteyahk and learning from the mosoms and kokoms? Every Indigenous person in academia will voice their answers differently as their lived experiences are unique—they are not the same—hence the inherent violence of not having SoTL principles of good practice that include and represent their truths.

Many Indigenous peoples believe that what we speak and what we think creates our realities. Conversely, the English language is “wordsmithing” (Mosom Rick Lightning, personal communication, July 25, 2023), designed to communicate the positivist paradigm where words are created and only describe a singular reality

(Frideres, 2020, p. 49). Due to its foundation in Cartesian dualism,³ the Western-colonial paradigm and its composite languages are not equipped to express Indigenous paradigms clearly as it does not allow for ambiguity in our answers. Thus, the language used to define Felton's (2013) principles inherently imply power differentials between the academic and the institution, the professor and the student, the Eurocentric (or colonial) paradigm and Indigenous research paradigms. As Mosom Rick Lightning emphasized, "if you aim to decolonize or Indigenize, you need to learn our ways, learn our language, and come to us" (personal communication, December 25, 2022). If one views decolonization through this lens, it can be argued that the act of decolonizing oneself is an act of connection to oneself, one's language, the land, and all of creation. Nookum Edmee and Mosom Rick have both impressed upon Courtney the need to know her language, know her people, know herself, and know her responsibilities. The mosoms and kokoms have always said to "know who you are," and this is for all people, regardless of background. We, as authors, cannot speak to what we do not know; therefore, it is not our place nor our responsibility to tell someone how to decolonize themselves. That responsibility is their own. Everyone's journey is different and, therefore, it is up to individuals to ask themselves: What feels right? Am I putting in the effort? What am I really asking for? Who am I, who are my people, and where do I fit into this decolonization work? These questions will guide academics but still give them the gift of learning the answers for themselves. It would be easy to list a step-by-step guide to decolonization, but that method would not work as it removes personal accountability.

Anishinaabe author Kathleen Absolon (2011), from the Flying Post First Nation, states that Indigenous paradigms are built on foundations of connection, holism, or humility, and are "wholistic, relational and interdependent" (p. 48). Conversely, Western-colonial paradigms are built on the foundation of separation, hierarchy, and superiority (Frideres, 2020, p. 45). What we learn, consume, and create is subsequently influenced by these foundational values and thus reproduced in every social institution including the academy. Nookum Edmee Comstock has shared the teachings of the seven sacred steps with Courtney—also called the seven grandfather teachings. These seven steps are humility, love, honesty, truth, courage, wisdom, and respect. As Nookum Edmee Comstock explained, "When you live according to the seven sacred steps, you will have a good life, and walk in a good way, but you cannot have one without the other" (personal communication, May

³ As Jaarsma & Berhout (2022) explain, "Cartesianism refers to a way of thinking that accepts *dualisms*—supposedly oppositional pairs of concepts like mind/body, good/evil, and nature/culture—rather than a more integrated or fluid way of understanding the world" (para. 1). Eurocentric Enlightenment ideals and René Descartes' dualism was focused on mind-body and omitted the spirit—ideas that have influenced Western colonial scientific thinking and the positivist paradigm. In contrast, the focus on spirit, the spirit world, and the connection between mind, body, and spirit in Indigenous culture and history is reflected in people's beliefs, language, and the Indigenous paradigm.

2021). When considered in this way, Courtney identifies a fundamental issue when it comes to decolonization in academia. Due to its fundamental values, Western-colonial academia inherently lacks humility and, therefore, according to Nookum Edmee's teachings, lacks love, bravery, wisdom, honesty, truth, and respect. Even more concerning is that Western academia controls what is considered real and valid knowledge and thus carries the most responsibility and influence in how decolonization is enacted. Some of what we are saying may seem harsh and cause readers to react with defensiveness, but perhaps it is a gift to sit in that discomfort and consider what it is rooted in, recognizing that through it there is potential to increase self-awareness and understanding. For instance, instead of continuing the practice of trying to add Indigenous perspectives to the Western-colonial research paradigms, we could move into "ground[ing] our research frameworks and methods in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing" (Absolon, 2011, p. 55).

We started the capstone course and project from a place of unawareness about protocol, ceremony, expectations regarding honoraria, and of our own privileges. We needed to set aside our own fragility for the sake of moving forward in a good way. The project was a starting point for all the participants to begin learning the protocols and teachings, as well as the responsibilities that come with the knowledge we received. This led to several changes in how we practiced, not just in relationship with kiteyahk and Indigenous organizations, but also how we engaged with each other. We learned to set aside our preconceived notions, ideas, and expectations and created new connections with Indigenous peoples, the land, each other, and ourselves.

WHAT DOES LOVE HAVE TO DO WITH SOTL PRACTICE?

Métis kiteyahk Maria Campbell (2007) argued that the legacy of colonialism is a life of "Can't, can't, can't—turn the other cheek, suppress anger, suppress pain until we can't feel anything anymore and our brains stop working" (p. 5). Absolon (2011) shared that "colonization has attempted to eradicate every aspect of who we are. Colonizing knowledge dominates, ignorance prevails, and we internalize how and who colonizers want us to be" (p. 19). This legacy of ignorance, suppression, and domination has created a chronic lovelessness—an absence of unconditional Shakihi (love) and ikkimmapiiyipitsiin (sanctified kindness). This lovelessness characterizes most issues in a colonized society, including those legacies that impact SoTL work.

Through this project work, the academic and community partners came to understand love as transformational, unconditional, and healing. Drawing from hooks (2001), Matias and Allen (2016) described "love as action towards social change for the betterment of humanity" (cited in Reyes et al., 2018, p. 820). However, in the same academic work by Reyes et al. (2018), the conventional patriarchal notion of love is rejected and framed as a "flowery, soft expression of love; as affection or a feeling" (p.820). While there is a need to understand, challenge, and dismantle colonial patriarchal norms, we do not believe it is wise to

reject the widespread understanding of love as a feeling or affection. In fact, this definition is not the central issue with patriarchal expressions of love. Instead, the problem lies with the hegemonic belief that love is ownership, power, control, and dominance over certain individuals or groups of individuals (hooks, 2001).

Love does not fail to be transformational or radical because it lacks feeling or affection, it is transformational and radical because of those qualities only when feeling and affection are gifted unconditionally through humble, reciprocal, honest, and ethical relationships. It may seem odd to describe unconditional relationships as reciprocal; however, Nehiyaw kiteyahk Mosom Rick Lightning shared with Courtney that one must do things without expectations to receive blessings. You do good things for other people just because it is the right thing to do, not because you expect people to do those things for you. The moment you give anything with the expectation of receiving something in return, you will receive nothing. However, if you give something with no expectations of a return just to be kind, blessings will come. Imagine giving love this way. In fact, this conceptualization of love reflects Métis and Nehiyaw values and principles of wahkohtowin (Campbell, 2007) and sakihitowin (Mosom Rick Lightning, personal communication, July 2023). In SoTL work, these unconditional relationships must be grounded in context (Felton, 2013, p. 122), but we must be careful not to place limitations on these relationships for the sake of “professionalism.” Otherwise, we are at risk of recentring white, Western-colonial approaches to relationships that are based in hierarchy.

Moving to enact love in academia will radically alter the paradigm that informs the construction of knowledge in society and how we are all implicated in the colonial acts that perpetuate lovelessness. This paradigm change will require a significant shift in thinking, particularly on the part of professors and Western-colonial academics, as this work requires letting go of habitual practices and the expectation that sources be appropriately reviewed and validated by Western institutions.

For example, when considering love in relation to her teaching practices, Carolyn recognized that Felten’s (2013) principle of student learning was highlighted. There was a saying that came to mind as she reflected on the project: “If you love something you have to let it go.” As we learned from the kiteyahk and collectively reflected on our group’s experiences, we all had to learn to let go and that was not altogether easy. For Carolyn, this meant letting go of the assessment strategies and tools that she had planned, such as written deliverables and reports. In the Fall 2021 semester, the students developed a detailed written report that included project goals, implementation strategies, and team reflections. In the Winter 2022 semester, Carolyn asked the students to expand on and include their project evaluation and final recommendations in the report. The students, however, proposed different ideas, asking to hold sharing circles at the middle and the end of the term and inviting their Indigenous and community partners. Rather than continuing to assign reports, Carolyn changed the assignment plans. Traditional Western forms of written, standardized assessment were challenged when the students recorded their conversations with their project partners, either using audio

or video, and made room for Indigenous practices of oral storytelling.

As Carolyn's understanding of colonization increased during the academic year, she came to understand ways to decolonize her teaching practices. This included active listening, acting on students' requests to change curriculum content and assessments, inviting students to design the course syllabus (Winter semester), creating ethical space *with* students for reflection, engaging in brave discussions, relationship building, and welcoming written, oral, and visual representations of learning. The students decolonized themselves, their language, and their approaches to relationships through reading and discussing course texts about Indigenous worldviews, human rights, and social justice (Ermine, 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Vowel, 2016). They also decolonized their interactions with the kiteyahk. These interactions and experiences with Indigenous community partners (i.e., Métis Calgary Family Services) also uncovered and raised critical questions about the students' personal assumptions, biases, and colonial ideas regarding Indigenous-settler relationships and language, enabling them to begin creating ethical spaces of engagement with one another.

Throughout the year the project participants continued to consider the meaning of decolonization and found that relationship and love were the foundation and starting point of decolonization and connection. Perhaps this cyclical reflective process speaks to the unending learning journey and work of decolonization. Viewing decolonization through critical lenses—historical, cultural, theoretical, and philosophical—and creating ethical spaces for engagement with Indigenous partners at MRU and in the community interrupted universal assumptions about the meaning of decolonization. This process also enabled students to begin critically reflecting on who they were and how they each related to and fit into the work of decolonization. Furthermore, through enacting love in our daily practices with each other, decolonization began to occur naturally as an act of connection. Carolyn was able to decolonize her teaching practices and assessments, and the students were able to begin decolonizing themselves and their approaches to relationships. The love we enacted was freeing, kind, inclusive, and reciprocal. In returning to these principles in the future, lovelessness will be combatted, those left hurt by colonial violence will begin to heal, and the world will begin to change.

CALLS TO ACTION → FELTON'S SOTL PRINCIPLES

Through our lived experiences both during and after the project ended, we came to recognize that Felton's (2013) principles were written in a particular historical time and place, prior to the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* (2015) in Canada. Therefore, Felton's language is less inclusive of diverse perspectives, and continuing to use such language prevents engagement in change making. As mentioned above, the language used to describe the principles of good SoTL practice reflects and reinforces the Eurocentric and colonial research paradigm. If the aim of SoTL research is to reproduce and

reinforce Western-colonial ways of knowing, then this language can remain unchanged. However, this is not the goal of SoTL research, so applying these principles and the language used to describe them is inherently problematic, particularly when applied to Indigenous and diverse research paradigms, which are juxtaposed, by nature, with the Eurocentric research model. Therefore, we would like to call upon SoTL researchers to commit to commissioning a set of principles for SoTL research that reflect the culture, languages, and worldviews of diverse Indigenous peoples. We say “commission” rather than “create” as it is not the job of non-Indigenous scholars to propose or develop a new set of principles for Indigenous research and education. The principles already exist, and the knowledge sits with our kiteyahk who are waiting for people to put time and effort into hearing their stories—to give them the traditional protocol and come and learn without expectations. This needs to be done within the context of a new relationship, perspective, and understanding of Indigenous peoples. We cannot keep doing the same things we have always done.

Consider the words of Nehiyaw kiteyahk Marvin Littlechild, “people will tell you a lot of beautiful stories, write them down ... don’t try and change them ... because if you change it—there’s a big word for that—it’s called a lie” (personal communication, March 17, 2023). To begin the process of gathering these principles from where they rest with kiteyahk across the country, those who take on this work will need to exercise humility, openness, and awareness to come into the ethical space, as human beings first, so they can learn from the kiteyahk without changing their stories and teachings—even unintentionally. This will mean placing less importance on colonial research ethics and consent forms, scripted interviews, and specific formatting, and instead utilizing appropriate traditional protocols.

However, we should do more than just learn the protocols. We must commit to honouring and understanding the significance of the protocols. Those who take on this work should make the effort to travel to the kiteyahk, who are all waiting for the young people to return to the circle and hear their stories before they are gone forever. This cannot wait, and if the SoTL community is committed to decolonization, this is what should be done. This is what it means to enact love in decolonization—it is committing to wahkohtowin and sakihitowin, to connecting, and to reciprocal, humble, ethical relationships within SoTL.

In the spirit of decolonization, we want to end this article with a teaching that was shared with Courtney and her partner from Marvin Littlechild on March 17, 2023. This teaching is significant to share in this context as he speaks particularly to the need for us to return to the ways of our ancestors—to know protocol, to put in the effort for the knowledge we want, and to hold space for learning in both paradigms. We should all closely consider this teaching when we think of love, relationships, and decolonizing SoTL. We must ask ourselves: Why am I reading this and what am I here to learn?

There will be people who say “aah it’s a lost cause” No, we can get strong again. We have to think ... have one mind to go back to our language, you know, to be bicultural If you know the best that you have about yourself and know

their way—the white man's way—and put those two together, you'll be bicultural but you'll be powerful. So work hard ... it's not an easy road. You know, I'm just about at the end of my trail now You know I'm in my 80s ... so there's only a few of us left here We counted 11 All of us have a story to tell As an old man I don't know when I'm gonna be called, so what I know about these stories is gonna be buried with me Nobody will ever know But it's up to you young people to go and search—to go and search for stories—but you have to ask You're not gonna get it for nothing What I mean by that is that I'm not gonna stand in the corner with my hand held high saying "Hey come! I know all about this!" I'm not gonna say that to—any of us—he [gestures to mosom Rick] won't say that. It's YOU! You have to have the initiative to go and look for it ... and when you find it, that's when you exchange. (personal communication, March 17, 2023)

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Courtney Gariepy, BCST, completed a Bachelor of Child Studies degree at Mount Royal University in 2023 and has a diverse background in child studies. She is Michif Iskwe and is passionate about pursuing the ongoing work of decolonization and Indigenization within early childhood education and post-secondary settings. cbgariepy2@gmail.com

Carolyn Bjartveit, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University. Her research focuses on human rights, social justice, topics of teaching and learning, and the complex intersections of the self of students and educators with the curriculum in culturally diverse post-secondary classrooms. cbjartveit@mtroyal.ca

REFERENCES

- Absolon, K. E. (2011). *Kaandossiwin: How we come to know*. Fernwood Publishing.
- de Oliveira Andreotti, V., Stein, S., Ahenakew, C., & Hunt, D. (2015). Mapping interpretations of decolonization in the context of higher education. *Decolonization: Indigeneity Education & Society*, 4(1), 21–40.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. UBC Press.
- Gariepy, C. & Bjartveit, C. (2023). The importance of "love" in authentic decolonization work and SoTL Practice. *Imagining SoTL*, 3(2), 2-15. <https://doi.org/10.29173/isotl702>

- Campbell, M. (2007, November). We need to return to the principles of Wahkotowin. *Eagle Feather News*.
https://www.eaglefeathernews.com/quadrant/media/pastIssues/November_2007.pdf
- Ermine, W. (2007). The ethical space of engagement. *Indigenous Law Journal* 6(1), 193–203.
- Felten, P. (2013). Principles of good practice in SoTL. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, 1(1), 121–125. <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.1.1.121>
- Frideres, J. S. (2020). *Indigenous peoples in the twenty-first century*. (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- hooks, b. (2001). *All about love*. William Morrow.
- Jaarsma, A. S., & Berkhout, S. G. (2022). Cartesianism. *Showing theory to know theory*. Open Library. <https://doi.org/10.22215/stkt/ja56>
- Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework*. <https://www.flightframework.ca/>
- Peltier, C. (2018). An application of two-eyed seeing: Indigenous research methods with participatory action research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691881234>
- Reyes, G., Radina, R., & Aronson, B. A. (2018). Teaching against the grain as an act of love: Disrupting White Eurocentric masculinist frameworks within teacher education. *The Urban Review*, 50, 818–835.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0474-9>
- Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. (2023). *Google Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
- Sensory, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Calls to Action*.
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf
- Vowel, C. (2016). *Indigenous writes. A guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit issues in Canada*. Highwater Press.