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Anti-Indigenous Racism Training and Culturally Safe Learning: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Anti-Indigenous racism is deeply and indelibly etched into the policies and practices which inform institutions and systems across Canada. Educational "spaces" can reproduce oppressive social structures without careful and critical pedagogical consideration. One of the ways to address racism toward and impacting Indigenous people is through anti-Indigenous racism education. We use the San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training program as an example of anti-Indigenous racism training. We examine the relevance and shortcomings of antiracism and critical race theories in the context of anti-Indigenous racism, and explore the manifestations of anti-Indigenous racism in adult education environments. Indigenous cultural safety (ICS) gained increasing attention when cultural and intercultural competency was identified within the Calls to Action in the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as required training across sectors including health, education, justice, public services, business, and child welfare. The intent of ICS training is to ensure safe and equitable services and care, free of discrimination, to Indigenous people. Within the San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training program, it was recognized that if anti-Indigenous racism educators are to effectively address racism and resistance, a set of core competencies of knowledge, self-awareness, and skills must be developed to support their work. We outline how the ICS pedagogical model was developed, and explore the ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators must confront and address personal triggers, resistance, emotionality, microaggressions, and everyday racism, and must assert Indigenous perspectives in the classroom. We also review the work that has been undertaken to research and unpack anti-Indigenous educator experiences and effective pedagogical approaches.

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Introduction and Background

Anti-Indigenous racism is indelibly embedded in everyday practices: in service delivery, in policy and program development, and in classroom practices. Antiracism education requires naming the privileges and power that have become largely invisible to and normalized by White people in North America and visible to racialized people who do not benefit from the same privileges and power. Racialized populations such as Indigenous people in Canada learn that to survive, they must learn about and adapt to dominant and oppressive attitudes, behaviours, and expressions of racist ideology. In adult education environments, racism toward Indigenous people manifests in a range of ways. Within the classroom, educators encounter triggers; resistance; resistance and anti-Indigenous racism; emotionality; and microaggressions and everyday racism, all of which compromise Indigenous perspectives in the classroom.

One way to start addressing anti-Indigenous racism and its impacts is through the delivery of Indigenous cultural safety (ICS) training. While the curriculum content may be well developed, the quality and effectiveness of ICS training highly depends on the educators and the pedagogy used to facilitate it, and the systems and institutions where it is delivered. The quality and effectiveness of ICS training not only depends on the roles and skills of educators, but also depends on organizational factors such as financial resources spent on training and who governs when and if training happens. We contend that if anti-Indigenous racism educators are to address racism and resistance, they must develop a set of core competencies related to knowledge, self-awareness, and skills. In short, ICS curriculum and pedagogy has to be taught and learned. In addition to describing core competencies, our paper focuses on the roles, responsibilities, and skills of ICS educators in co-creating the space to make this type of training impactful for learners.

The first author (CW) of this paper is Kwakwaka'wakw from 'Namgis First Nation, an Indigenous leader in the field of ICS training and the director of the largest ICS training organization in Canada. The second and third authors (MMN, MF) are racialized and White non-Indigenous researchers, respectively, working in Indigenous community–partnered health research contexts for over a decade. All three authors are committed to creating and holding spaces for Indigenous people to feel safe in contexts that are dominated by non-Indigenous people, policies, and practices—specifically through ICS training and in health care settings, health research, and postsecondary institutions.

Social Construction of Race, Colonialism, and Critical Race Theory: A Thumbnail Sketch

Henry and Tator (2010) asserted that the construct of a racial hierarchy is not supported by science. It is not enough to state that race is an unscientific, socially constructed phenomenon because despite the lack of scientific evidence, societal values and perceptions about racial categories and traits persist. Dei (2006), an antiracism scholar, points out that as we learn to dismantle and *unlearn* the concept of race, we also need to understand how it is used to maintain social oppression and hegemonic power through everyday human interactions as well as through institutional policies.

Critical race theory (CRT) critically examines the way in which race is implicated in all aspects of society. CRT can be helpful to use as a theoretical framework to see how racial groups with power govern other racial groups. However, some scholars (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Dunbar, 2008; Ward, 2018) find that CRT is lacking important components within the framework—the naming and examination of colonialism as well as the voices of Indigenous scholars.

Questioning constructions of race can be challenging. It is most challenging with people who are White because unpacking racism requires the outright naming of whiteness as a site of dominance (Frankenberg, 1993). Antiracism education requires naming privileges and power that have become normalized by White people in North America and elsewhere. And while many forms of power and privilege are invisible to White people, they are highly visible to racialized people. Indeed, racialized populations such as Indigenous people in Canada survive by learning and adapting to the "habits, customs, moods, attitudes and idiosyncrasies" of the oppressor (Hanna, Talley, & Guindon, 2000, p. 433).

Decolonization Through Anti-Indigenous Racism Education

Antiracism education examines the construction of race in relation to power. Antiracism education and theory gained interest in the 1980s when the Canadian government started to brand itself as a multicultural nation, promoting the idea that cultural diversity was both welcomed and upheld as the strength of a multicultural nation.

Antiracism theory and education has been criticized for failing to include and critically examine historical and contemporary colonialism while also failing to include reference to Indigenous sovereignty (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Phillips, 2015). When the context of colonialism is neither acknowledged nor addressed, history is effectively erased and Indigenous people are rendered invisible.

In the context of Indigenous-specific antiracism education, also known as anti-Indigenous racism education, the links between colonialism and racism must be framed in contemporary terms. It is undeniable that racism and colonialism continue to exist and that "many Canadians still believe that [Indigenous] people are inferior; as a result, these people believe that there is a sound, rational basis for discrimination against [Indigenous] persons at both the individual and institutional level" (Frideres & Gadacz, 2001, p. 10). When educators lead anti-Indigenous racism training or deal with racism in the classroom, addressing White hegemony is challenging, and issues of White fragility and guilt (Caouette & Taylor, 2015; DiAngelo, 2011), denial, and avoidance are pervasive (Lund, 2006; Paul, Carr, & Milroy, 2006; Schick, 2000).

The presence of anti-Indigenous racism in adult education environments is well supported in the literature, as are its manifestations as grouped under the themes of triggers; resistance; resistance and anti-Indigenous racism; emotionality; microaggressions and everyday racism; and adverse Indigenous experiences in the classroom. These themes are not discrete, but rather they intersect, overlap, and are connected to one another in complex ways. Table 1 provides a summary of the themes.

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Table 1

Manifestations of Anti-Indigenous Racism in the Classroom

Theme	Definition	Examples
Triggers	Words that connect to pre-existing anger or pain related to oppression and result in an emotional response; a physical response alerting people to danger	"I don't see differences; people are people to me." "What do *you* people really want, anyway?" "If everyone just worked hard, they could achieve." "When are Indigenous people going to start fixing their problems?" White women crying and peers rushing to their side, hijacking the learning. Also includes instances of the following: • resistance • ignorance • White supremacy • uninformed and unexamined opinions
Resistance	Indicators or markers of prejudice, bias, and other expressions of racist ideology	"I am fed up from hearing you people talk about racism." "What you are talking about here is simply a revisionist perspective of actual history." "Dwelling on the past is not helpful. I think that it is time you people just got over it and moved on."
Resistance and anti-Indigenous racism	Attitudinal and behavioural dynamics that surface in the classroom when Indigenous content or perspectives are presented; unique nature of this resistance suggests that Canadians actually refuse to know that racism, which underpinned colonization, benefits not just the original settlers, but all non-Indigenous people currently living on this land	Ideological assumptions such as "race doesn't matter (culture does)," "meritocracy—everyone has an equal opportunity," and "goodness and innocence—by individual acts and good intentions, one can secure innocence as well as superiority" (St. Denis & Schick, 2003, pp. 61–65)
Emotionality	Expression of emotions, easily activated opinions, rationalizations, and judgments related to engaging in dialogue and learning about race and racism	Emotionality can be labelled as White fragility, which can be triggered by some of the following contexts: • suggesting that a White person's viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity) • people of colour talking directly about their racial perspectives (challenge to White racial codes) • receiving feedback that one's behaviour had a racist impact (challenge to White liberalism)

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Theme	Definition	Examples
Micro-aggressions and everyday racism	"Everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (Sue, 2010, p. 3)	Everyday anti-Indigenous racism: • "I thought you people got everything for free." • "Do you know what 'data' means?" • "How much have you had to drink today?" • "You must have got that promotion to fill a quota!" • "All their communities are sick."
Indigenous experiences in the colonized classroom	Indigenous students' experiences in education and the difficulty of hearing about "historical and ongoing colonial violence perpetrated against Aboriginal people" in a learning environment that itself perpetuates racism (Cote-Meek, 2010, p. 115)	Cote-Meek (2014, pp. 110–112) identified several themes in Indigenous students' descriptions of racism they experienced in the classroom: • denial of racism • being silenced • being made to feel not intelligent enough • insinuations that Native studies courses are not real academic courses • being called upon as the "Native Expert" • being called upon as the "Cultural Indian" • everyday racism

Scholarly work like that of Cote-Meek (2010, 2014) describes the experience of Indigenous students in the "colonial classroom." She sheds light on the very real trauma and harm experienced by Indigenous students as they contend with a racist environment, often created by both faculty and students. When race-based discussions occur in the classroom, they are not only potentially polarizing, but unless skilfully addressed and managed, can lead to resistance-based responses that impact the learning milieu and levels of engagement. Resistance is a weighty reality borne of our collective colonial experience as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If our intention is to reduce anti-Indigenous racism and improve the social status of Indigenous people, then resistance to Indigenous perspectives and to learning about privilege and White supremacy must be explicitly discussed and addressed by anti-Indigenous racism educators.

In order to address racism and resistance, anti-Indigenous racism educators and institutions must develop a set of core competencies which target knowledge, self-awareness, and skills development. One important and widely embraced form of anti-Indigenous racism training is provided by the San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training program.

Unlearning and Learning Do Not Happen by Themselves: Pedagogy Matters

ICS training is not simply about the transference or sharing of knowledge. Content is important, and delivery is equally important. *How* training is facilitated is as important as *what* content is covered. Consider the following real scenario:

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I am sitting in the boardroom listening to my co-facilitator introduce the five-day Indigenous cultural awareness training we are going to deliver. She sits down and it is my turn. I notice I am a little bit nervous. We haven't done this together before and the 25 people in the room are staring at us. Not all the stares seem all that friendly. Whatever. I get up and start to speak. I am on a roll.

"I really hope that over this week we will get to know each other, and I also hope that we can begin to have those 'courageous conversations' that we don't get to have about these issues."

Out of the blue, a voice comes from the back of the room, "That's great! I always wanted to know why all the Indians are drunks!"

Oh my god. Did he just say that? Out loud? I hear my co-facilitator whisper, "Oh my god!" behind me. I look down the room to where the young man is sitting. He has his feet up on the table and is leaning back in his chair. I want to go down there and push him over. So I start walking down toward him. What am I going to say? Maybe someone else will say something? Oh no! What if somebody else says something?

I see that half the room is Indigenous women and they are staring at me. One of the women has her mouth open and her eyes are HUGE. One of the women says quietly to the woman beside her, "Wow, here we go already" or something like that. Huh? What does that mean? After that there is silence. Everything seems like it is in slow motion. Why are they all looking at me?

I don't know what to do. I think about the agenda for a moment. My heart is pounding and my face feels really hot. I have memorized the Instructors' Notes in the curriculum and I know for a fact that there is nothing in there about this kind of thing. What have I gotten myself into? Does this happen to everyone? How come we didn't have an in-service about this? Why did I say that thing about courageous conversations? What a stupid thing to say. I keep walking slowly and finally arrive at the young man. He is grinning at me and I am aware that I want to wipe that smug smile right off his face.

I am able to mumble, "Ummmm … well, that is a very good question and I ummm … will make sure you have an opportunity to … ahh … learn about that over the next week." I turn away and slowly walk back to the front of the room. I feel every single eye drilling into the back of my head. I am not sure how I am going to get through the next few minutes to the break, never mind get through the next five days.

Delivery of ICS training in Canada is for the most part interactive, whereby participants have the opportunity to engage with educators/facilitators, as well as other participants. As depicted in the scenario above, the culture within an actual or virtual classroom can be difficult to establish at the outset of a training, depending on the attitudes of participants. Indigenous cultural safety facilitators, therefore, are trained to set and manage the tone of learning. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of literature about core competencies and how to select, train, and retain ICS educators. Similarly, very little has been written or is known about what makes an effective ICS educator.

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Core Competencies of Indigenous Cultural Safety Educators

The "dump truck" approach to teaching (simply dumping knowledge on learners) is neither effective nor appropriate when educating people about complex topics that are both personal and deeply rooted in socially accepted views. Given that training is most often facilitated in groups, the opportunity for co-creating knowledge and understanding requires a classroom environment where participants and educators can learn from each other. One of the difficult realities for ICS educators in this environment is the potential for harm which is always just beneath the surface. They must be ever vigilant of the varied forms of harm: harm to participants who are subject to their co-learners' hurtful attitudes and biases, harm to participants who do not feel protected by educators, harm to educators by participants, and harm to educators by their colleagues who may not be equipped to handle difficult situations. In short, the education of White people about racism can occur at the expense of educators, particularly Indigenous educators. This harm can occur during the process of "unpacking" personal racism without cognizance of the impact the process of unpacking has on the educators. This lack of understanding/awareness of the cost of learning—where learning may occur at someone else's expense—is a common blind spot. Even experienced educators risk being impacted, or triggered, in unexpected ways.

The following sections briefly highlight three core competency areas that emerged from a study conducted with educators who are engaged with anti-Indigenous racism work. The study and the core competencies will be fully explored and discussed in a forthcoming paper.

Knowledge

In addition to knowledge of ICS content, ICS educators must also have a solid foundation in pedagogy and theory. Knowing how to facilitate learning while also understanding the theoretical foundation of the curriculum is essential. Educators must consider the diversity of perspectives in each classroom as they facilitate learning that unpacks overt and subtle forms of anti-Indigenous racism and structural racism. If the intent of ICS training is to (a) raise awareness of past and present colonialism, (b) interrogate colonial narratives, (c) replace colonial narratives with counter-narratives, and (d) motivate people to apply their new knowledge to their everyday living and practice, then educators must have the pedagogical knowledge needed to challenge participants, encourage them, and build trusting relationships with them. Educators are responsible for facilitating a process that involves participant learning, unlearning, resistance to new ways of thinking, and integration of new ways of knowing and doing.

Self-Awareness

ICS educators must also have a solid understanding of their own racial standpoint and how that informs the ways in which they teach and how participants learn. How participants act, think, and speak/write often differs depending how they relate to educators (Ward, 2018) and vice versa. Consider an ICS training that is delivered by an Indigenous educator, a White educator, or a racialized non-Indigenous educator. Most often, participants/learners are most willing to be vulnerable in the presence of people they perceive to be like-minded; by contrast,

when participants do not find commonalities with their educator, they are less likely to share and ask meaningful questions. Co-facilitation models offer options for engaging which promote the exploration of diverse perspectives, create space for diverse participants, and model a form of relational accountability and cultural humility (Ward, 2018).

ICS educators must be prepared to examine the ways in which their racial identity is tied to their upbringing, experiences, education, and place of privilege. This is important work that must take place if educators are to model learning expectations. Even after educators have engaged in self-examination and training, they can still be triggered. Participants or co-facilitators may say or do things that cause an educator to feel paralyzed, angered, or offended, which prevents them from being able to facilitate learning in the moment. This can sometimes extend over a longer period of time.

Skills

It is very difficult for educators to know *what* or *how* participants think without creating spaces for that understanding to evolve. It requires a lot of skill to move a group of participants through a process of thinking, reflecting, challenging assumptions, and taking action on issues that get at the core of our identities. While some trainings may be populated with participants in similar vocations or working within like organizations, from the outset educators must be skilled at discerning and adjusting to the range of knowledge and perspectives that are shared within the group. They are expected to analyze and deepen everyone's knowledge by lifting the curtain and asking participants to engage with what they see. This work can be exhausting for educators. It can also raise questions about their responsibility when a participant demonstrates neither an interest in learning nor a willingness to learn. What is their responsibility to try working with that person, particularly if it is at the expense of the other learners in the class?

Wise Practices in Progress: San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training

In a 2017 evidence brief (Churchill et al.) in which "wise practices" were identified, the San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training program was featured as a case study that embodied many of the wise practices that were congruent with several of the Calls to Action within the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).

The San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training program grew out of a requirement by the Transformative Change Accord: First Nations Health Plan (British Columbia Assembly of First Nations et al., 2006) that health providers across the province of British Columbia (BC) receive cultural competency training. In response, the Indigenous Health Program at the Provincial Health Services Authority in BC undertook the development and operations of the provincial ICS training program. The design of the San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training program is unique in that it is facilitated, interactive, and offered in an online environment. The facilitation model was also unique in that it was based on transformative learning theory, critical race theory, and critical decolonizing antiracism theory and Whiteness studies.

The San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training program was first offered in 2009. It began with two facilitators and has since expanded to a team of 70. In excess of 130,000 people

have been trained over a 10-year period. The facilitators are part of an interracial team (Indigenous, White, and racialized non-Indigenous) who co-facilitate learning pods of 25 learners. All trainers receive rigorous training and mentorship and have specific areas of focus and expertise.

Conclusion

ICS training is decolonizing work that takes place within complex and dynamic contexts where transformative learning occurs and where harm is often reproduced. Creating a classroom culture that facilitates learning is easier said than done. The effectiveness of ICS training is only as effective as its educators and their pedagogical practices in facilitating learning. The personal nature of ICS training makes it exceptionally difficult work and work that can easily lead to educator burnout. As we understand and learn from the experiences of ICS educators, the ways in which educators are selected, trained, prepared, mentored, and supported by their institutions will enhance educator retention and growth.

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