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Stepping into discomfort is not comfortable, but it is the only path to growth. I've been stepping into discomfort for a while now. First, taking steps to become more aware of what decolonization could look like in classroom practice and reflecting upon my own privilege, second, jumping into an ever-evolving leadership position and, finally, sharing both my words and visual reflection in this article. That discomfort is only a fraction of what I imagine many Indigenous students feel as they walk through school communities, and encounter a variety of educator attempts at Truth and Reconciliation.

We are all at various points along the journey to hopefully co-creating educational practices that work more respectfully for all learners. As a new Principal, I am insatiable in attending webinars to grow my understanding of how to be a better school leader. To that end, I attended a webinar in January called the Decolonizing Together Symposium which featured the amazing Carolyn Roberts. Some of you may have also attended the recent BCPVPA webinar, Leading for Equity: Decolonizing and Indigenous Education, where Carolyn discussed similar thoughts with a focus on leadership.

Personally, I was inspired by the ideas presented in both webinars. When inspired, I reflect on things that I have learned, and record it in visual form to help me grow my understanding. In my visual reflection, I identified the ideas that came up for me. Carolyn's sessions really have served to highlight essential questions that need to be asked within school contexts to ensure that the work of decolonization of educational practices is not cast aside to avoid discomfort, which only reproduces the status quo.

Stepping into Discomfort

In words and images,
author Angela Bragg offers her
impressions of the deep learning
gained from two recent webinars
led by Carolyn Roberts



One of my favourite ideas from Carolyn's presentations was that we start creating leaders as soon as students walk through the school doors, and into classrooms where those with Indigenous heritage may find it difficult to see their worldviews respectfully represented. A 'one-size fits all' curriculum, where individuals are judged and graded based on compartmentalized subject matter, defined by a ringing bell to indicate a shift in activity seems, upon reflection, ridiculous. However, much of our current school practices are aligned to what can appear as a series of check boxes, comparisons, and alarm bells. The nullification of identity and assimilation into a dominant, oppressive system continues each time this cycle is repeated.

In contrast, Carolyn also presented an anti-colonial view of education where community is built first. Having spent many a September/October building community in a classroom with students learning

about each other's gifts, I immediately paid a great deal of attention to what followed with Carolyn's presentation. Too often, it seems like a few weeks of intensive community building is ultimately followed by the expectation that it is now time to buckle down and start working with curriculum. The anti-colonist view of education followed community building with an understanding of the collaborative, and the notion that it takes everyone to do the work.

At that point, I was hooked. Group work, collaboration, and connection have always seemed to be the gold standard for helping students and staff see great leaps in progress and benefit from the healthy formation of relationships that result. Even better, in this model, the next steps focused upon how collaboratively built knowledge could be used to benefit the greater good, and all share the responsibility for passing it on. Carolyn revealed that in many Indigenous languages, there is no word for 'mine'. Knowledge is meant to be shared with others for the betterment of all.

In thinking about where I have seen students shine this year, it was in those opportunities where this model has been unwittingly followed. What could students and staff accomplish if an anti-colonial approach to education were the norm, rather than the rarity? Could this be a starting point for helping Indigenous students feel a greater sense of belonging as learners, to know themselves deeply, and to have more opportunities to develop confidence through seeing themselves in the curriculum?

Grow, learn, pause, reflect, repeat. As school leaders let's shine a light and be inspired by Carolyn's approach to knowledge and considerate next steps well. How can we collaborate with staff, students, and the larger school community to start to change the narrative? Whose stories do we include? How do we step away from the proverbial table to make room for Indigenous voices to be heard? The great thing about this work is that there are many access points for change agents to take.

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The superficial toolkits that have been used in our daily practice are not enough. We all need to have the humility to recognize the privileges that we have been afforded as an educator within a colonial system to begin to see that classroom spaces have not been

safe places for Indigenous students. As Carolyn also stated eloquently in both webinars, we have all been impacted by settler colonialism, and possibly also exposed to the trauma of Indigenous history (residential schools, sixties scoops, the legacy left by brutal governmental policies), and have not spent enough time learning about the truth, or Indigenous brilliance.

In the words of one of my own teachers, Dr. Andrew Campbell, we have become very good at moving on – that is why it is important to sustain courageous and brave conversations. Let's keep the conversations going to ensure that we are moving beyond guilt or shame, and co-creating educational spaces where children or youth can grow together in respectful spaces that address inequity. Every small step is still a step forward to find our path; within the messiness of the work ahead that has no quick fix, our objective is to affect positive systemic changes for all learners.

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