

# The Importance of Being Uncomfortable and Unfinished

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Bear Healing Lodge (BHL) was a committee established in 2018 within the Faculty of Nursing at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Canada. The original mandate was to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action (2015). The initial intent was that BHL create a blueprint for the faculty to address the TRC and begin the process of reconciliation. However, a shift occurred in our approach, process, and intent following collective reflection and discussion of the Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) article, "Indigenization as Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Decolonization: Navigating the Different Visions for Indigenizing the Canadian Academy," at an early meeting. Members of BHL realized that the original intent of delivering a blueprint for the nursing faculty was not possible without first addressing our own social location and beginning the process of decolonizing ourselves. The goal was no longer focused on producing a deliverable but on the uncomfortableness of the unfinished process of engaging in decolonization of self as a journey. This paradigm shift created the ethical space for acknowledging ongoing privilege and power as colonizers within the academy and opened our eyes to our positions of power in relation to nursing students and each other (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Our intention, as authors, is to share the struggles we experienced in acknowledging our ongoing privilege and oppression in our roles within the BHL. We, as a pronoun, will refer to the four authors for the rest of this paper. We will discuss what we have discovered through our work on the BHL committee and examine systemic discrimination borne of colonialism. We recognize that every individual and group will have different experiences influenced by their social location and the systems in which they live and work and recognize that no one perspective is absolute. We offer this work humbly and with good intentions for others to learn from our struggles and triumphs.

### **The Formation**

MacEwan University is a post-secondary institution focusing on excellence in undergraduate education, with approximately 1300 undergraduate students in the Faculty of Nursing. The work of BHL aligns with MacEwan University's strategic vision in honouring our place in our downtown city ward O-day'min in Edmonton/amiskwaciwâskahikan. MacEwan's Indigenous Centre, kihêw waciston, is an invaluable partner in this work, most significantly through relationships with Knowledge Keepers, director, and staff. The goal of the Faculty of Nursing to engage with the TRC recommendations led to the establishment of BHL.

### **Our Social Location as Authors**

We concede we are uninvited guests on Treaty 6 Territory and Métis Territory 4, which was the traditional meeting place for Blackfoot, Cree, Dene, Nakota Sioux, and Saukteaux peoples on Turtle Island. We recognize the ongoing struggles to uphold the treaties of friendship with respect to the land and honouring relationships. We acknowledge the pain and suffering of all who attended the Indian Residential School System, those affected by the Sixties Scoop, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and children and recognize the devastating impacts of intergenerational trauma. We realize, as a collective, the need for allyship and disruption to address the stereotypes and myths that continue to disenfranchise and dehumanize the Indigenous Peoples of this land.

Each of our social locations provides the ontological lens to understand our own histories contextualized within power, privilege, and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). All members of BHL were supportive of the collective reflection and the desire of the four authors to examine and

elucidate the journey. As authors, this collective reflection in writing this paper has set us on a path to expose colonial ideologies as a group of Indigenous and white settler women. We are each committed to understanding how endemic racism influences and shapes the profession of nursing and nursing education. We recognize that as female academics, we are not just the oppressed, but as members involved in nursing education we have been socially conditioned to be the oppressor.

**Caroline** identifies as a cisgender mixed ethnicity woman of Dene, Norwegian, Irish, and Scottish descent. She is committed to honouring her Indigenous roots by addressing the inequities that have devastated her Indigenous family and community, historically and continuing into today. Caroline recognizes her settler past and the white privilege that is contained within these roots, as well as the white privilege (but also the trauma) that was afforded to Caroline through her upbringing as a Sixties Scoop Survivor being raised in a British Canadian family. Caroline is focused as an individual and professional on identifying and naming interpersonal and structural racism and exploring and dismantling colonialism in structures and policies of today in both education and health care. Caroline has been a registered nurse for over 30 years, and currently teaches nursing (foundational and community health) as an assistant professor. Her work includes educating students and faculty about decolonization of nursing, as well as current exploration into barriers to the uptake of decolonial knowledge.

**Sydney** identifies as cisgender Métis woman of Cree, Swedish, and British ethnicity. As someone who is mostly white and looks white, Sydney has benefited from white privilege and has not experienced the inherent racism many other Indigenous Peoples have. This whiteness has caused a dichotomy for her in terms of her own racial identity. She is committed to challenging colonial barriers and continuing to learn about racism, white privilege, and unconscious biases. Sydney has a Bachelor of Arts degree and has been working as a student advisor in various universities for 15 years. She has been with the Faculty of Nursing at MacEwan University for 4 years.

**Jody** identifies as a white, cisgender settler of British, Scottish, and German ancestry. Jody's troubled relationship with land, place, and privilege includes both the knowledge that she is occupying stolen land, and her tremendous gratitude for the land on which she lives and works. As a white settler and descendant of the colonizing nation, benefiting from colonial systems that have privileged her and her family while attempting to silence, remove, and erase Indigenous Peoples, she is committed to unsettling and to staying within the spaces of discomfort necessary to and for the work of decolonization. As an academic librarian embedded in the Faculty of Nursing, she recognizes that she is part of colonial systems of naming, categorizing, and privileging of information and voices. She sees it as her responsibility to seek ways of decolonizing her work practices and spaces, and to respect and amplify Indigenous voices and knowledge systems in and through her work with students and faculty.

**Colleen** identifies as a cisgender settler of French, Irish, and Polish ethnicity. Her French-Canadian roots date back to 1663 and for her this was always a source of pride. However, she is now cognizant of the white privilege embedded in her DNA and the important work of dissecting her social location. She is committed to the roles of allyship and disruption as an individual and a professional to begin the dismantling of systemic structures and policies. She is cognizant of the importance of challenging the ideals of privilege, which influence who has power and voice, to engage in liberation to address structural inequities for Canadians, especially addressing the TRC recommendations for health and education. Integrating social justice principles of honouring diversity and creating inclusion are foundational building blocks that she mentors in the classroom



## Contextual Influences

### *Post-secondary Response to the TRC Calls to Action.*

In 2015, the TRC released its final report documenting the history and lasting impacts of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. The term *cultural genocide* was intentionally chosen to reflect the dehumanizing effects of residential schooling on Indigenous Peoples and noting intergenerational trauma as a lasting effect experienced by many across Canada. The TRC also released 94 Calls to Action to direct the necessary changes in Canadian society for healing to begin across and between nations (TRC, 2015).

Canadian post-secondary institutions have been grappling with how best to respond to these Calls to Action. For many, the work has been challenging due to differing visions and understandings of what the end goal is and how to attain the end goal (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Gaudry and Lorenz focus on defining the different levels of Indigenization that occur at universities such as Indigenous inclusion, whereby the numbers of Indigenous students and faculty increase; however, the deep-seated structure of the university does not change, as it does in their definition of reconciliation Indigenization.

However, some Indigenous scholars see that, despite gains that have been made, such as increased numbers of Indigenous students and university action plans that align with the goal of reconciliation, universities are having difficulties in matching action to the rhetoric they espouse, such as having far more Indigenous scholars, engaging Indigenous Elders in meaningful ways, and ensuring more scholarships and bursaries for Indigenous students (Munroe, 2021). Educational institutions have committed to an equity, diversity, and inclusion approach to attract and retain Indigenous students and faculty. However, ensuring an inclusive climate and guaranteeing that Indigenous scholars are not the only Indigenous voice in a department has been challenging (Munroe, 2021).

The Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) describes decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation as important aspects of responding to the Calls to Action (CASN, 2020). They pinpoint specific actions for each of these concepts that occur in universities across the country, such as land acknowledgements, publicly displaying symbols of Indigenous cultures, and focusing on Indigenous Knowledge and cultures through offering programs, courses, and course credits (CASN, 2020).

A second endeavour is the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge into curricula and educational life on campus. However, both strategies have failed to reach their desired outcomes, as senior leadership and faculty have not first or simultaneously dismantled existing barriers, colonial structures, or processes present in the academy that ultimately inhibit success of any such endeavours (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Harder et al., 2018; Louis et al., 2017; Pete et al., 2013). Without this critical effort of understanding the complexity of moving forward as a reconciliation process within a colonial structure, simply layering on pieces of Indigenous Knowledge to already-existing structures becomes a moot point (Harder et al., 2018; Pete, 2016). Trimbee (2020) suggests colonial practices in and of academia are retained and even strengthened when decision-making processes continue to align with the dominant narrative. Therefore, as authors we intentionally entered into this uncomfortableness from a socio-political perspective to examine our histories within the current context of ourselves as individuals and professionals within the Faculty of Nursing.

### *Philosophical Lens*

In our reflective writing process, we recognized the need for further knowledge to develop our understanding of the importance of being unfinished and uncomfortable. As authors, we incorporated literature that informed BHL discussions and each of us sought out and shared articles that contributed to our own growth as individuals and professionals. We reflected on which concepts and philosophical lenses were relevant to our experiences and how they could help us frame our group processes. Our discussions included asking questions of ourselves and of each other, seeking terminology, and confirming our collective reality. Our inquiries, self-reflection, and conversations were not always easy or comfortable, as we experienced the psychological and cognitive discomfort associated with shifting between dissonant knowledge systems (Festinger, 1962; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

As authors, we have multiple social locations, which increased the dissonance when our discussions challenged long-held beliefs. Embracing the pedagogy of discomfort (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas, 2015) provided the necessary lens to question those hegemonic propositions deeply embedded in our daily lives. This shared space became the birthplace of questioning structures and processes that perpetuate inequities and thus dehumanization. Our struggles of feeling comfortable with being unfinished provided confidence and commitment as a group to engage in the necessary work of dismantling and rebuilding our knowledge. Our hope is that our struggles and triumphs may provide insights for the reader as they begin their own journeys of challenging colonial hegemonic assumptions, beliefs, and practices. Our experience has caused us to recognize and reaffirm our commitment to be always in a continued state of, iterative growth, and to embrace the unfinished and uncomfortable nature of this work.

The work needed to disrupt hegemonic practices needs to start today; but equally, if not more critically, important is to first understand the ramifications of nursing's history as oppressor and colonizer (Nazon et al., 2019; Racine, 2021). We must understand that nursing has never been apolitical but has been socially conditioned to act out hegemonic *truths* through power, privilege, and exclusionary practices and determining whose lives matter through selective charity (Filice et al., 2020; Kagan et al., 2009; McGibbon et al., 2014; Nazon et al., 2019; Racine, 2021). In the pursuit of enacting professional virtues, we lost sight of social justice as an enabling force to dismantle systemic discrimination to promote liberation and solidarity (Kagan et al., 2009; McGibbon et al., 2014). In essence, our history has demonstrated "nurse as Indian agent" by reflecting and upholding certain standards of health and effectively gatekeeping access to resources for those who were deemed virtuous upstanding citizens by the system (Kennedy et al., 2021). This neoliberal perspective continues to be championed by modern nurses through their ability to shape the discourse on health, education, and privilege as colonizers (Holmes et al., 2008; Nazon et al., 2019).

A critical inquiry approach led us to analyze the social structures and processes that guide our practice within the academy, utilizing tenets of critical and feminist theory and postcolonial perspectives (Kagan et al., 2009). We recognized the importance of using our structural advantage or social capital to create a milieu, moving from rhetoric to transformation, as we examined the relationship between power and knowledge. This work required the courage of exposing long-held beliefs endemic to nursing, academia, and ultimately society. Our process involved deep personal exploration, which involved identifying our individual social location, as a precursor to collective critical reflection. We respectfully challenged each other towards growth as we collectively sought to confront the endemic narrative of white settlers within health care and post-secondary education

constructed by colonial patronage (Holmes et al., 2008; Kennedy et al., 2021; Racine, 2021). We acknowledged the need to shift our focus solely on individual consequences to understand systemic causes of racism to begin to depoliticize health inequities and politicize our profession as recommended by Holmes et al. (2009) and Kagan et al. (2009). We realized the importance of moving beyond an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) perspective, as a stance, to embodiment that calls forth action.

However, we quickly realized that for intentional and meaningful work to occur, partnering with Knowledge Keepers and Elders was necessary to create space for shared meaning-making to begin a paradigm shift for unlearning to relearn for two-way teaching (Kennedy et al., 2021). Our guides provided the necessary support and nurturance for critical reflection as curiosity and humility to develop concrete actions. Recognizing that this journey required understanding of relations between Indigenous Peoples and white settlers is paramount, because, as Bell (2021) states, “anti-racism does not manifest in reflection, it only operates through action” (p. 8). Therefore, as a group we waded into uncomfortableness, unpacking our privilege to begin the dismantling.

### **Dismantling to Rebuild a Socially Just Worldview**

#### **Critical Allyship for an Ethical Space**

BHL has endeavoured to focus on the learning to become allies in the shared struggles and triumphs for a decolonized Canada and for self-governance for Indigenous Peoples, and to do this we reviewed literature and resources about allyship. Critical allyship is defined as a dual process of not only understanding the inequities of an unjust system rife with privilege and power, but also identifying the unearned benefits of a favoured few by this system (Nixon, 2019). This dual approach fosters unlearning and recommitting to stand in solidarity with those who have been unfairly disadvantaged by embracing discomfort and putting the allied group’s needs first (Nixon, 2019).

Underlying principles of allyship include (1) the importance of being recognized by the people allied with rather than self-identifying as an ally; (2) as a lifelong process of being and becoming by building one’s capacity for criticism and critique of self, respectfully with peers, and of the system; and (3) engaging in a variety of activities for critical allyship (Nixon, 2019). However, allyship is not enough where *us* and *them* as separate entities are maintained in this discourse as *othering*. Therefore, a move towards solidarity in allyship as a shared struggle of dismantling colonial structures and systemic discrimination is necessary and reflects the Indigenous meaning of relationship as togetherness (Kagan et al., 2009; Kluttz et al., 2019; Nixon, 2019). We must take an intentional approach to avoid the empty gestures of performative allyship, which results from a lack of congruence between commitment and action where actions are devoid of utility for the allied and are in anticipation for recognition and praise of an audience (Blair, 2021). Giving a personalized land acknowledgement may be an example of individual performative allyship if it does not reflect the decolonization of self that is necessary to engage in solidarity action.

An important aspect of both allyship and decolonizing solidarity is the notion of *unsettling*. The purpose of unsettling is to challenge settler narratives, ownership, and practices through “a disruptive, bounded and modest mode of action” (Steinman, 2020, p. 564). Critical allyship as an iterative process of unlearning to relearn and recommit to new ways of viewing the environment and the structures that influence our personal and professional lives is critical for this work. We

have engaged in this process, as a collective, to confront the history of Canada as a settler state that maintains a colonial structure in its institutions, governing bodies, and policies. We are learning about Canadian history from an Indigenous perspective, and of the atrocious dehumanizing acts of oppression that have been omitted in our primary education and erased from societal memory. And we are recommitting our critical allyship daily as members within BHL, as post-secondary education employees, and as individuals in society.

This ongoing commitment to engage, learn, and recommit must be embedded in relationships with each other. Working with Roxanne Tootoosis, we sought to engage with Indigenous Knowledge and learn how to walk in the way of the Etuaptmumk/two-eyed seeing teachings of Mi'kmaw Elders Albert and Mundera Marshall (Iwama et al., 2009). Roxanne emphasized the importance of relationships within Indigenous Knowledge systems, and that in order to ally with Indigenous Peoples, one must engage in authentic relationships. In the BHL, primary relationships have evolved with one another, with the late Roxanne Tootoosis, and with kihêw waciston. Fundamentally Roxanne Tootoosis has provided us with understanding of Indigenous Knowledge systems, including ceremony, which has deepened our commitment to active allyship.

Our journey of exploring our status as settlers and commitment to allyship began with the foundational teachings of our mentor, Roxanne Tootoosis. Her passing was felt deeply by all of us, as a mentor, colleague, and friend. Her legacy lives in each of us as a dedication to continue the work started even with the absence of her wisdom as our guide (Gifford & McEachern, 2021). She provided an authentic space for exploration through her acceptance, joy, and positivity—qualities that she shared with us and that we wish to emulate in her honour (Gifford & McEachern, 2021). We will continue to challenge the hegemonic practices and structures that prevent the dismantling of systemic discrimination.

Ermine (2007) envisaged an ethical space created by and necessary for an authentic partnership between two societies. This *neutral zone* is a non-allegiance meeting place where differences in worldviews and cultures are respected when engaging in cross-cultural dialogue and reconciliation (Ermine, 2007). Sustaining an ethical space requires knowledge of the principles derived from the teachings of friendship treaties, most importantly the Two Row Wampum Covenant Chain Treaty (Hill & Coleman, 2019). Notably, recognizing and respecting interdependent autonomy, contributions and inherent worth of partners, and *consciousness of place ceremony*, which makes visible an intentional relationship and commitment of both to nurturing this ethical space (Hill & Coleman, 2019). Finally, knowledge is not owned solely but shared to strengthen the relationship through mutual trust, respect, and transparency (Hill & Coleman, 2019). This foundational understanding was pivotal in shifting our perspectives.

### **Shifting our Paradigms**

We agreed within the first few months of formation that, while our initial mandate was to respond to and pursue reconciliation as outlined in the TRC, preparatory work was needed. This paradigm shift actualized as a new vision of understanding colonial influences on teaching, research, and administration as the decolonizing practice in which to build a just BHL (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Kuhn (1970) first defined and described paradigm shifts within scientific discourse as a complete shift, or “transformation,” of worldview predicated by “crisis” (p. 111). Crisis becomes the catalyst for integrating a critical social justice lens to inform education in which to respectfully challenge students to reveal how their social locations have been influenced by the

system they inhabit (Zembylas, 2015). The paradigm shift is uncomfortable because, as settler Canadians, our hegemonic colonial perspective frames our experience and understanding of the world. The work of interrogating, critiquing, and shifting our original worldview, in the move towards decolonization, is inherently uncomfortable and unfinished work, as it involves an iterative disruption to our values and imaginaries about our reality in a colonial, neoliberal time and space, in an institution that is exploring how far to go in disrupting the modern normative narrative (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015). However, only by embracing being uncomfortable and unfinished with our white-settler identity will the catalyst disrupt what is known, to reveal a new reality as we move past denial to understanding power, oppression, and privilege in our colonial academic lives (Regan, 2010; Wilson, 2008; Zembylas, 2015).

Although as authors, we embraced the uncomfortableness and unfinishedness, not all BHL members joined us in this process. We have lost members who were interested in Indigenization, but not as willing to engage with the slower work of decolonizing, and others for whom the work has either been emotionally taxing or has become a lower priority. Remaining members have intentionally engaged in the work of decolonization of self in which to inform the structure, processes, and goals of BHL as an entity. For this work to be meaningful and enduring, our goals must not be tokenistic, but transformative. This involves an unsettling and dismantling of previously held beliefs, practices, and acceptance of academic processes for change within and for the Faculty of Nursing.

Engagement in the work of decolonization involves more than a cognitive shift in knowledge and knowledge systems. A profound psychological discomfort, or dissonance, can accompany our confrontation with such discrepant knowledge systems (Festinger, 1962; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). We experienced a taxing emotional labor associated with these uncomfortable spaces of learning and unlearning for transformation (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas, 2015). As settlers engaged in this work, we are moved outside of our comfort zones; this discomfort may invoke a sense of guilt or shame, as well as grief, loss, and anger, but is critical for authentic transformation and the paradigm shift required to engage in true decolonization and reconciliation work (Lennon, 2020; McLeod, 2020; Regan, 2010). As academics reliant on cognitive reasoning, this shift to the heart requires trust in the process and in each other as we commit wholeheartedly to the process of learning in and through crisis (Kajner et al., 2012; Lennon, 2020). We have stumbled, taken steps back, and have been lost; but we continue to seek guidance, recommit to the crisis for our own transformation, and to offer support for others in their own work.

### **Our Learnings**

We offer the following learnings as intentions to the reader: knowledge needs to be shared to inform relationships for growth. There are different ways of approaching the work of reconciliation, Indigenization, and decolonization; while each approach may share similarities there are marked distinctions that would fundamentally affect each group's formation and direction (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Each collective needs to find their own way and choose their own approach. We hope our learnings help guide you in enriching your process.

### **Protocol to Foster Partnerships**

Reciprocity in and for partnerships is fundamental within Indigenous ways of knowing. In a colonial context where Indigenous people have been consistently forced to engage with the hegemonic systems and rules of engagement, reciprocity must involve engaging in Indigenous

worldview protocols. Such protocols stem from deeply held spiritually oriented societal beliefs and are essential to cultural practices and ceremonies. Engaging with protocols demonstrates respectful acknowledgement of the ethics, values, and belief systems, and is necessary for establishing authentic partnerships.

The offering of items for Indigenous traditional protocol (cloth, tobacco, and other sacred items) is fundamentally different from the academic practice of offering honoraria; it is not a simple transaction for services rendered as understood from a colonial perspective. Engaging in protocol and ceremony as settlers helps with the shift from a limited colonial awareness of relationships and culture, to one of solidarity for true reconciliation (Davis et al., 2017; Indigenous Corporate Training, 2019).

Establishing relationships requires a decolonization approach. We need to acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing and the emphasis on connectedness, wherein everything is related (Indigenous Corporate Training, 2019). Moving from an individual focus (settler perspective) to acknowledging these connections (Indigenous perspective) between land, beings, community, ceremony, and ancestors takes time (Davis et al., 2017; Indigenous Corporate Training, 2019). Key to our relational and decolonial approach was participating in ceremony, seeking blessing, and asking for an Indigenous name to guide and direct the work of the BHL. It was important to us, knowing the amount of work that needs to take place within the Faculty of Nursing, that we were doing this work in *a good way*. As BHL was given the mandate to respond to TRC within the faculty, we had anticipated support from colleagues for whom and with whom we sought to engage in the project of reconciliation. While BHL was and is committed to decolonization and Indigenization within the faculty, we had naively assumed that in this pursuit of reconciliation we would find common ground with our colleagues and were unprepared for the resistance we encountered.

### **Unprepared for the Resistance**

Canadians have long believed in a national identity of multiculturalism, acceptance, and inclusion, along with a reputation for being nice and polite. What has lurked beneath the surface is the silencing of racialized voices and the perpetuation of systemic discrimination via policies and structures embedded in colonial institutions (Bell, 2021). This has emerged in academia in a variety of ways, one of which has been the reticence to engage in the work needed to respond appropriately to the TRC. This reticence has been evident in our faculty in relation to our request that all faculty members engage in additional professional learning regarding Indigenous contexts and history. While we could have anticipated resistance to examining white privilege and the critical colonial discourses embedded in the nursing narrative, this reluctance towards basic learning was surprising.

Although racism is well documented as an important contributor to health care inequities (Bell, 2021; Chen et al., 2021; McGibbon et al., 2014), we were surprised by the active and passive resistance of some faculty members as we began to examine our own role as oppressors. Inherent racism within the profession has exposed nurses as oppressors across the country; the tragic story of Joyce Echaquan is just the tip of the iceberg of a colonial rich profession (Nerestant, 2021). Nurses are a byproduct of their formal education and the system where reinforcement of long-standing myths and colonial privilege has escalated the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples (Kennedy et al., 2021). Nursing as a value-laden profession has many examples of structural racism as a result of laws, policies, institutions, and practices that provide advantages to certain

racial groups while excluding others from the care they require (Bell, 2021; Holmes et al., 2008; McGibbon et al., 2014). Nursing has a long-standing relationship with socio-political institutions that have shaped and reinforced hegemonic practices, thus enculturating a racist mindset in the profession (Bell, 2021; Holmes et al., 2008; McGibbon et al., 2014). The myth of *race*, as a genetic *truth* rather than social construct, continues to circulate in nursing discourse, perpetuating structural violence and health inequities through shaming and blaming the individual for their health choices (Bell, 2021).

Whether racist nursing actions are intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, the outcome for the recipient remains damaging and dehumanizing (Eaker, 2021). Ongoing work of the BHL will focus on antiracist learning to identify and unlearn implicit biases that require humility, curiosity, and deliberate practice. Foronda's (2020) theory of cultural humility provides foundational knowledge for nursing faculty members to engage in an ongoing process of shifting from an ethnocentric, self-oriented focus to a reflective, other-oriented practice. We want to change the narrative to provide communal space to question and challenge hegemonic practices and eliminate the use of automatic and biased judgments to make decisions (Chen et al., 2021). Therefore, we will continue to create respectful space for diversity of thought to broaden both epistemological and ontological perspectives, recognizing the need to stay engaged and open to uncomfortableness (Singleton & Hays, 2008). Our focus must be on understanding the narrative of the dehumanization of a racialized humanity with an intent for liberation (Williams, 2017). Confronting and counteracting racism means engaging in uncomfortable conversations that require extensive commitment and resources to be sustainable.

### **Engaging for Sustainability**

The work of decolonizing long-standing beliefs and narratives, embedded in a society, is a slow and emotionally charged process. We have realized the importance of being kind, patient, and adaptable when confronting and respectfully challenging rigidity and resistance. This journey has been personal for us and therefore we have no prescriptive recommendations to make. However, we offer the following questions to help with your path towards decolonization, recognizing that the process and outcome will be unique for each faculty who engages in this process. We believe engaging as a collective requires a conversation about sustainability: sustainability of discourse, of community, and of structure.

*Sustainability of discourse* proposes adopting multiple lenses early in the process to explore diverse perspectives. We are proposing diversity in thought to challenge notions of power and privilege while supporting community cohesion. What philosophical perspectives (i.e., tenets of critical and feminist theory and postcolonial perspectives) will help guide the work? How will Indigenous community be involved in this process? How will you frame your purpose, efforts, and ultimately actions in responding to the TRC? What is your vision for Indigenization, reconciliation, and decolonization within your curriculum, program, and faculty (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018)? We have found that critical reflexivity, in community, is a pivotal process for sustained discourse to achieve solidarity (Kagan et al., 2009).

*Sustainability of community* begins with identifying not only members within the collective but also external partners in this work. What is the purpose of the collective (Kagan et al., 2009)? How will you build a community with a shared vision? Who are potential partners within the educational institution and from the larger community? How will you create and sustain these relationships? We have found that good relationships are critical for this work; deliberate

cultivation of honest and respectful relationships are necessary for sustaining the ethical spaces vital for thriving partnerships (Ermine, 2007).

*Sustainability of the structure* includes those resources that assist with the work of the collective. What agency will the collective be given to enact change? How will leadership and administration champion the efforts and actions of the collective? How will efforts to decolonize processes be supported within and by the institution? What financial commitment, resources, and processes are available for protocol, partnerships, and professional development? We have found that sustainability as a concept is critical for this work and will require extensive efforts for many years. Ongoing commitment from all levels within the post-secondary institution will be required for this critical endeavour (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; TRC, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

We have situated ourselves in being uncomfortable and unfinished—recognizing the beauty of this in-between space for growth. As suggested by other authors, we must have patience and compassion with one another in these spaces of discomfort, as we engage in honest dialogue and with a process that is iterative without absoluteness (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Regan, 2010; Singleton & Hays, 2008). We are not in a rush to determine the next step. We recognize authentic engagement is neither quick nor easy; relationships and solidarity will provide the insight necessary—we stay open to the possibilities.

Our successes to date will not be measured by output alone. Rather, the success of the BHL has been in the establishment of a living circle of dedicated members who are committed to working in and through discomfort as we push for meaningful change. As Singleton and Hays (2008) have posited in relation to critical conversations about race, we must “stay engaged, expect to experience discomfort, speak [our] truth, and expect and accept a lack of closure” (p. 19). Finally, this work must be politicized. As individuals, we are products of the systems in which we live and work. Our narrative of being uncomfortable and unfinished was necessary to inform the evolving and critical work of reconciliation as an individual, professional, and as a discipline. This act of becoming political will shift us from superficial narratives and performative discourses towards taking action for transformational change in society, as noted by Racine (2021).

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