

Theorising Practices With Decolonising Intentions

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Abstract

Within the home economics field the biggest number of practitioners are educators working in schools. As professionals they are consistently engaging with evaluation of their work, seeking to improve not only their practice but also the student experience. This paper provides a brief discussion of description of the challenges of transforming teacher practices to be inclusive of Indigenous knowledges and understandings within their classrooms.

Self-study and narrative inquiry are two approaches used by educators as they investigate their practices and consider how to enhance their work. By focusing on these two practitioner lead approaches to research, the intention is to provide a context for the following teacher educators' papers.

KEYWORDS: DECOLONISING PRACTICE, PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE, SELF-STUDY, NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that articulates the right of Indigenous people to have access to education that enables a quality of life—socially and economically (Graham, 2010). Additionally colonised countries are having to come to terms with how colonisation processes have removed Indigenous people physically from their land, have severed Indigenous people's connections to language, culture and spirituality and has worked to make Indigenous people irrelevant, lesser and other. In Canada the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came about as a direct consequence of protracted litigation by Indigenous people against the government and churches who ran Indian Residential Schools (Stanton, 2011). In South Africa after the first democratic election and dismantling of the apartheid state, the Truth and Reconciliation Report calls for all students to be educated in ways that develop a culture that supports human rights (GCIS, 2003; Horsthemke, 2005).

In colonised countries teachers are increasingly being asked to include first national knowledges and understandings within their programs. For teachers who are part of the settler population and whose knowledge of Indigenous people is informed by a colonial stance, the requirement to include Indigenous knowledges and understandings is challenging. Personal and professional experience shapes what teachers do within their practice as they provide learning opportunities for other people's children. Guided by curriculum to scope subject knowledge to be taught and their pedagogical content knowledge to transforms subject knowledge into a comprehensible form for their students (Park & Oliver, 2008), teachers work to engage their students with learning. Teachers are also engaged on ongoing learning and professional development as they contemplate their practices, and learn more about their subject content and pedagogical approaches. As teachers reflect on their practices there are inherent challenges between

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knowing too much about what they are doing and why; not knowing about unnoticed moments and interactions; and not knowing enough about other's experiences.

Incorporating Indigenous knowledges and understandings into their classrooms requires teachers to rethink what they know through a decolonising lens and engage with their pedagogical practices in different ways. While some of this can be addressed through professional development and collegial practices it also demands that the teacher investigate their practices. Teacher practices are linked with notions of identity both as an educator (Loughran, 2004) and as a person from a particular cultural and racial group (Olivier, 2019), and where practices are sourced through intrinsic beliefs about the world (Whitehead, 2000) and how we are positioned within it.

When teachers respond to the need to incorporate Indigenous knowledges and understandings, they are not only rethinking their own positionality but are also posing the question "how do I decolonise my teaching practices?". This question reflects what Whitehead (2000) claims is about understanding our individual rationality such that "When I make a claim to believe or to know something, or to explain why something happened, I want to understand the logic of the belief, knowledge or explanation" (p. 94). The question is an example of Schön's "problem setting" where the teacher is able to reframe the issues to better understand their teaching practices in different ways. Teachers are able to reflect on how both colonial and decolonial worldviews (Loughran, 2018) inform their practices and thus come to understand them through different frames.

Kincheloe (2003) in his book *Teachers as Researchers* argues that teachers, together with students and parents need to participate in research to create their own knowledge about those issues that impact and inform the practices within the classroom.

The very basis of teacher research involves the cultivation of restless, curious attitudes that lead to more systematic inquiries. ... All educational acts become problematic to the teacher as researcher. This critical consciousness sees all educational activity as historically located. The perspective cannot view the educational act separately from a social vision, that is, a view of a desirable future (p. 38)

Such research inevitably generates self-reflection, new theories and different practices. With this in mind, there are a number of ways that teachers as practitioners can investigate their own practices. These approaches include action research, autobiography and autoethnography. The following papers provided by practicing teachers offer insights into their practices through narrative and self-study.

Self-study

Self-study is an approach that has been largely utilised by teacher educators (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015) but is also evident in professional career learning (Rawes & Renwick, 2020) and support for teachers to become reflective practitioners (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Longhtran posits that self-study "grew out of the work of reflective practice, action research and practitioner inquiry and is closely tied to teacher educators' sense of identity and desire to ensure (as much as possible) that they 'practice what they preach.'" (p. 1). For LaBoskey (2009) the practice needs to be principled and accordingly positioned within an intent for equity and social justice. As a result, it is an active, decision-making praxis. LaBoskey lists six principles that can both guide and be used to interpret self-study including:

- Teaching is a moral act founded on an ethic of care
- Teaching is an act of inquiry and reflection
- Teaching is essentially a political act.

These principles are core to teachers theorising their work and reflecting on their practice particularly in regards to decolonising curriculum and pedagogy.

The classroom environment is a complex social context (Kincheloe, 2003). For teachers to reflect on their practices in constantly changing milieu requires an approach that can cope with such dynamics. The value of self-study as a research process under such circumstance is that it is self-initiated and that it evolves with circumstances (Loughran, 2018). Self-study is less about the research process and more about the focus of the research (Loughran, 2018; Loughran & Northfield, 1998). In consequence it is easy to see why Loughran (2018) describes self-study through the metaphor of a journey and its focus on the destination. In context of the papers provided by the teachers in this special edition the destination is about decolonised practices and content and the journey is from a colonial to a decolonial approach to both subject content and pedagogical content knowledge.

Narrative Inquiry

Story telling is a human activity that has been used since time immemorial to understand our place in the world such as through sharing experiences, trying to make sense of those experiences and to understand others (Moen, 2006; Spector-Mersel, 2010). Moen (2006) makes the claim that teachers live storied lives and utilise storytelling as a pedagogical practice. She also makes the claim that the use of narrative as inquiry is both the phenomenon and method that is used to describe the classroom experience. A narrative describes the sequence of events that the person telling the story wants to convey. The story teller will draw from and be influenced by their social and cultural contexts their natural circumstances (Spector-Mersel, 2010) leading Moen to contend that “Narratives, therefore, capture both the individual and the context” (2006, p. 60).

Spector-Mersel (2010) describes narrative inquiry that is “primarily a process that organizes human experiences into meaningful episodes” (p. 62). The engagement in narrative inquiry enables teachers to engage with a deeper noticing of their world. The different understandings that teachers’ narratives can disrupt or refute prevailing narratives (Lewis & Adeney, 2014).

The narrative of self inevitably leads to mining oneself as data. ... a shift in recognition of what makes knowledge and, emphatically, who is the storyteller in that process. It also means that the self-recognises that the subjective story is not stand-alone: others are inevitably involved. (p. 72)

The use of narrative inquiry is to make sense of and to determine the meaning of experience. The intention is to offer many perspectives that seek both practical and functional applications. By telling stories about their practices teachers are in a better position to not only lay bare underpinning (colonial) assumptions while offering possibilities for decolonising.

The following papers are authored by teachers who are endeavouring to understand their practice. By investigating their practices these authors are looking to identify possibilities for movement towards and engagement with decolonial perspectives in their curriculum and pedagogies. Kincheloe (2003) has argued that privileging a technical and elitist approach to research on and about teaching that excludes teachers offers little benefit. Recognising and supporting teachers as researchers speaks to a democratic disposition enabling teachers to speak for themselves. These teachers, as contributing authors to this special edition on decolonising home economics, provide important insights into teachers’ reflection on practice to “understand what we do, why we do it, and how we do it” (Vaines, 1985, p. 70).

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Kerry Renwick co-ordinates the home economics education program at UBC, a teaching specialisation whose content and practice are inherently linked to building and sustaining respectful relationships. Her research focuses on social justice in context of K-12 educational settings.

Kerry's previous research includes health promoting schools; exploring the relationship between school gardens and mental health in youth; and teachers' practice in health and food education. She is currently the Principal Investigator on a SSHRC Partnership Development grant focused on global food literacy education. The Food Literacy International Partnership (FLIP) includes Deakin University, Australia; Sweet Briar College, USA; and Gothenburg University, Sweden.

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