

(Un)Occupying Education and Mental Health Institutions Through Art

A report for the Indigenous Advisory Circle, Creative Technologies Program, York University
(Based on work completed in conjunction with the postgraduate level Diploma in Art Therapy program
at Vancouver Art Therapy Institute, and additional materials)

By Joanne Bear, BSW



Table of Contents

Introduction	p.1
Chapter 1: Literature and Context	p.7
Chapter 2: Ethics	p.13
Chapter 3: Research Activities	p.15
Chapter 4: Creative Processes and Outcomes	p.27
Chapter 5: Interpretation, Implications, Conclusions & Recommendations	p.31
Conclusion	p.39

List of Figures of the Images

Fig. 1. Alyssa's art and sharing with the group	p.17
Fig. 2. My sketches and notes of our main discussion points at our station	p.18
Fig. 3. Tristan's art and sharing with the group	p.19
Fig. 4. Indigenous Advisory Circle, dancing	p.21
Fig. 5. Indigenous Advisory Circle, connecting with each other and Indigenous food	p.21
Fig. 6. Indigenous Advisory Circle, decolonization through art and discussion	p.22
Fig. 7. Prayer tie making workshop at York University	p.23
Fig. 8. The fluidity of the medicine wheel and ceremony in therapy	p.25
Fig. 9. Art heals the soul	p.28
Fig. 10. Paper bag inner healer – creating an equitable space in institutions	p.29

References	p.40
-------------------	------

Appendix	p.42
-----------------	------

Introduction

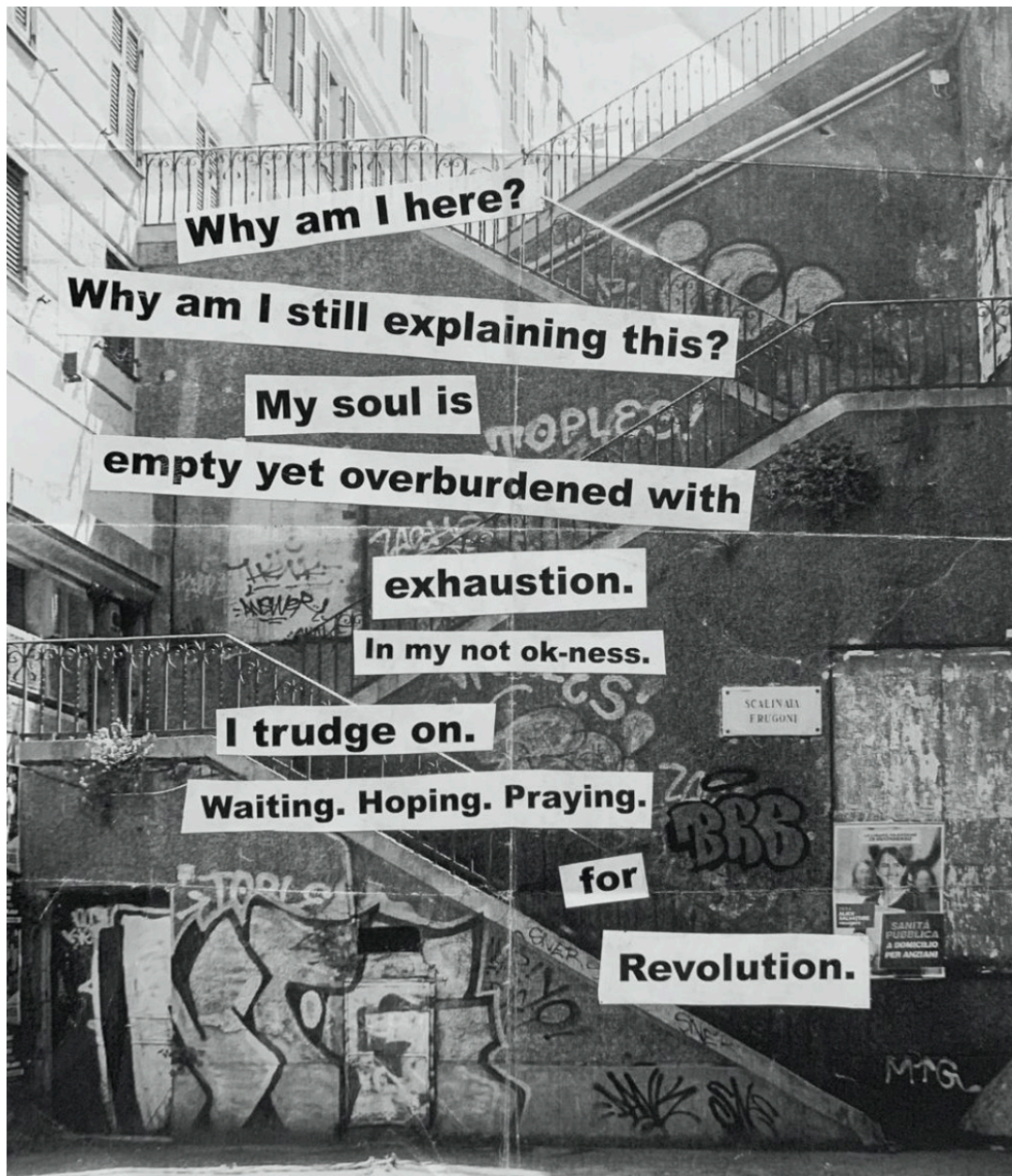
The effects of generational trauma from colonization, residential schools, and systemic racism highly affect Indigenous people in today's society. Although it is largely unknown to settler populations, generational trauma is a result of these violent acts. Generational trauma oppresses Indigenous populations and creates barriers to progression daily and in almost every area of our lives. The needs of Indigenous people seeking support differ from mainstream methods and needs. Most mainstream attitudes do not consider the harm of colonized practices, resulting in only partially addressing an Indigenous person's overall well-being. These colonized methods are seen as superior in mainstream society and are a staple in academia and therapeutic settings. Mainstream methods in institutions have the possibility of re-traumatizing Indigenous populations through pushing colonized practices onto the person or group (Vivian, 2018). If non-Indigenous professionals would like to work with this population in any capacity, it is vital they understand Indigenous views, beliefs, healing, and values to be able to communicate effectively (Vivian, 2018). Decolonization is necessary to break the cycle of institutional oppression for Indigenous youth, individuals, and communities. I am drained as a result of the ways mainstream culture and institutions continually re-traumatize Indigenous people. With this project, I am working to be a part of preventing this cycle for the younger generation with the hope to a part of creating the supports and community they need.

During my research, I came across this art piece by Indigenous artist Joey Solomon. This piece had no title or description. This piece resonated with me, as this image depicts an accurate portrayal of the many injustices, along with cultural and literal genocide Indigenous populations have faced from colonization and residential schools. The part of the image I found that impacted me the most is the bible in the hand of the state-employed skeleton hand. The graves and missing Indigenous women and children in the graves are powerful parts of this image as well, as they depict a truth of our past and present. The flowers coming out of the hair is also meaningful to me, as this shows how the colonial state disregards the value of Indigenous lives. But, we are still here and we are fighting to heal from the violence that was and continues to be put upon us, and for which we continue to be blamed.



Image courtesy the artist, Joey Solomon

This is a poem and collage I created in response to Joey Solomon's untitled art piece. The frustration I have from continually explaining to settler populations and service professionals about the historical trauma Indigenous people have faced and that continues to cause a large portion of the problems and barriers we face today is one of the most significant reasons why I felt the need to be a part of this project, and speak out on the victim blaming myself and my Indigenous friends, relatives, co-workers, and countless other Indigenous people face everyday.



Collage and poem by Joanne Bear. Image source: unsplash.com

Indigenous Clients and Needs

Mainstream institutions, including mental health services and academic institutions, can be ineffective when working with Indigenous individuals. Indigenous communities strongly believe in a holistic process that includes ceremonies and connecting to cultural roots as being equally crucial for maintaining a good mental health space, emotional balance, and spiritual connection (Vivian, 2018). Most mainstream supports do not include these aspects. However, if these tools were utilized within a therapeutic space or acknowledged and leaned on in academic settings, it creates an appropriate space to work with Indigenous people and builds trust, respect, reciprocity, and relationships. Without a holistic lens, there is no base to do any meaningful work. This awareness and cultural competency can be used as mobilization for social change (Lu & Yuen, 2012). However, the structure should come from a place of humility, and professionals must be open to amalgamating the host community's cultural roots, ideas, structure, and notions in ways that connect to them (Lu & Yuen, 2012). Currently, processes regarding culturally appropriate supports are mainly created from the perceptions and beliefs of the dominant society in knowing, knowers, and practice (Graham, 2013). These colonized environments also affect Indigenous youth negatively.

Why is Decolonizing Significant for Indigenous Youth?

Today's Indigenous youth are an important part of the healing process. From my experience, these youth are hopeful in creating social change, and being a part of that change. They are tired of being oppressed within intuitions and stereotyped in society. I have seen the power of combining the arts in the forms of storytelling via theatre, radio and television production, combining spiritual practices and connection to culture within their creative work, and educating settlers in society via creative communications. These modalities have given them a voice, and connecting to their culture and spirituality were necessary to rebuild the mind and spirit from historical trauma. Youth are making an effort to use their struggle to turn around negative circumstances by actively participating in getting their messages out for society to see. They have hope for all First Nations generations, and are educating themselves in finding ways to achieve change. However, they cannot create change if they are repeatedly oppressed within the institutions that have been designed to help them. With the knowledge that a focus on the Indigenous experience is therapeutically effective, adding spiritual and cultural aspects to therapy supports in any form completes the healing process.

Decolonization for Indigenous Healing

Non-Indigenous agencies and institutions must undo the dominant culture's influence in their lens, as well as incorporate a reconnection to spiritual and cultural practices when working with Indigenous communities. Indigenous youth hold the key to their own healing in their minds, hearts, and spirits. Therefore, it is critical that mainstream services and institutions guide them appropriately so they can flourish. Oppressive attitudes, victim blaming, racist government policies, systemic racism, and generational trauma are all a direct result of residential schools and colonisation, and influence how Indigenous populations are treated within agency settings. These mindsets and practices need to be abolished.

As an Indigenous social worker and student art therapist, I have witnessed the lack of culturally appropriate services and practices in social services, educational systems, and art therapy practices. I have experienced inadvertent and blatant racism and miseducated professionals mistaking ignorance for allyship as both a student and a professional. This discourse and project are essential in bringing awareness to mental health and education practices within institutions. Because I have lived experience in seeing the lack of suitable supports for Indigenous people, I strongly believe this is a gap in the field of art therapy that needs to be acknowledged. This discussion and the project I will be proposing are important and essential to the field of art therapy in order to truly create safe spaces for Indigenous clients. In my experience, institutions are related in the work they doing, and the harm I have witnessed done to Indigenous people has been parallel across these institutions, which is why I have included the discussion of art therapy and education. Art therapy in general is lacking supports that are culturally and spiritually appropriate when working with Indigenous populations. This Report is partially for a project called “The Journey” at York University that is working to create culturally appropriate programs and services with a goal to decolonize the mainstream post secondary experience for Indigenous students at the new Markham campus School of Art, Media, Performance and Design (AMPD). AMPD Creative Technologies is a program that will start in 2024 when the new York University campus opens in Markham, ON. This program will explore creative avenues with new technologies, focusing on collaboration. Students will focus on decolonization, ethical ways to partner, and learn to explore the possibilities merging digital arts tools. There will be a focus on land-based practices and working with local partners. The program is being advised by an Indigenous Advisory Circle, and the program will aim to serve and partner with Indigenous communities in York and Durham regions to support the areas educational priorities. One of the main goals is to help Indigenous youth connect as a community to feel like York is their campus where they can be part of shaping the new program.

A consistent issue for Indigenous people in society is barriers to feeling safe when trying to integrate into mainstream educational systems or accessing mental health services. Many settler professionals are not equipped with the appropriate tools to support Indigenous populations with an holistic approach that includes cultural and spiritual practices, addresses historical traumas, and understands Indigenous worldviews and practices. Mainstream professionals can enforce colonial practices onto Indigenous clients and create an unnecessary power structure, which results in causing more harm than good and promotes oppression, racism, and barriers to services and the Indigenous healing process.

Problem: Many Indigenous people face oppression both when accessing mental health services and within academic institutions.

Objective: To dismantle power structures between Indigenous youth and researchers in an institutional setting.

Research question: How can we decolonize mainstream institutions through creative arts and technologies?

The notions of consent; equitable access and treatment within mainstream institutions; culturally appropriate methods; and diminishing power structures within systems are discussed and are main themes in this study. Some proven community arts, social justice, and postmodern art therapy concepts that have been successful in working with marginalized communities are also at the core of this research project. Community engaged arts, postmodernism, and social justice are significant themes here, as they share parallel values to Indigenous ways of being and knowing (Vinz, 2023).

Chapter 1: Literature and Context

This research project sought to investigate co-researching in an arts based community project as a means to decolonize intuitional practices in art therapy and academic institutions with Indigenous youth. Community engaged arts, postmodern art therapy, and social justice are all relevant practices that have parallel viewpoints to Indigenous culture and ways of existing. The combination of these lenses incorporates working together as a community, equality, incorporating music and arts with spiritual practices, and political influences when needed. There are unbalanced power structures within mainstream institutions that create harm for Indigenous people when we are amalgamating within academic and mental health institutions. This project looked into how, as a collective, researchers and Indigenous youth can cooperatively address ways to actively decolonize mainstream institutions through creative arts and technologies. The research method in this study involves co-researching with Indigenous people as a way to dismantle power structures between researchers and Indigenous people, fostering an environment where Indigenous collaborators have agency over their experiences, stories, and art.

This study hopes to advance social justice by acknowledging and working to undo the historical and current structure of colonial power imbalances between professionals and Indigenous populations within institutions. This research addresses the problematic gap in education and mental health institutions, and illustrates culturally appropriate methods that incorporate and honour Indigenous histories, stories, art, knowledge, voices, and expression.

Art therapy is a powerful therapeutic process that relies on utilizing the subconscious mind to help heal painful emotions, trauma, or experiences through the artistic process. I have witnessed many profound experiences on my student art therapy journey. However, art therapy in general is lacking supports that are culturally and spiritually appropriate when working with Indigenous populations. Because the lack of culturally appropriate practices is a problematic gap in the field of art therapy, I want to continue to do work that combines community engaged arts with co-creation alongside Indigenous youth, where youth and facilitators dismantle power structures and work together as a collective. I am proposing a method that combines community engaged arts with the co-creation of Indigenous youth where youth and facilitators dismantle power structures and work together as a collective.

Another reason for this topic as my final project is that utilizing expression through digital arts such as incorporating community work with video production, video editing, and graphics has been helpful for me as a way to deal with institutional settings. Being involved in these projects and this field of work has been a profound part of my professional life and my personal healing journey.

My initial idea was to co-research with Indigenous youth through their participation in workshops. During this research phase I spoke with multiple partners about possible Indigenous youth workshops (see below) and we hope to work with them in the future. Research has colonial implications or baggage attached to it; [t]o re-Search from an Indigenous world view is to restore one's location and truth into knowledge systems... we are always searching for what was taken and we are doing so in an ever-changing world" (Absolon, 2022, p. 26). I will be discussing re-Search in a similar way with the

intention of holding an alternative space for collaborative conversations with Indigenous youth through the arts, where Indigenous learning, being, and ways of knowing are honoured. The re-Search will also serve as a way for myself to understand that not all research is colonial and harmful. Mental health services and education has been a source of re-traumatizing Indigenous people by forcing colonial ways onto them. This project delves into the meaning of finding ways to work outside of colonial practices where the healing process is more aligned with Indigenous worldviews.

I will be discussing the meaning of decolonization through researching artistic spaces where Indigenous youth can be involved, emphasizing their agency through a social justice and postmodern art therapy lens.

Co-Creation, Research Processes, and Contextualizing the Activities in the Literature

My role in this project was to examine how to incorporate community based arts with art therapy and approach the concept of decolonization in mainstream institutions through the arts. I incorporate art therapy into this project with a community engaged art, postmodernist lens. I also use my experience in social justice within this work.

During this process I have also been completing my diploma at Vancouver Art Therapy Institute (VATI). (Martin (2003), as cited in Hogan (2002) was a source of inspiration for me during my coursework at VATI. Her writing was one of the many influences I took from to understand my passion for community engaged arts can realistically be incorporated into my work as a postmodern art therapist. Martin and her colleague used a phototherapy technique and turned their photography projects into workshops as a way to “intervene in cultural debates about the constructions of identities...” (pg. 202). This project inspired me, as it demonstrated ways to incorporate art, community, confronting social norms, witnessing, and supporting one another. The two women photographed their nude, aging bodies, and projected text over the images. They played with cropping and exposure elements (Hogan, 2002). As they developed their photographs, they partnered with a women’s theatre group to run a series of workshops using their phototherapy techniques, incorporating improvisation, acting, and video in a performative way (Hogan, 2002). They incorporated time for “processing, feedback, support and reflection” (Hogan, 2002, pg. 216). Data was collected using photo and video which allowed participants to view and work through issues raised (Hogan, 2002). Another inspiration I will be drawing from in this paper and in my research are Lu & Yuen (2012). They facilitated a project through Concordia University, where they worked with an art therapist in a research project with Indigenous women in a community engaged setting. This project used body mapping as art therapy workshops, and incorporated smudging, prayer, and drumming to tap into the cultural and spiritual healing aspects for the women they worked with. The art was used as a way for the researchers to understand the barriers in healing from violence the women faced in their lives (Lu & Yuen, 2012). This article taught me that not all research is harmful and colonial, if it is done correctly alongside the community researchers are working with. Hocoy (2005) pointed out how Junge et al (1993) discussed: “...[We art therapists are] co-creators engaged together with our clients in their struggle, which is ultimately also our own” (p. 150). Societal disparities can be either mutually reinforced or actively challenged in this context” (pg. 10). This quote expands on the equitable view of co-creation with Indigenous youth in community, art, and therapy, and demonstrates how

art therapists do not have to act as passive observers or facilitators. Instead, the artist/activist can actively engage with their clients in the therapeutic process. Both therapist and client equally contribute to the creation of meaning, understanding, and healing through the medium of art. When this process is harmful or colonized, the therapist might inadvertently enforce certain societal norms or biases. On the other hand, co-creation can consciously work against these structures, promoting more egalitarian and just interactions, understandings, and outcomes (Hocoy, 2005).

The Concept of Consent within Institutions

This project is very close to my heart, as I have a Bachelor of Design in Communication from Ryerson University, a Bachelor of Social Work from University of Regina, and in 2023, completed my Art Therapy Diploma through VATI. Throughout my education, there has not been culturally appropriate supports available to me, such as effective mental health services; access to medicines; access to medicine men, women, and healers; and no appropriate spiritual supports offered at my schools at times when I needed them the most. My experience is parallel with Simpson (2014), where she confirms: “Within the context of settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples are not seen as worthy recipients of consent, informed or otherwise, and part of being colonized is having to engage in all kinds of processes on a daily basis that, given a choice, we likely wouldn’t consent to. In my experiences with the state-run education system, my informed consent was never required –learning was forced on me using the threat of emotional and physical violence. In post-secondary education, consent was coercive – if you want these credentials, this is what you have to do and this is what you have to endure.” (pg. 15). The assumption that colonial practices will work as part of Indigenous healing is unethical and lives on in the mental health field, including art therapy. Hocoy explains that the dominant culture is so embedded in the mainstream cultures that society has merged with colonial power structures and has accepted and encouraged them as the norm (Hocoy, 2005). He continues this idea by saying art therapy is not immune to dominant ideologies: “Even the “healing” traditions can be in service to dominant culture interests, complicit in neo-colonial power arrangements, and tools of assimilation and social control” (Hocoy, 2005, pg. 8). Now that I am empowered with knowledge around this issue, I am aware that as an Indigenous person my learning and ways of knowing do not align with colonial ways, and that much of my education has been a source of re-traumatizing me by forcing colonial ways on me in order to pass my courses and earn my degrees. I am working to be a part of breaking these cycles for our younger generations.

Using a Social Justice Lens

Social justice and its goal for social transformation is a crucial and influential element to this project. From my experience, being able to incorporate aspects of social justice such as: human rights; anti-oppression and anti-racism; fair and equal access to basic societal needs; political, social, and community action; cultural and spiritual needs; and art as a human right are all part of the complicated dynamic when combining art therapy, community engaged arts, and when working with Indigenous communities. For me, social justice encompasses these details. Hocoy (2005) highlights how Augusto Boal was a leader in shaping community-based art therapy. For example, his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* took marginalized communities’ injustices and adapted them for theatre projects which took place in public spaces Hocoy (2005). Actors would share

their personal experiences and social circumstances while creating new responses to their stories (Hocoy (2005). *Theatre of the Oppressed* has been influential in the field of social justice, to this project, and to my experience in community engaged arts. The community productions *Theatre of the Oppressed* created gave a voice to marginalized groups who did not have an outlet or a voice to address their socially constructed positions within society. Their stories gave them empowerment in the world through addressing social issues through the arts. The contributions *Theatre of the Oppressed* has made to social justice and the arts are still relevant today. For example, this type of art form educates audiences and promotes conversations in a non-threatening way; is both a form of activism; and creates a sense of belonging and community for audiences and performers.

As far as a theoretical framework for how to name social action within art therapy, there is no clear definition (Hocoy, 2005). One significant reason for my research and involvement in community arts, social justice, and art therapy is that I have experienced and believe in the power in combining these elements into the therapeutic process. However, gaining access to therapeutic services can be a barrier, and the risk of oppression and control are an additional barrier for Indigenous clients once they walk through the door. Because of how society has been designed, privilege, economic status, government influence, race, sexual orientation, and class, all affect art therapy, as these concepts are all socially constructed but are made to feel like a natural part of the world (Talwar, 2017). Further, all these elements “operate under the guise of promoting equal access” (Talwar, 2017, pg. 103). Dismantling learned power structures and awareness that Indigenous communities have specific needs is essential for a decolonized mind frame and practice.

Postmodernism Art Therapy and Community Engaged Arts

Postmodern art therapy is in alignment with community engaged arts, as postmodernism pushes any limits that a mainstream approach would take on, and disallows any barriers a mainstream or colonial practice could potentially impose on an individual or a community that might create harm in a therapeutic setting. Alter-Muri & Klein (2007) illustrate these aspects in their writing. The authors describe postmodern art therapy and its impact on those involved: “Objects are taken out of their original context and then arbitrarily brought together. The use of diverse media can cause multiple references to historical, personal, social, and political events...” (pg. 83). These changing meanings can keep someone safe, as the meanings of personal symbolism and artwork stay true to their experiences. Alter-Muri & Klein describe a postmodern lens as an open consciousness to others’ worldviews and as a means to continually adjust to changes around us in order to participate in the process of co-creating and witness what that evolution looks like for a group or an individual (Alter-Muri & Klein, 2007).

Parallel to incorporating social justice into community based arts, postmodern art therapy is community driven and focuses on respecting the ever-changing personal and political framework of an individual’s experience. I see postmodern art therapy method as parallel to Indigenous culture and ways of knowing. Working together as a community, equality, the combination of incorporating music and arts with spiritual practices, and using a political voice when needed, are all incorporated into the values that make up both an Indigenous mindset and a postmodern practice. Postmodernism

encourages individuals to recognize that their personal growth is interconnected with the well-being and progress of the community (Alter-Muri & Klein, 2007). By actively engaging in their own therapy and participating in efforts to address community concerns, individuals can empower themselves and create a mutually reinforcing cycle of empowerment with positive changes in society (Alter-Muri & Klein, 2007). Postmodern art therapy acknowledges there are always changing elements to the meaning of a person or communities' art, whether it is artistic, social, personal, or political. In working with Indigenous youth there is an underlying political element, as we are inherently political beings by being born Indigenous. Postmodernism challenges political and societal norms and respects individual realities of truth, meaning, and existence. Because of the parallel roots between Indigenous ways and postmodernism, the fluidity of postmodern art therapy can naturally support Indigenous culture, spirituality, and worldview. Alter-Muri & Klein (2007) exemplify this concept of change and flexibility by affirming: "Postmodern principles reinforce the belief that there is no one style, construct, and medium that is appropriate for every client" (pg. 86). Hocoy adds to these mentioned aspects of postmodernism and community-based arts practices by reminding us that the political characteristic in community engaged arts is a prominent aspect that contributes to fighting disenfranchisement: "The activist-therapist understands that political neutrality and therapeutic passivity serve only the omnipresent forces of oppression and injustice" (Hocoy, 2005, pg. 12). Throughout this process, my research question has been: "How can we decolonize mainstream institutions through creative arts and technologies?"

Chapter 2: Ethics Not Creating Harm

Not creating harm is an important ethical concept in incorporating art therapy with community engaged arts, and when working within any community. One theory that further embodies the significance of this perception is Natalie Rogers' person centered approach. Sommers-Flanagan (2007) conducted an interview with Rogers, where Rogers specified: "If I just used art as a self-expression and art as a language between us, I could do no harm—which was my major concern..." (pg. 122). Rogers highlights a connection with Native American ways of being into her practice as well. Natalie explained in the Sommers-Flanagan (2007) article that after a creative group activity of sharing and clearing painful emotions, her and her expressive arts therapy groups would engage in drumming, chanting, or other rituals as a collective. Rogers credited how Indigenous people recognized that using the body, sounds, and art are all part of the healing process, and how these aspects have the power to bring people together (Sommers-Flanagan, 2007).

Goldbard (n.d.) explains the importance for obtaining community approval before assuming a researcher or facilitator are welcome in a community with their ideas: "We develop protocols for plugging in: for instance, adopting a community assessment process involving meetings and petitions to ensure that a mural doesn't go up on a wall where it is not wanted, that images they find offensive are not imposed on those who will look at them every day" (pg. 2).

Like Rogers, Goldbard is emphasizing the concept of not creating harm when planning community engaged arts projects. Hocoy (2005) points out "Art therapy need not be a tool of colonization in which an inappropriate foreign practice or image is imposed (Hocoy, 2002a). It can adapt to the particular needs and worldview of the host community rather than remain ideologically aligned to "tradition." (Hocoy, 2005, pg. 12). This statement highlights the importance of culturally sensitive and flexible approaches to art therapy. An ethical therapist requires a mindset that calls for the practice of art therapy to be able to adapt to the specific needs and cultural context of the community it serves, rather than imposing harmful foreign or traditional practices in a way that could be seen as colonizing or disrespectful to the clients or community.

The Medicine Wheel in Ethics

The medicine wheel is fluid and changing. By incorporating changing aspects of Indigenous identity, working together as a community, existing together as a community, creating our own art and music, smudging, and prayer (or guidance) through an Elder, we are incorporating the medicine wheel into our artistic journey. The medicine wheel continues the notion of not creating harm in a research or institutional setting, as it is following Indigenous protocols and weaves them into the artistic and therapeutic process. I would like to incorporate these pieces into my research, as they are a part of maintaining an ethical practice and not forcing a colonial agenda onto the youth we work with.

My research has explored the power of combining social justice, postmodern art therapy, and community engaged arts as an approach to decolonize institutional experiences through the arts for Indigenous youth. The literature examines on social

justice, postmodern art therapy, and community engaged arts, has illustrated influential projects that demonstrate a co-researching approach, how a lens of co-researching has given participants agency and control over their voices and artwork, and has helped mobilize social action through a collective consciousness. A postmodern practice in art therapy with a social justice lens, and community arts practice, can support work with Indigenous populations effectively, as these methods are politically and socially conscious, and focus on a just arts and research environment where there is no tolerance for colonial practices to be pushed onto those involved. The roots of postmodernism, social justice, and community based arts are parallel to Indigenous worldviews, spirituality, practices, and political views, making this integration fluid, and accurately acknowledging each individual's personal and political experiences. These discussions and projects are incredibly necessary in bringing change to mental health and education practices. I conclude with this reminder from Hocoy (2006): "From a transpersonal and interdependent view of the self, however, doing clinical work that is cognizant of the societal implications is social action, and being politically active is doing therapy; these activities are understood to be interrelated processes" (pg. 11).

Chapter 3: Research Activities

“The Journey” – Working Title of Our Project

In consultation with the Indigenous Advisory Circle, I have been consulting on how to choose an appropriate name for the work we have been doing. My supervisor Rebecca connected me with Nancy Johnson, Cultural Programs and Nancy Louit-Gonzalez, Traditional Counselor at the Centre for Indigenous Student Services. Here, the group was connected to knowledge keeper Kevin Fujita who helped conceptualize with Rebecca, and the name “The Journey” was tentatively decided on for the project. Since then, and in consultation with Fujita, the group have decided to use a range of different translations of the word “the journey”, “listening path” or “trail” to refer to this work we are doing together. Please see <https://listeningpaths.com>

During this process I have been researching, contacting, and aiming to build relationships with Indigenous agencies and youth in the downtown Toronto area as an initial step in building long-term partnerships. These included the Bawaajigewin Aboriginal Community Circle in Oshawa and the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, Regent Park. I also reached out to the Sutton School District, hoping to make connections with Indigenous students in the York region. I have been immersed in my daily life with thoughts about how to incorporate community-based arts with art therapy, and how to approach the concept of decolonization in mainstream institutions through the arts.

We Are the Living Resistance

In March 2023, our team put on a first Indigenous Advisory Circle meeting at the York University's YSpace in Markham. This meeting was very beneficial and inadvertently healing for me. Everyone involved was genuine, warm, and had an interest in working collectively to make this project a success. The energy was one of total support and consideration of each other and because of this, the energy was vibrant.

Those who attended are as follows:

- Rebecca Caines, PhD, Assistant Professor, Creative Technologies, Department of Theatre
- Hector Centeno, MFA, Assistant Professor, Cinema and Media Arts
- Michael Darroch (he/him/his), Ph.D., Associate Dean, Academic Associate Professor of Cinema & Media Arts
- Marissa Largo, PhD, Assistant Professor of Creative Technologies, Department of Visual Arts and Art History
- Two knowledge keepers, Clay Shirt (Wolf Clan, Treaty 6) and Phil Cote (Treaty 6) and Clayton's assistant Michael Brown
- Three Indigenous youth artists: Tristan Martell (Cree, Treaty 4); Shayne Martell, (Cree, Treaty 4); Alyssa King (Robinson-Superior Treaty 1850)
- Afro-Indigenous visual artist, Jasmine Swimmer
- Indigenous art therapy student and research associate, Joanne Bear (Cree, Treaty 6).
- Dustin Brass, consultant expert on land-based education (Oji-Cree, Treaty 4)
- Ellen Waterman (Professor) and Gale Franklin (Research Assistant from Carleton University), who attended in order to plan future co-projects.
- Maya Chacaby–Professor in Indigenous Studies at York, Anishinaabe Opwaaganasiniing First Nation, via zoom

Integrating Art-Therapy into Our Process

I had a table set up during the Indigenous Advisory Circle meeting where I worked with two of the Indigenous artists/youth. My role during this meeting was informed by art therapy, and I utilized prompts learned from my practicum at VATI, such as having an abundance of materials set up on the table for inspiration, building rapport with Alyssa and Tristan to create a safe space, and asking them if they felt comfortable responding to our main decolonization question through their art. Initially I thought it would be based on directives and planned directive-based activities (*See Appendix 1*). However, since the meeting ended up being more of a discussion-based day, we set up an art station at my table and addressed the concept of decolonizing education through art

and discussion. The flow of the meeting included multifaceted approaches such as art therapy informed techniques, dance, smudging, discussion, a focus on Indigenous community and kinship. All these elements combined are crucial for our mental health and well-being. We also connected with Indigenous foods, which built our sense of community and connection to Indigenous culture. I found the combination of mixing art therapy influences and our goals of consultation created a space with enough room for all elements that were included into the day, where everyone felt heard and validated. I had been disconnected from any type of Indigenous community for the past couple of years, and connecting with other Indigenous people and Indigenous artists was inspiring. Witnessing ideas and receiving Indigenous input for how we see the future of decolonization with our art as a means for mobilization was empowering. Acknowledging we have the ability to create change was powerful to witness and to be a part of.



Fig. 1. Alyssa's art and sharing with the group

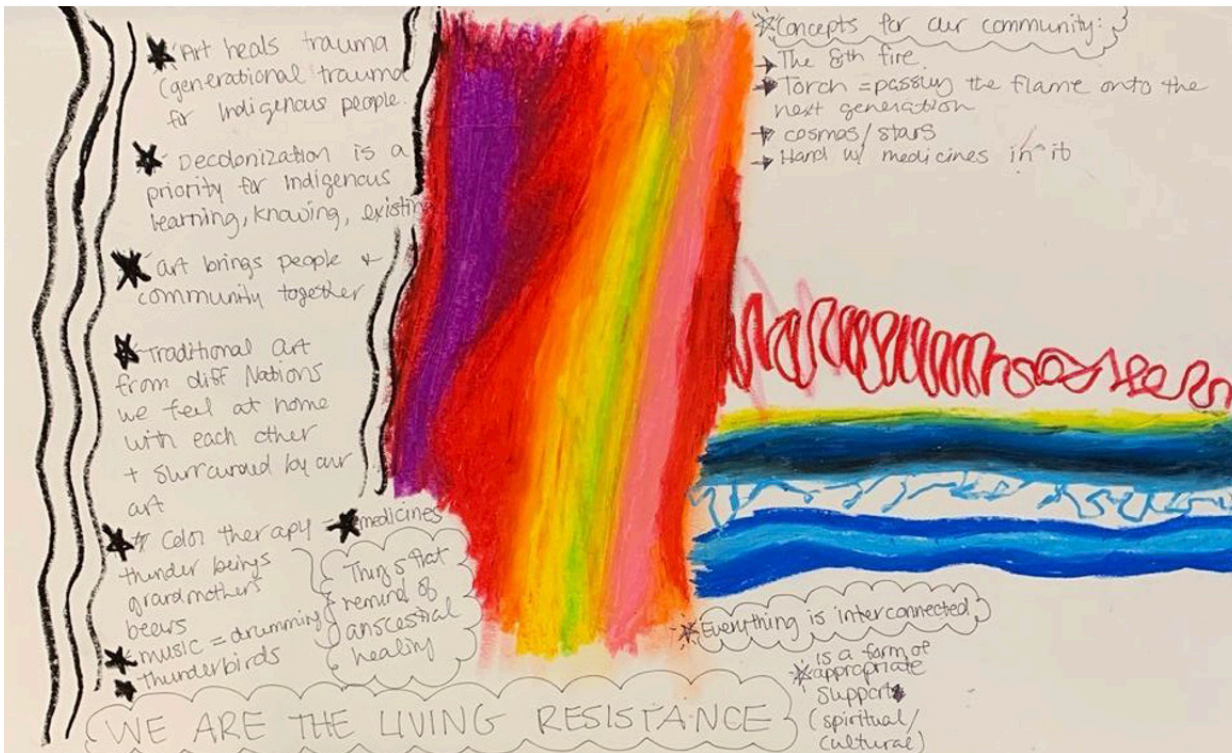


Fig. 2. My sketches and notes of our main discussion points at our station.

The notes on the image state:

- Art heals generational trauma for indigenous people
- Decolonization is priority for indigenous learning, knowing, existing
- Art brings people and community together
- Traditional art from different nations makes us feel at home with each other and surrounded by our art
- Color therapy, medicines, music = drumming, Thunderbirds, thunder beings, grandmothers, bears – things that remind us of our ancestral healing
- Everything is interconnected
- Is a form of appropriate support
- WE ARE THE LIVING RESISTANCE
- Concepts of our community – the 8th fire, torch = passing the flame onto the younger generation, cosmos/stars, hand holding medicines in it

This was a consultation, and no personal data was gathered. We asked for advice on how to do things in a good way with the group rather than how to move forward. Note: We consulted York University's research ethics board, who advised we were not required to complete an ethics application for this stage of the project. Participants gave verbal consent to use their names and photos.

Some recurring themes of discussion that came up in our discussions were "the 8th fire", and how our healing as Indigenous people is tied to passing the torch onto younger generations. Talks about luminous beings and the cosmos, the importance of the connection to the elements and nature, medicines, and our art seemed to permeate throughout the discussion. Colours, art, and the power these elements have within indigenous healing, were also themes.

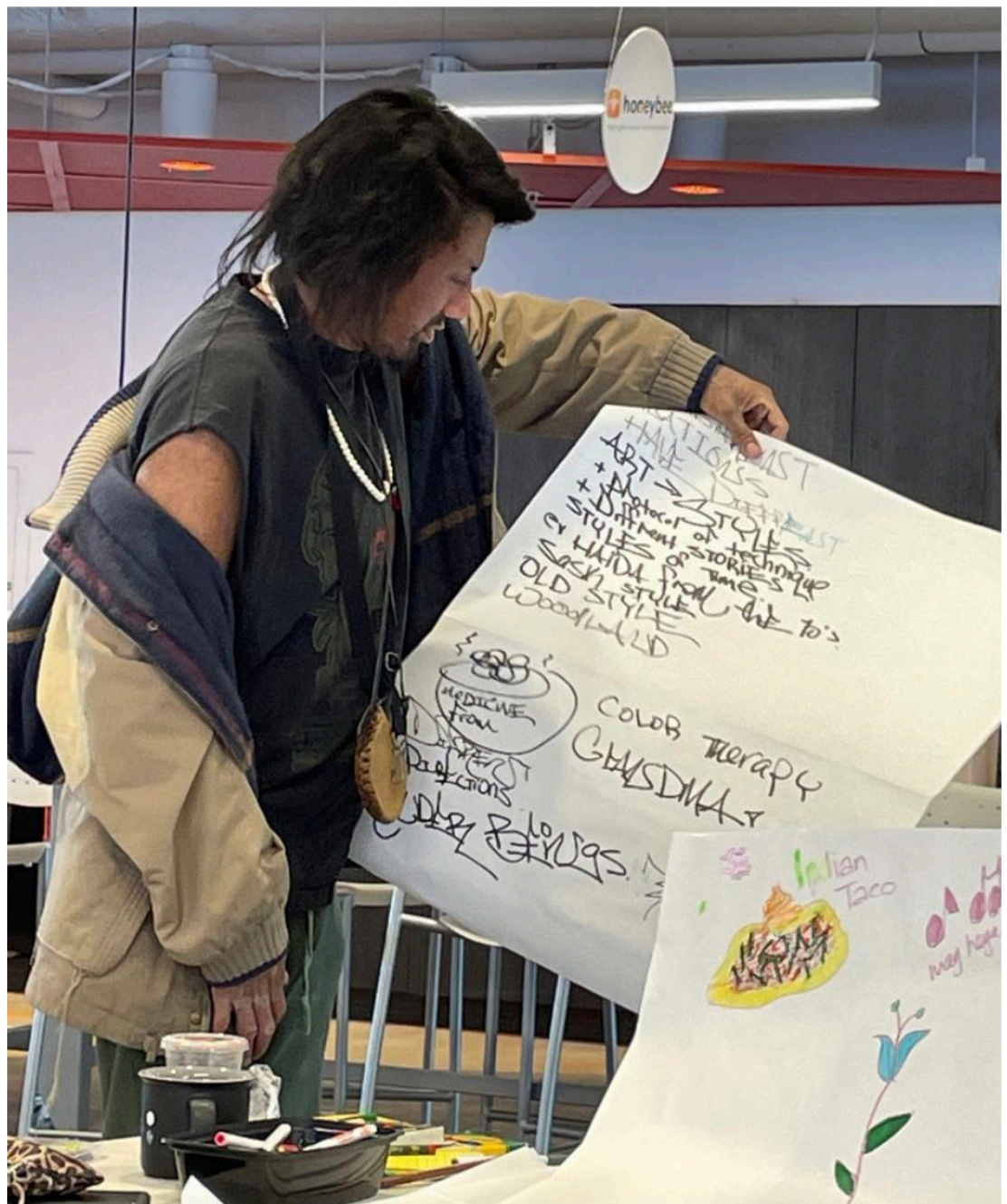


Fig. 3. Tristan's art and sharing with the group

Our main question we addressed throughout the day and in our art, songs, and discussions was “How can we decolonize mainstream education through creative arts and technologies?” The contributions of the group were important in our discussions on how to decolonize mainstream education as well as utilize art to do this work. Several points stuck out to me:

– Knowledge keeper Phil Cote asked whether York can and will actually support or allow us to follow through with this project in order to support Indigenous students appropriately. For example, Cote, along with the whole group in attendance, wanted to know if there would be dedicated space on campus for Indigenous programming, Indigenous student scholarships, Indigenous professors, or space for a sacred fire, or smudging protocols, etc. This point expanded on my thought of how, although educational institutions have supports that are framed as “Indigenous”, rarely do they provide well rounded spiritual, cultural, mental health, or educational supports that are geared towards how we learn and nurture ourselves. They tend to use more stereotypical or surface protocols.

– Tristan and Alyssa brought up some notable ideas. They stated that when we are around our art and our own people, it feels like an instant support system. This is significant for the concept of combining art and community for Indigenous youth/ students.

– The importance of using and connecting with our medicines was brought up a few times as well, which is crucial for our spiritual and cultural connections (to the medicines and with each other).

– Tristan brought up the point that the 8th fire was an important part of our journey as Indigenous people and we are passing the flame onto the younger generation.

– At our table, the concept of Indigenous people as the living resistance was discussed, which resonated with me. We need to always keep this in mind as to not stay trapped in colonial ways and by allowing colonization and mainstream culture to continually retraumatize us.

Knowledge keeper Clay stated that we were all meant to be in this room together at this moment and for me, this moment felt like a confirmation that we were all chosen to be a part of this project. I felt like everyone had diverse and unique skills they brought to the table. I believe using art, medicines, appropriate supports, and maintaining a spiritual and cultural connection as part of decolonization in education are all equally crucial elements. This far, we are at a planning, reaching out, and consultations stage with “The Journey.”



Fig. 4. Advisory workshop, circle/dancing



Fig. 5. Advisory workshop, connecting with each other and Indigenous food



Fig. 6. Advisory workshop, decolonization through art and discussion

Prayer Ties Workshop

In June 2023, some of the team members met at York University where I facilitated a workshop on making prayer ties. Mike Darroch (professor in the new program at Markham campus); Sylvia Defend (Costume Designer in the Department of Theatre); Rebecca Caines; and myself were in attendance. Sylvia donated fabric for us, and her participation in making prayer ties was collaborative and an extension of our community. Making prayer ties was a teaching I learned while working at a youth retreat in Alberta. This teaching entails taking various sizes of fabric and tying them together with tobacco and making an offering to our ancestors where the tobacco will carry our prayers to where they need to go. The group made several prayer ties for guidance with this project, and for personal help as well.



Fig. 7. Prayer tie making workshop at York University

Second Indigenous Advisory

On November 6, 2023, our team held a second meeting of our Indigenous Advisory Circle at York University's YSpace in Markham. Those who attended are as follows:

- Rebecca Caines, PhD, Assistant Professor, Creative Technologies, Department of Theatre
- Marissa Largo, PhD, Assistant Professor of Creative Technologies, Department of Visual Arts and Art History
- Knowledge keeper, Phil Cote (Treaty 6)
- Indigenous youth artist, Tristan Martell (Cree, Treaty 4)
- Indigenous art therapy student and research associate, Joanne Bear (Cree, treaty 6).
- Dustin Brass, consultant expert on land-based education (Oji-Cree, Treaty 4)
- Nora Rosenthal, Research assistant York University
- Nancy Johnson, Cultural Programs York University
- Nancy Louit-Gonzalez, Traditional Counselor at the Centre for Indigenous Student Services
- Dustin Brass, consultant expert on land-based education (Oji-Cree, Treaty 4)

The group discussed where they are currently at regarding the work each person has been doing and where collectively the group hopes to continue to see the project go. Overall, plans discussed were: youth partnerships; learning the land with students; planning how to support Indigenous students; how to decolonize the upcoming program; new classes/building the program; progress in the report I have been working on; providing access to medicines for students; migration to the 8th fire; urban sweat lodges and gardens; and Tristan performed a dance for the group. This workshop was a check-in and opportunity for the team to connect.

Methodological Approach – Ceremony and the Medicine Wheel in Therapy

Dr. Eduardo Duran, PhD is a Native American clinical psychologist who mainly works with Indigenous communities. His experiences are parallel to my position as an Indigenous student art therapist striving to work as a healer within colonial settings. In a video recording called *Healing the Soul Wound*, Duran has a conversation with Indigenous youth, where he provides insight through his experience as an Indigenous psychologist on the effects colonial practices in education and mental health services have on Indigenous populations, both clients and practitioners (Duran, 2020). Duran points out how the concepts of psychotherapy and ceremony are separate entities in a colonial perspective, as the worldview in this mindset divides each area of life (Duran, 2020). However, Duran reframes this concept by asking us to change our understanding to realise that “everything is a continuum” (Duran, 2020). If we can understand psychotherapy as a ceremony when working with Indigenous people,

they can continue the concept of ceremony in their own lives and in their own time become connected to soul healing, which is a spiritual experience (Duran, 2020). Duran illustrates that creating ceremonial spaces in an intuitional setting allows people to gain their own understanding at their own pace of what ceremony is for them (Duran, 2020). Duran's concept of not following a linear colonial lens as a psychologist is parallel to incorporating the fluidity of the medicine wheel. The mainstream way of categorizing, assessing, and working with Indigenous populations does not align with the circular protocols of Indigenous identity, understanding, historical trauma, and cultural ways. (Whyte, 2023). The medicine wheel is based on the holistic approach of encompassing the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of an Indigenous person or community. The sections within the medicine wheel are constantly changing to reflect what someone needs in the moment. Combining concepts like ceremony and the medicine wheel can seem abstract, however these approaches change based on where an individual is at allowing the therapist to meet an individual where they are at. Incorporating ceremony and the medicine wheel are appropriate for this study because their flexibility and theories can be easily woven into postmodernism, community engaged arts, and social justice work.



*Fig. 8. The fluidity of the medicine wheel and ceremony in therapy
Image sources for collages: unsplash.com*

These meetings and connections to our team and community have been beneficial in preparing me for future workshops I want to plan with Indigenous youth. It is helping me to re-learn that you cannot rush any process when trying to engage or do community or arts-based projects with youth. This process has helped me to develop and re-develop my workshop ideas with a lens that will help me embody the art therapy “do no harm” when working with youth in the future. Getting the perspectives from an Indigenous community helped to inspire me and helped to reiterate the importance of how we as Indigenous people are the living resistance, and how we must continue to empower each other by working together. This process has reminded me of how powerful our art, music, medicines, spiritual walks, kinship, foods, prayers, and connections with each other are.

Chapter 4: Creative Process and Outcomes

This study has served as a reminder that the community and arts work I have been involved in has always been rooted in co-creation and this project is leading me back to this. My creative method when working in communities is to focus on the process in its entirety. The preparation for community engaged arts projects feels more like a producer's role, where the initial focus is logistical. For example, my role includes planning the location if needed, equipment planning, and ensuring no equipment is brought onsite that youth or community members will not have access to once the project is completed. Once we are immersed in the artistic process, my goals are to meet people where they are at, a method demonstrated by Eduardo Duran (2020). Duran discusses how the mainstream diagnosis process can place unfair and sometimes unnecessary labels onto someone (Duran, 2020). The diagnosing process tells someone who they are, which the person then embodies as part of their identity, therefore becomes the diagnosis (Duran, 2020). Duran illustrates a way not to deny the person's reality, but helps to reframe how professionals can approach a label by stating "the spirit of sadness is visiting you", as opposed to "you have depression" in a more holistic, spiritual, and nonjudgmental way (Duran, 2020). A concept such as creating a diagnosis, along with the notion of "fixing" someone, defeats the purpose of genuinely helping that person in their healing. I argue that this process should be carried over from the diagnosis process to a community arts space. Acknowledging the totality of a person and not limiting our understanding of their identity to their diagnosis or issue, helps to meet a person where they are at, creating a more comfortable art or therapeutic space. As we are co-creating, I focus on the process of the collectives' and individuals' art rather than the outcome. Collaborative art-making has taught me the importance of considering the process and not only the final outcome of the art, whatever the modality is. Lastly, I focus on the collaboration aspect as a way of ensuring the project gets completed. I have included art pieces I created during this period as I studied at VATI and worked at York. Fig. 9 represents my intention as to why I wanted to practice art therapy and how my background in community art is inherently woven into my clinical practice.

The spray paint and brick wall represents the grittiness that comes along with working in marginalized urban communities and how I embraced the grit which became embedded into my soul during my time doing this work. The Decolonize logo is included because decolonization is always a part of everything I am involved in, whether it be day to day life, my work in community art spaces, or working with Indigenous youth or individuals.



Fig. 9. Art heals the soul

Spiritual Practice as Part of the Therapeutic Process

When I began working in community arts and social justice, I noticed in my work with youth that part of the gap in therapeutic and institutional settings was not allowing people to incorporate their spiritual lives into their art and their healing process. Many of the youth I have worked with would share details about their temples, churches, prayers, fasting, and spiritual beliefs with me. It was these experiences that allowed me to see these gaps and know I had a purpose to incorporate spiritual identity into my work, especially with Indigenous youth. Bray (2008) writes about a personal experience as a counsellor working with a youth named Paul who had close family members pass away, and whose spirit he was still in regular contact with. Bray initially wanted to view Paul's spiritual experiences as

unlikely (Bray, 2008). However, Bray explains how through research, he became open to Paul's experiences. He states: "I began to understand that Paul's spiritual gifting was heightened by his losses, making the boundary between the spiritual and day-to-day reality more permeable" (pg. 30). This article demonstrates how easily having a spiritual experience can be dismissed as mental illness within a mainstream system. Indigenous populations are spiritually connected by nature and having their spirituality undervalued in a colonial therapeutic setting creates harm. I strongly believe that if you are not dealing with the spiritual aspect of someone's healing as a therapist you are only partially helping them. Spirituality is embedded into part of the creative process for me. One important detail to point out here is that not everyone is spiritual and in these cases it is crucial not to push spirituality onto someone as well. My experience with shamanism and spiritual connections has never been associated with mental illness. Because I am a spiritually connected person and am open to my clients' spiritual experiences, practices and beliefs, I have been connecting my work with clients to their spiritual beliefs and practices since I began working in social justice. I have had the opportunity on smaller levels in art therapy to incorporate mindfulness and work parallel to spirituality. For example, with practicum clients, I have incorporated things like mindfulness, breathing, setting intentions, and making an "offering" in nature to the universe for clarity and guidance. In social justice work, I have smudged and prayed with clients, supported them in making tobacco offerings to creator/and ancestors, participated in drumming, and have offered to connect someone with a shaman who felt they were in spiritual danger.



Fig. 10. Paper bag inner healer – creating an equitable space in institutions

Fig. 10 represents how the integrated influences in my work this far in community arts, postmodernism, and social justice contribute to creating a safe and co-operative space when in institutional settings. As well, this image describes how my own struggles and trauma connect me and help me relate to clients. These experiences have given me an understanding about humanity that enables me to relate directly to many issues that oppressed groups of people face. I can see parallels that tie my own experiences as part of a marginalized group with other oppressed groups as having similar experiences of exclusion and marginalization by the dominant society. This image represents how I ground myself when working with clients and keep myself in a mindset that because we are human, we are equals.

Chapter 5: Interpretation, Implications, Conclusions, & Recommendations: Addressing the Gaps

I addressed the question: “How can we decolonize mainstream institutions through creative arts and technologies?” with an art therapy informed lens that explains how institutional and research environments can dismantle harmful colonial practices through the combination of community arts, postmodern art therapy, and social justice practices.

This project and Report educates settler professionals on how to address these gaps by creating more equitable research, academic, and therapeutic environments. By enforcing colonial practices, not acknowledging traditional, spiritual, and cultural beliefs and knowledge, there is a problematic gap that creates harm when Indigenous populations are trying to access or integrate into institutional settings such as academia or mental health services. Embracing Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices and the acknowledgment of historical trauma and violence as a result of colonialism, residential schools, and systemic racism in society and institutions are necessary parts of our healing process in schools and therapeutic settings. The inclusion of ceremony and the medicine wheel is part of bridging the gap because the meaning of ceremony can be personalized to whatever ceremony looks like for an individual, and the medicine wheel is fluid and changes with the meaning of mind, body, emotions, and spirit, based on one’s experience.

Empowering Indigenous youth as co-creators to break down the barriers of power structures within an academic/research setting can make the research process safer for vulnerable populations by creating an alternative space of not creating colonial harm. The methods and concepts I speak about in this Report all tie into Indigenous knowing and existing because of the parallels in fluidity, community, reciprocity, spirituality, and holistic approaches.

Interpretations

The broader theory of decolonization within intuitions through art has been the main concept of this research. In order to address the main question, I had to go inwards and delve deeply into the root causes of the trauma facing me and all Indigenous people. I focused on the main question:

“How can we decolonize mainstream institutions through creative arts and technologies?” I had to hold space for the past and I had to internalize concepts from the foundation of generational trauma, historical violence, residential schools, systemic racism and racist government policies, and how these factors affect our participation in western settings such as schools, mental health services, and in everyday life. As I internalized, I worked through the process in my own way. I found the only way to start a project such as this was to address this social issue from the beginning by looking deeper into why Indigenous people experience barriers and are born into historical trauma, and find a way to address that the majority of settler populations do not acknowledge historical trauma as the cause of our problems.

There has been input, planning, and advising with Indigenous workgroups through workshops through York University as a way to educate an academic institution on how

to work with this population appropriately. The workshops and planning stages with other Indigenous people have been beneficial in addressing this research question. The sense of community ; input from others with similar experiences and worldviews; the incorporation of prayer, drumming, smudging, dancing; examining the research question through art and discussion; and the collaborative atmosphere of the advisory workshops has all helped me to put this research into new perspectives with a newfound sense of community that I was not expecting during the course of this work.

The question of how to address the harmful effects of colonization within academic and mental health institutions, and how to go about the dismantling of these structures through community arts projects with a lens informed by postmodern art therapy, were looked into over the course of this study. The methods used in this research demonstrate examples that are specifically planned to give agency to Indigenous people who might be re-traumatized by colonial practices in an institutional setting. The combined methods discussed consider the historical trauma and oppression mainstream society and practices have placed onto Indigenous youth. Therefore, appropriate cultural and spiritual factors have been included into this research. The aspect of ceremony and cultural acknowledgement have been taken into account, as well as co-researching as a way to create equality and remove power structures in order to create a space of reciprocity between institutions and Indigenous youth.

The incorporation of postmodern art therapy, social justice, and community engaged art practices were the methods used to research the question of decolonization through the arts.

Using co-creation between researchers and Indigenous youth is a way to address imbalanced power structures between Indigenous youth and institutions. Co-creation is based on the intention to empower youth and give them a voice and control over their art, stories, and experiences. Making decisions as a collective and creating a sense of community with other indigenous people has been integral to this planning.

Implications: Case Studies in Community Engaged Arts, Postmodern Art Therapy and Social Justice Practices

The examples given in this paper are proven methods in community engaged arts, postmodern art therapy and social justice practices that have given agency and a voice to the participants/artists participating in projects. Hocoy (2005) describes how Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* was a leader in shaping community-based art therapy, as well as illustrates the roles art therapists can embody as social activists (Hocoy, 2005). Hocoy further explains that because art therapy fundamentally has social consequences, the art therapist must be aware of how impactful the connection is and must be between the community, injustices, and the individual (Hocoy, 2005). Hocoy (2005) states: "In response to such inequities, art therapists engage as activists by addressing their own complicity and taking a conscious and ethical stand in redressing social disparities" (pg. 12). It is with this activist mindset we as art therapists can effectively do impactful work with Indigenous communities.

Part of my professional lens as a social worker included that there are many realities affecting people and they are socially constructed based on an individual's unique experiences in the world. This is parallel to postmodernism art therapy (Drass, 2016). As

previously noted, postmodern art therapists deny any attachment to one single method or belief system (Alter-Muri & Klein, 2007). A postmodern lens can effectively cater to an individual's changing environments, political surroundings, and to the flexibility of Indigenous spirituality and ways of thinking.

Another part of postmodernism that works for projects such as this research is that postmodernism embodies a connection to the art and simultaneously combines socially conscious ways of thinking, education, and therapy (Alter-Muri & Klein, 2007). These elements can all be included in the vast amount of theories that can be accessed in art therapy, but the way the ideas are approached and presented in postmodern thinking holds a stronger sense of revolution and impact to me than other methods.

Natalie Rogers, whose work is influenced by her father, Carl Rogers', person-centered approach, has been consistent with maintaining ways to not create harm in her expressive art therapy and community engaged arts practice. (Sommers-Flanagan, 2007). The influences of the Rogers' correspond with social justice and community arts, where the focus is the safety of the group and the building and protection of what Natalie Rogers calls: "...a collective consciousness." (pg. 123). The origins of Rogers and her father's lens stand on similar principles as postmodernism, social justice, activism, and going against mainstream norms in general when working with marginalized or vulnerable populations. Sommers-Flanagan (2007) explains: "Additionally, in his work, he strayed from the psychological mainstream, breaking down boundaries between psychology and other nonmedical mental health disciplines. In particular, he fraternized with (even claiming to learn from) counselors, social workers, and educators, sometimes publishing in their journals" (pg. 121).

The purpose of the theatre and film/photography project in Martin (2003), as cited in Hogan (2002) was looking at aging, the parallels of identity, community art, addressing issues as a collective, and incorporating film/photos as part of the therapeutic process. This work resonated with me and demonstrated community projects with social action are a form of art therapy. For example, during their workshop series, one of the women explored the themes of "silencing" and "speaking out" (pg. 221), where the workshop focused on highlighting her mouth with lighting and a bandage prop to empower her to speak on her past trauma (Hogan, 2002). This is an example of empowering and giving someone a voice who had been silenced by her situation. Indigenous youth have been silenced by issues such as generational trauma, racism, and colonialism; and this workshop inspired me to realise that projects such as this workshop and its planning are intended to give them voice and therefore their power back.

The work by Lu & Yuen (2012) was important to include in my research process, as it includes the ceremonial aspect in the art therapy and community process. The settler authors in this article were educated on the ceremonial aspect of working with Indigenous communities (Lu & Yuen, 2012). They began a research journey and inadvertently became circle keepers in their roles (Lu & Yuen, 2012). They came to understand the importance of not utilizing their project solely for data, but that in working with Indigenous populations, their responsibilities included maintaining the built relationships, supporting relationships between the women in the circle, supporting the artists/participants, and participating in ceremonial aspects such as singing, drumming, prayer, and smudging (Lu & Yuen, 2012). This project held an art exhibition and a ceremony once the workshops had been completed (Lu & Yuen,

2012). The art exhibition to showcase the artists'/participants' work was also a reminder of the importance of sharing work with the community once the project is completed, further giving a voice to those involved and transmuting their pain into ceremony and celebration of their accomplishments and supports (Lu & Yuen, 2012).

Recommendations

Working on this project, my experience as a social worker, as an Indigenous person, and a student art therapist has made me hyper aware that most settler professionals working in academia and in mental health services are distressingly unaware of the historical violence that occurred and how it still negatively affects those communities currently. In many cases, there is no care or concern for the true causes of trauma, how to work with Indigenous populations effectively, and to get help to heal from Canada's violent past. My recommendation is mandatory education and trainings for professionals planning on entering the fields of mental health or academia. Some examples I have thought about to begin building effective training modules for settler professionals are: creating meaningful discourse and combining activities that call for people to feel what Indigenous people faced during times of historical violence and cultural genocide. The blanket exercise, is a workshop that has been widely used in post secondary institutions as a way to educate settler students about how the narratives in mainstream education are missing the perspective of Indigenous people. See: <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/> This workshop plays out historical events by forcibly moving and displacing participants from blankets placed on the ground representing land and rights. This workshop includes aspects of the residential school experience, land and rights being taken away from us, and allows participants to experience the trauma and loss firsthand (Waubgeshig, 2016).

Another way to teach the true narratives and experience of Indigenous people are two documentaries about residential schools I have found in my research process, *Stolen Children / Residential School Survivors Speak Out* and *Muffins for Granny*. These stories allow people to feel the impact of what happened to Indigenous people and the aftereffects in their lives, their families' lives, and how these acts of violence are still affecting Indigenous communities today.

Cultural safety trainings from BC Health Authority and San'yas in Ontario are created specifically for health specialists, and teaches settler populations who Indigenous people are, what Indigenous people experienced through colonization, and how these experiences affect our health and well-being (*Ontario — San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Online Training*, n.d.). The purpose of this training is so professionals gain cultural competency and are equipped to effectively work with Indigenous populations. One of their mandates with this training is to help participants reflect upon how they can have a role in changing existing systems to undo racism directed towards Indigenous populations (*Ontario — San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Online Training*, n.d.). This training program may be geared toward health care professionals, but I believe the concepts addressed in them are universal.

Rupert Ross is a settler professional who has worked with many Indigenous offenders in the criminal justice system as a crown prosecutor. Through his experiences, he gained an understanding of the main reasons Indigenous populations face unnecessary struggles today. Ross acknowledges "the incredible circumstances that have been

put on First Nations people across the country...” (*Community Healing Programs with Rupert Ross Trailer*, n.d.), which is why I am including him in my recommendations to be used as appropriate teachings to pass on in educational programming.



image from *Stolen Children | Residential School Survivors Speak Out*



image from *Muffins for Granny*

Ross' statement is crucial in educating settlers about the underlying causes of our traumas, which is usually not acknowledged or addressed in mainstream discourse. Ross acknowledges that Indigenous populations are coming out of dysfunction and colonization, recognizing this healing disallows the normalized concept of victim blaming to prevail and instead forces people to think deeper about our past experiences and the real causes (*Community Healing Programs with Rupert Ross Trailer*, n.d.). Ross questions the idea of traditional healing and understands there are major differences between a colonial and Indigenous approach (*Community Healing Programs with Rupert Ross Trailer*, n.d.). From his experiences, Ross understands the actual causes of our trauma. Ross wrote a book called *Indigenous Healing*, where he outlines practices that could be utilized for training purposes. These principles were compiled by Narvaez (2019). Narvaez reiterates how in Ross's writing, he notes how western therapy maintains a focus on the mind and does not consider the heart or spiritual aspect (Narvaez, 2019). This viewpoint makes western ideologies in therapy "not worth very much" in the minds of Indigenous people (Narvaez, 2019). The meaning of a healthy individual in a colonial lens is vastly different from an Indigenous worldview on health. We view a healthy person, family or community as being supported by family and community. If they are happy in their lives, but that looks different from the standard colonial view, it is seen as abnormal (Narvaez, 2019). Group healing, ceremonies, and the community taking on the responsibility of one's healing and wellbeing are also concepts Ross has reiterated in his writings (Narvaez, 2019). Ross exemplifies the need for Indigenous communities to lean on spiritual healers in the community as well (Narvaez, 2019). Ross's book *Indigenous Healing* is based on his work with Indigenous people. In it he has written about the importance of connection to the land, and that in an Indigenous worldview it is not always the best solution to talk (Narvaez, 2019). Some suggestions to connect with the land are activities such as medicine or berry picking, activities such as creating art, or storytelling (Narvaez, 2019). Another aspect that makes Ross's work effective is that he separates a colonial worldview from an Indigenous one, which is a main gap in the areas of education and therapy. Ross's teachings can and should be incorporated into Indigenous cultural competency trainings.

These examples, concepts, and workshops could be further developed, combined, or individually utilized to create an Indigenous-specific cultural competency courses for emerging settler professionals (for example staff and professors at VATI or York).

Coming Full Circle

My past work in community engaged arts, video production, and theatre was where I became established in social justice work. This research project has brought me full circle. I have experienced the power of healing in community arts as an artist, as a producer in community television and radio, and as a witness. Community art projects have the ability to heal the viewer, the participant, and the facilitator. These projects reach everyone involved in whichever way an individual needs healing in the moment. Community art and the way it communicates has the ability to educate settler audiences about our past, present, and futures in a non-threatening manner. This study has taught me how to release ideas and re-work them until they are better than I thought they could be. My initial idea was to lead a workshop with Indigenous youth where their photography or video projects were projected onto a wall in our art space. However, as the project planning progressed, this idea was shaped into a project that could give

youth more of a voice in their work. The concept was changed from a project that would be given to students to share as a collective, into a project where they could become empowered to act as co-researchers, co-creators, and equals (Tatjana Jensen, personal communication, August 2023). This workshop was initially intended to give youth a chance to express their views on their connection and identity as Indigenous, as well as incorporating ceremonial aspects such as prayer, smudging, and Elder guidance. This research also taught me that the project itself can act as a form of ceremony if that is the shape it takes for someone. While this planned workshop did not take place during the period of research this report covers, the team continues to explore potential youth workshops in the future.

Working on this project has taught me that incorporating Indigenous culture and spirituality are ceremonies within the work, and ceremony has individual meanings to each person that looks different for everyone. This experience has educated me on how postmodernism, community engaged arts, activism, and social justice are all surprisingly parallel to Indigenous ways of life, and are natural methods in supporting and working with Indigenous populations. Social justice has played an integral role in my life and work since becoming immersed in social justice work. A social justice background has given me an extremely grounded position to be able to do the work of an activist/therapist/artist. Without this lens, I do not think I would be fully equipped to do this work. This study has reminded me that social justice is essential in working with Indigenous people, as it holds a base for inclusion, equality, and access to programs and services intended to support Indigenous communities in their healing process. Postmodernism holds elements of activism, social justice, and community engaged arts within its practices. These aspects, along with the needs and lives of Indigenous communities, are shifting, evolving, and changing together as the world changes. The flexible nature of postmodernism and its elements of activism are necessary tools when working with Indigenous populations, as our fight largely political is at times. Community engaged arts gives voices to and empowers marginalized or oppressed communities through their art, which is an experience that is indescribable unless you have witnessed it.

Combining Clinical Practice with Community Arts

One of the most important things I have taken away from this research and the planning process through York University was that building an art therapy practice through a social justice and community based lens is sustainable and needed in the art therapy field. The flexibility of combining many methods that cater to individual and community needs and lives as they evolve, with the natural ability to change alongside the people involved, is unique and effective. An equally significant epiphany that came to me as I researched was that I did not initially connect that the combined lenses of social justice, postmodernism, and community arts (which I hold so much passion for) are all extremely interrelated with Indigenous worldview, spirituality, changeability, artistic expression, movement, music, political ideologies, sense of community, and culture. These combined methods allow the therapist/activist to truly work alongside a community or client by creating an alliance and flowing with changes in their lives or in the world as needed.

Participating in combining a clinical art therapy practice with community engaged arts practices, specifically from a framework of co-creation and co-researching with youth, negates the notion of not having their voice and consent to be heard. Co-creation and empowering youth in this manner silences the colonial standard of creating a power

structure in the relationship between client/participant, professional, and institution.

In my experience as an Indigenous social worker compared to my experiences in community engaged arts, the fields of social work, education, and mental health are worlds behind community engaged artists and activists. There was zero tolerance for racism or judgment towards other people's belief systems, racial backgrounds, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background in these art spaces. However, the artists or community members I collaborated on projects with had no formal training on how to work as a part of a culturally competent team. The concept of creating a safe space was a natural process in the community arts environments I was a part of. Unfortunately, I cannot say I have had a similar experience within academia, places of employment in the field of social work, or trying to access my own mental health supports through colonial agencies. Projects such as this one are based on how to effectively create safe spaces, build relationships, and work towards dismantling any concepts of therapy that consider a colonized agenda as part of the therapeutic process.

Understanding how to decolonize this practice for Indigenous populations takes this work into a much needed realm that does not really currently exist in art therapy. This study has reiterated the importance of community for me within Indigenous healing, and helped to expand my skills in knowing how to address the specific needs of Indigenous communities. This project has taught me to re-learn the importance of being around other Indigenous people, and how that in itself is a form of healing because of the relationships and natural support systems built through our own community.

Do it Anyway

This project at York and my personal process during my final VATI studies, has been exciting, difficult, and extremely triggering at times. As a generational survivor having many relatives who attended the residential schools, living with the residual effects of residential schools, and the direct results of colonization and systemic racism affecting my life on a daily basis, it was difficult at times to read certain words, watch survivors share their violent experiences in videos, and to look at specific images to complete parts of this research. However, my inner voice and my spiritual guides led me to keep going because of the importance of creating projects that cater to empowering and creating equality for Indigenous people and communities to have voices through their words and art. As well, this dialogue needs to be correctly addressed and shared within institutions so settlers can no longer be misled or miseducated. The need to be a part of creating change within mental health and educational systems was a driving force in my role in this work.

Conclusion:

When I initially prepared to study as an art therapist, my goals were to continue working as an artist in an environment where I could help people. I had no idea I would be able to continue working through a social justice lens as well as being a social activist in my clinical practice (Hocoy, 2005). Learning how to incorporate postmodernism, social justice, activism, community engagement, and connecting with clients on deep levels has made this experience more meaningful and purposeful than I initially thought it would be. Tying these experiences to my research have helped me to understand that I have a place in this field. The art therapy skills I have gained at VATI, combined with my social work, social justice, and community engaged arts experience, and this work at York, have given me the space and time to figure out how to appropriately utilize each skill set, together or independently, when working with clients. It also helped me to understand that I am advancing social justice and that I am part of activism, social action, and political action with my clinical practice itself, because of the lens I use. This study helped me to understand how to further develop my skills in decolonizing my work with Indigenous clients in my clinical practice. I look forward to bringing representation as an Indigenous art therapist into the mental health field and now realize I have unique skills and experience to offer this new field. This study and the teachings that came from this process will stay with me as I progress in my career. In the documentary *A Man Named Scott*, artist Pharrell Williams states during an interview: "...Let's just completely be ourselves unabashedly and be very proud of what and who we are...where we come from made huge impressions on us, huge impressions on our spirits and on our bodies. What we wore, and how we talked...when you mentioned [Kid] Cudi and that ever-growing, ever-expanding generations of folks who do not adhere to boundaries...we're doing it cause we're human and it's our right...we can't edit what we were exposed to and what helped to form the way we see the world, so we're not gonna edit the result." (Complex, 2021). This statement made me think how we as Indigenous people have the right to be who we are, and how creating and expressing ourselves how we want is universal and a human right.

References

- Absolon (Minogizhigokwe), K. E. (2022). *Kaandossiwin.: How we come to know. Indigenous re-Search methodologies* (2nd ed.). Fernwood Publishing.
- Alter-Muri, S., & Klein, L. (2007). Dissolving the boundaries: Postmodern art and art therapy. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 24(2), 82-86. DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2007.10129584
- Bray, P. (2008). Counselling adolescents when “spiritual emergence” becomes “spiritual emergency.” *New Zealand Journal of Counselling*, 28(1), 24-40.
- CBC News: The National. (2015). Stolen Children I Residential School survivors speak out [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdR9HcmiXLA>
- Complex. (2021). Complex - “A Man Named Scott: The Kid Cudi Story.” *Facebook*. <https://www.facebook.com/complex/videos/a-man-named-scott-the-kid-cudi-story-now-streaming/595001718613864/>
- Duran, Eduardo. (2020). “Healing the soul wound” with Dr. Eduardo Duran: *Conversation*. [Video]. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKVTzJYyyRY>
- Drass, J. (2016). Creating a culture of connection: A postmodern punk rock approach to art therapy. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 33(3), 138-143. DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2016.1199244
- Goldbard, A. (n.d.). *Values and ethics of community-based arts practice*. <https://arlenegoldbard.com/>
- Graham, J.S. (2013). Expressive therapy as a treatment preference for Aboriginal trauma. *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing*, 11(3), 501-512.
- Gregory, E., Strandquist M., & Turnbull, G. (2017). *Young people’s guide to self-portraiture – Photography as a social practice*. <https://www.asocialpractice.com/young-peoples-guide-to-self-portraiture/>
- Hocoy, D. (2005). Art therapy and social action: A transpersonal framework. *Art Therapy*, 22(1), 7–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2005.10129466>
- Hogan, S. L. (2002). *Gender issues in art therapy*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Is this real life*. (n.d.). Art Gallery of Sudbury. Retrieved from <https://artsudbury.org/en/whats-on/exhibitions/is-this-real-life/>
- Joey Solomon. (n.d.). www.instagram.com/joey_solomon_art/ Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/joey_solomon_art/
- Kanerahten:wi Whyte, M.. (2023). Stepping into the circle: Inviting spirit through medicine wheel teachings in the expressive therapies continuum. *Canadian Journal of*

Art Therapy, 36(1), 20–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26907240.2023.2210984>

Lu, L. & Yuen, F. (2012). Journey women: Art therapy in a decolonizing framework of practice. *Arts in Psychotherapy*, 39, 192-200.

McLaren, N. (2007). Muffins For Granny I 2007 Residential School Documentary. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZEmzCWDIKc>

Moore, L. (2013, November 12). Community healing programs with Rupert Ross. (n.d.). *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TeJRu1rbOk>

Narvaez, D. (2019). 10 Indigenous holistic healing practices. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/moral-landscapes/201902/10-indigenous-holistic-healing-practices>

Ontario — *San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Online Training*. (n.d.). Sanyas.ca. <https://sanyas.ca/core-training/ontario>

Psychotherapy with Native Americans Interview. (n.d.). www.psychotherapy.net. <https://www.psychotherapy.net/interview/native-american-psychotherapy>

Simpson, L. (n.d.). Land As pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. *Decolonization*, 3(3), [1]-25.

Sommers-Flanagan, J. (2007). The development and evolution of person-centered expressive art therapy: A conversation with Natalie Rogers. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85(1), 120–125. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2007.tb00454.x>

Talwar, S. (2017). Ethics, law, and cultural competence in art therapy. *Art Therapy: American Journal of Art Therapy*, 34(3), 102–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2017.1358026>

Unsplash. (2019). *Beautiful Free Images & Pictures | Unsplash*. Unsplash.com; Unsplash. <http://unsplash.com>

Values and Ethics of Community-Based Arts Practice. (n.d.). Retrieved April 2, 2023, from <http://bussigel.com/communityart/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Community-Based-Arts-Ethics-2-14.pdf>

Vinz, S. (2023, July 18). *What Is a Theoretical Framework? | Guide to Organizing*. Scribbr. Retrieved from <https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/theoretical-framework/>

Vivian, J. (2018) Reconciliation: A contemplation of the role of art therapy. *Canadian Art Therapy Association Journal*, 31(1), 43-48. DOI: 10.1080/08322473.2018.1453223

Waubgeshig, R. (2016, January 12). *Blanket exercise teaches history from an indigenous perspective*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/blanket-exercise-teaches-history-from-an-indigenous-perspective-1.3400940>

Appendix – Art Therapy Directives for York Workshop

Concept: different ideas of what education can look like to participants
Workshop to have our community help us create the brand and logo for this project
Question - What do we need to do to decolonize this work/education?

Directives

Tape a large piece of paper on the wall, and allow people to draw or write their ideas or concepts of the above questions until it's full/end of the day, etc.

Draw a circle on a large piece of paper. Divide the circle into north, south, east, and west:

If you can relate it to the Medicine Wheel, in what direction is do you want this project to go in?

Is there a symbol that represents where you are in this journey? If so, draw the symbol and place it inside the circle within the corresponding direction.

Is there a symbol that needs to be found or reintegrated? If so, place this symbol within the circle.

What gifts would you like to ask of the four directions – for your educational journey?

You can either use symbols or words to represent these gifts. Place them inside the circle.

Can you relate the juxtaposition of combining traditional Indigenous ways with the mainstream methods of education? If so, place the combinations anywhere inside the circle/ doesn't have to be perfectly inside the sections or circle.

Can you write in a list what education means to you/how the concept of education makes you feel? This can take many forms afterwards – i.e. poetry, spoken word, collage, etc.

What does a safe space in a school, class, or community look like for you?

what is a symbol that you can carry with you to feel safe/empower you at school?

Identity wheel (can be a literal wheel or any form. i.e. student, mother, father, sister, brother, Cree, artist, spiritual connection, job, etc). Who are you and what shapes your idea of decolonizing mainstream education?

Create / Destroy / Transform – make a sculpture with play dough – destroy it - rebuild it and add embellishments as needed. Activity for healing from trauma (in this case generational trauma). Or – deconstructing / reconstructing mainstream education to fit our needs.

Using symbols or abstract notions, can you describe what a safe/peaceful/meaningful educational experience looks like for you?

Using symbols or abstract notions, can you describe what a community means to you at a post-secondary school?

Can you describe in an image what decolonizing mainstream education means to you?
Can be a symbol, words, an abstract concept, collage, a literal image, etc.

What do we need to do to decolonize this work/education?

Visualize a door. What is on the other side of the door for you as you enter post-secondary education, and what do you need to be successful as a student?

Free flow – draw random shapes and colors and see if they can be matched to any feelings/emotions/ideas/etc.

Collage – words to describe what does education/decolonizing education look like/mean for you?

Draw in literal or symbols what are spiritual aspects that you can lean on in times of stress/doubt/fear during your studies?

How can WE facilitate our own healing in a mainstream institution to dismantle power dynamics/empower other Indigenous students within post-secondary settings?

If two people know each other / are comfy working together, they could simultaneously work together on a large piece, and combine their ideas on what decolonizing education looks like for them.

What is symbol of hope for you?

Let your hand guide you with random shapes and colors to see what comes up for the themes we are discussing.

Maybe we can make prayer ties together for our hopes/dreams for this project also. It's very easy, all we would need is cloth and tobacco. Students can take it and offer them on their own, or we can take a walk somewhere and find places together? Maybe closer to the end of the day idk.

Warm ups if needed:

4 minute scribble drawings

Paper crumble or sculpture

Deep breathing or movement

Bilateral drawing (using both hands)

Supplies

Tempera or poster paint: red, blue, green, yellow, black, white, brown, purple, orange.

Acrylic paint

Watercolor paint

Paint brushes

Cups or jars for painting

Palettes for paint

Crayons

Pencil crayons – regular sized

Pencil crayons -thick

Sharpies

Markers – thin and thick

oil pastels

Pens

Pencils

Pencil sharpeners

Collage materials – magazines, glue, tape, scrap papers, etc.

Play dough and Random embellishments – ie. Stones, small craft gemstones, feathers, etc. (play dough for create/destroy/transform, and embellishments for collage and create/destroy/transform)

Paper – newsprint or cartridge, about 18" x 24" Try to buy in bulk from supplier,

Paper – various sizes

Paper – roll of large newsprint for wall activity