Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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“Canadian Immigrant-Descendant and Immigrant Faculty Member Reflections as they Approach the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Carmen Rodriguez de France, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria
(Supervisor)
Dr. Ted Riecken, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic (Member)
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Dr. Matthew Little, School of Public Health and Social Policy, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This research explored the experiences of immigrant-descendant and immigrant faculty members as they approach the work they are invited to contribute to reconciliation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action (2015b) through their roles as post-secondary educators. The purpose of this research was to better understand the experiences of immigrant-descendant and immigrant faculty to inform how they can be supported in reconciliation work, particularly as they contemplate engagement in the consciousness-raising, ally work and institutional changes that are required as we walk in a new way with Indigenous Peoples.

On the journey towards reconciliation that Truth and Reconciliation Commission Chair Justice Murray Sinclair (Ojibway) envisions (Macleans, 2015), this research further considers why and how we might come together as Indigenous Peoples, immigrant-descendants and immigrants, stopping at fires of action along the way that collectively encompass the circle surrounding reconciliation (Newman, 2018). Two central concepts interweave throughout, the commitment to creating ethical spaces of engagement (Ermine, 2007) and the practice of research as ceremony (Wilson, 2008, S. Wilson, personal communication, February 2, 2020).

Given the dearth of literature available at the time of writing that directly related to this research, a range of philosophical and theoretical scholarship and works of practitioners provided the foundation. These sources shared a focus on social transformation and included formative works by Dewey (1939), Freire (1970/2000, 1973), Habermas (1994, 2002) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), highlighting Habermas’ communicative action theory and Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystem of human development. Additional works by practitioners such as Bishop (2015), DiAngelo (2011), Gehl (n.d), hooks (1990), Luft and Ingram (1955), Sennet (2015), Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) Snowden and Boon (2007), and Wheatley and Freize (2011) provided further insight into creating ethical spaces for engagement.

Rooted in my emerging understanding of my ontological stance as relativist and a tendency towards the epistemological perspective of constructivism, aligning with the interpretive paradigm, the research took an anti-oppressive research approach (Potts & Brown, 2015) informed by the Indigenist research paradigm (Wilson, 2007, 2008). Following exploration of narrative inquiry in the dominant culture and as practiced by Indigenous scholars, a narrative approach was undertaken to gathering data. Individual conversations were held with 15 participants, all faculty members at Royal Roads University, a small public post-secondary institution in what is now called Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. A group conversation with eight of the participants followed the individual conversations.

Ten themes emerged from the meaning making process that followed these conversations: locating self, clarifying purpose, institutional challenges, relationships with Indigenous Peoples, relationships with Indigenous Knowledges, curriculum, teaching/learning facilitation, self-reflections and what might help. A framework based on the intersection of self-assessed competence and confidence in a given context was developed to provide an empirical heuristic (St. Clair, 2005) to provide insight into the experience of faculty members at Royal Roads, faculty members at other institutions and perhaps for ally work in different contexts.

Throughout the study, I recorded my autoethnographic observations. These observations revealed cultural epiphanies that provided insight into my “deeper level thoughts, interests and assumptions” (Ermine, 2007) and supported ongoing critical reflection of the work as it unfolded.

This dissertation concludes with reflections of the work overall, identifying some of the research limitations, suggesting recommendations for future action and research and reflecting on the tremendous impact that this has had, and will continue to have, on me personally and professionally.