Decolonizing Praxis:
Implications for Child and Youth Care

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Community drum designed
by Dylan Thomas, 2016

"We acknowledge the traditional and unceded territories of the Lekwungen, Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples on which the University of Victoria stands."

Introduction

While Western post-secondary institutions have a history of enacting colonial violence, there has been advocacy from communities, faculty, and students to actively incorporate decolonial theory and practices into higher education. In this regard, current Child and Youth Care (CYC) programs across Canada have highlighted the importance of incorporating decolonization processes in curriculum and practice.

At the University of Victoria, the School of Child and Youth Care's (SCYC) mission to decolonizing praxis in practicum settings is early in its implementation. Therefore, the results of this research will support future directions of curricular decolonization. Furthermore, it is timely to set upon this research in light of the recent release of the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls' report (2019) and to enhance the school's commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Calls to Action report (2015). Furthermore, we are guided by the articles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2016).

Objectives

In the SCYC, a preamble about decolonizing praxis in practicum courses has been implemented as a guiding principle. Through this research, we aimed to address the following questions:

- How are CYC practicum instructors/CYC staff defining decolonization in relation to their identity and experiences?
- How are CYC practicum instructors/CYC staff implementing their working definitions of decolonization in their work with SCYC.
- What are the barriers for CYC students and staff to implement decolonization processes in practicum placements?
- How can we support future directions in terms of curricular decolonization in CYC practicum?

Methods

Participants: Eight CYC staff, including four practicum instructors, participated in the research.

Sampling: Volunteer response sampling was implemented through an email sent to practicum instructors who continue to work in CYC at Uvic.

Data Collection: Our data was collected through small-group or individual semi-structured interviews. Seven questions were asked, but there was adjustment for those who had not taught a practicum course. Furthermore, clarifying and expanding questions were posed when appropriate. In two instances, the participants submitted written responses as they were unavailable during the interview dates.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The responses were summarized and categorized according to each interview question. Answers were then coded in accordance with our four objective questions. Finally, answers in each category were coded into themes.
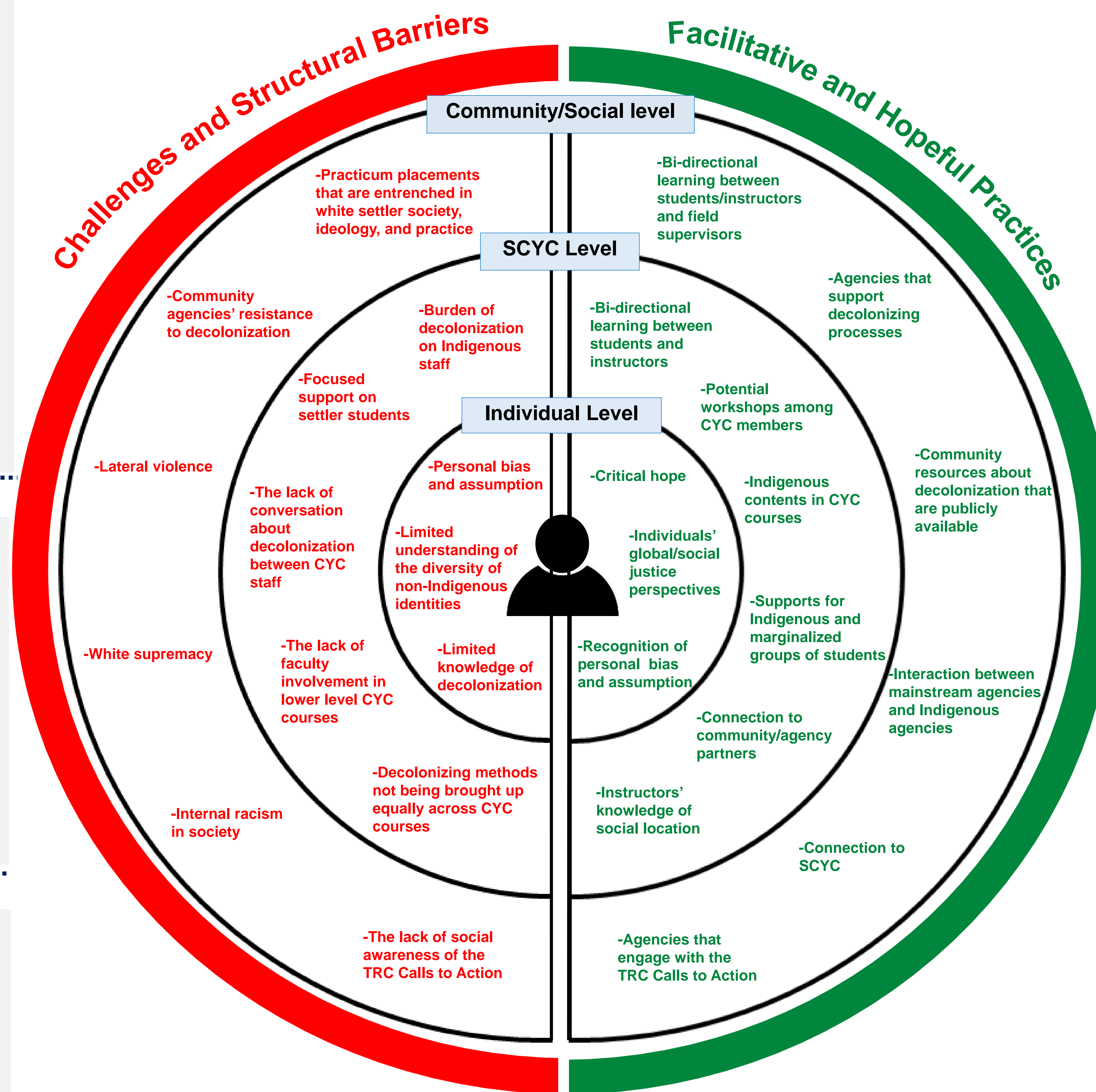
Findings

Figure 1. Challenges and structured barriers and facilitative and hopeful practices in terms of Implementing Decolonizing Practices

Figure 1 depicts challenges and structural barriers and facilitative and hopeful practices to implement decolonization processes at the individual level, at the SCYC level, and within the community/social level. At the individual level, student's level of awareness is identified, at the SCYC level, general curriculum and practicum courses are highlighted, and at the social/community level, practicum agencies and general societal barriers are recognized. The facilitative and hopeful practices (written in green) emphasize decolonial processes within these three levels. The challenges (written in red) depict structural barriers to incorporate decolonial processes at each of the three levels. The information presented is based on our research findings and represent factors that can be translated into further curriculum development of CYC practicum courses.

Recommendation

Individual Level

CYC must support students in critically reflecting on their unique social location and experiences in order to ensure historical harms are not repeated through unexamined normalized social and professional practices and policies. Furthermore, this process must create space for global and marginalized perspectives.

The term decolonization is often being treated as a buzzword or trend, with no real action behind it. CYC practitioners should reflect on how we have used the term as a metaphor without actively engaging in building a positive relationship with Indigenous Peoples. Rather than expecting others to educate us, we should understand the necessity of taking initiative of ongoing self-education on how to support Indigenous resurgence.

SCYC Level

CYC curriculum development can ensure decolonization and Indigenization theories are incorporated and maintained throughout all CYC courses. This process can reduce the gap in Indigenous and decolonial theory between lower and upper level CYC courses.

CYC Practicum Courses

A collaborative model of teaching and learning can result in positive growth of both CYC instructors/students and field supervisors. On-going discussions about decolonization can occur between instructors, students, and field supervisors to facilitate a greater understanding of the subject in relation to the unique practicum agency and one's social location. This includes mentoring practicum students to respectfully challenge their practicum supervisors and raise difficult conversations. In addition, increasing intentional discussions among CYC instructors on the topic of decolonization and Indigenization can support instructors to have these conversations with students and partnering agencies.

The SCYC can continue mentoring and guiding mainstream agencies who are developing their understanding of decolonization and social justice. In addition, practicum sites that may be engaging in harmful practices should continue to be monitored.

Finally, Indigenous content and decolonial theory should be increased throughout practicum courses. Specifically, these processes are lacking in the CYC 210/211 practicum course. In addition, practical guidance is needed for students to understand how decolonization processes can be incorporated into their practicum site.

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