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Unsettling Cooperative Education: Decolonial Directions

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ABSTRACT

How does decolonization inform co-operative education (co-op)? This question raises complex issues for educators and institutions, especially considering how decolonization is an unsettling journey (Regan, 2010) that involves critical reflexive change. Facing increasing pressures to support 21st century skills and career development—pressures that often mirror neoliberal socio-economic priorities of efficiency, growth, instrumentality, and productivity—it can be hard to know where to begin engaging decolonization in co-op.

This article explores theoretical discussions for how "decolonial praxis" (Gahman & Legault, 2019) can inform an approach to co-op that equips students to engage their integrative career development in holistic and responsible ways. Drawing from the work of curriculum theorist Dwayne Donald (2022), I will suggest that an important starting point involves practices of unlearning and relationality within co-op curriculum and programming. Practices of unlearning involve examining assumptions in co-op and assessing areas for change (e.g. values of neoliberal capitalism). Practices of relationality emphasize ways co-op can support student growth and responsibility within their own workplaces and communities. I conclude with a brief case study discussing how these directions have informed decolonial directions in unsettling co-op at the University of the Fraser Valley (Abbotsford, British Columbia).

UNSETTLING COOPERATIVE EDUCATION: DECOLONIAL DIRECTIONS

I begin this article with two hypothetical scenarios based on common interactions I have with university students in my role as Co-operative Education Coordinator.

Scenario #1: "I just want a job!" the student exclaimed to me as they sought advice on how to succeed in their recent job applications. I proceeded to offer encouragement and direction to the student, noting the importance of perseverance and the suggesting areas for improved professionalism in the application process. I could tell the student was highly motivated, ready to hustle in doing whatever it would take to improve. Within a few weeks the student notified me with excitement that they had received a job offer. Success!

Scenario #2: "I'm struggling to fit in," the student lamented while reflecting on their recent application to join the co-op program. Impressed by the student's skills and experience in their resume, I was surprised to hear their concern. They shared how they were struggling with the emphasis on individual "hustle" as a key to career success. They told me they don't mind working hard but are worried that their values of patience and connection to local community don't fit co-op. Promoted as a chance to find yourself, this student felt the opposite: the demands of professionalism in co-op would require them to lose themselves. The student never followed through with their application.

Scenario #1 illustrates a common experience for post-secondary students eager to make the most of their time and money by jumpstarting their career and getting a job related to their studies while they are still in school. And for many students, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), and co-operative education (co-op) specifically, is a valuable pathway to achieve this goal. Alternating full-time work terms with academic study terms, co-op facilitates invaluable work experience for students within their education, often providing clarity in career direction and viable options for

employment following graduation. If you are a co-op educator, this scenario and description is likely familiar to you. And when students are successful, as many are, it is rewarding to sit back and observe the ways co-op is a well-functioning pathway for meaningful WIL experiences.

Scenario #2, however, highlights challenges students face when the emphases of co-op do not align with their own expectations, experiences, or values. Recent studies on WIL and accessibility have shown the narrow scope of many WIL programs are a barrier to participation for Indigenous and other minority student populations (see Zegwaard, 2019; Eady et al., 2022). Writing on the topic of Indigenous perspectives on WIL, Michelle Eady and team (2022) suggest that, WIL is a strategy that benefits all students and should be designed in a way that enables participation for all. However, current WIL experiences are largely developed through a Eurocentric, colonized lens and as such best lends itself to a white, able-bodied, self-sufficient, 18–24 year old population. (p. 131)

I relate the contrasting experiences of these two student scenarios with this analysis of narrow conceptions of WIL and see an opportunity for new understanding and change. This observation relates to calls in many areas of higher education to engage in the important work of decolonization (e.g. see Andreotti et al., 2015; Battiste, 2017; Donald, 2009, 2022; Patel, 2014; Pewewardy et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2018; Stein, 2019b). Writing from a Canadian context, I recognize that while decolonization[11] is a complex concept and practice with many different iterations, it is referenced in this article to mean the ways settler colonial perspectives, practices, and structures are interrogated and addressed in specific places and lands (see Tuck & Yang, 2012). Decolonization invites critical inquiry and concrete changes to the ways in which the injustices of settler colonialism persist in society, including education, such as the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the need to honour Indigenous self-determination and rights to lands they have resided on since time immemorial. As educational researchers Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) have asserted as an intentionally disruptive and unsettling statement: "Decolonization is not a metaphor" (p. 3) in that it addresses the reality of "total appropriation of Indigenous life and land" (p. 5). The importance of land, Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasize, highlights the specific qualities of settler colonialism that need to be addressed in decolonization:

> *Settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain. … Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. (p. 5)*

Returning to the opening example of a successful co-op student experience, these challenging directions in decolonization invite critical examination into the ways co-op is situated within settler colonial contexts of higher education. In particular, connecting decolonization to co-op requires the acknowledgement of possible ways Co-op structures and curriculum risk perpetuating problematic aspects of modern socio-economics in areas of accessibility, inclusion, and sustainability on the particular lands in which co-op programs are situated. As tempting as it is, for WIL educators keen to learn from and respond to the calls for change that decolonization raises, sitting back is not an option. Instead, as I explore in this article, WIL educators, including in co-op, are invited to participate in the journey of decolonization (Regan, 2010) through practices of unlearning and relationality that can lead to new ways of engaging WIL curriculum and programming.

As a contribution to research on decolonization and WIL more broadly (e.g. Ramji et al., 2021), this article wrestles with implications of decolonization and higher education within the structures of co-op common in many post-secondary institutions. Inquiry begins with theoretical reflections on decolonization and co-op, briefly defining co-op and situating it within the current social context of higher

1 I realize that the term "decolonization" is contested in debates about what terminology to use in describing efforts to assess and respond the legacy colonization in modern society and education (see Daza & Tuck, 2014). Leigh Patel (2014), for example, suggests that the term anticolonial can "draw into relief the ways in which decolonial should always speak directly to material changes, specifically to land" (p. 359). Where decolonization implies a stripping away—a freeing from the grips of colonial injustices—anticolonial names the need for interrogation of the ongoing phenomenon that is colonialism. This is an important distinction that I include in my approach here, but because decolonization remains the more prominent term higher education research, I have chosen to use it here.

education. This is followed by discussion of how decolonization in education invites practices of unlearning and relationality as a way to address the contextual complexity of the places and land in which co-op programs are located and experienced. The article concludes with a brief case study of unsettling co-op by exploring two areas of unlearning and relationality within co-op at the University of the Fraser Valley: interrogating neoliberal assumptions and fostering holistic student experience.

A brief note on my positionality before continuing. I am a settler researcher and educator living and working in Stó:lō territory, home to the Halq'eméylem speaking "people of the river" (i.e. Stó:lō). This land is also known as the Fraser Valley, a suburban-rural area about 100km east of Vancouver, British Columbia. I have worked in higher education for over a decade in teaching and administrative roles focused on interdisciplinary and experiential learning curriculum, in which I have developed and taught a variety WIL programs and courses including community-based learning, internships, and co-op. My own unsettling journey of decolonization (Regan, 2010) really only began when as an adult I finally learned the horrifying history of Canada's Indian Residential School system which included schools in the Fraser Valley (see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Hearing stories of survivors during Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission that concluded in 2015 disrupted my understanding of what it means to be a resident of Canada, and specifically on the land where I live in the Fraser Valley. I have since been on a journey of learning from the gift of Indigenous people and land, specifically Stó:lō in my own context. This learning experience has opened my eyes, heart, head, and hands to considering new ways of structuring education in this place. I am grateful to the Stó:lō elders, communities, colleagues, and students who have graciously shared their wisdom with me. So, here I am as co-op educator, continuing this journey of decolonization in my current work and place. Extending from my doctoral research in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia tentatively titled, "Unsettling Education in the Fraser Valley," the following reflections on how decolonial directions lead to unsettling co-op are a window into part of this journey.

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION (CO-OP)

While there are a number of ways that co-op has been defined and structured as a form of WIL (Fannon, 2023), this article will reference the most common form of co-op, in which students alternate full-time semesters of academic study with periods of full-time, paid employment related to their academic program "in appropriate fields of business, industry, government, social services and the professions" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 59). This basic co-op structure reflects the definition from Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada, 2021) that informs my own context in a Canadian university:

> *Co-op work terms have specific requirements; the student must be engaged in productive work for which they receive remuneration, the student's performance in the workplace is supervised and evaluated by their employer, and that the work term lasts for a minimum of 12 weeks and/or 420 hours. Co-op is intentionally designed to ensure that the skills the student learns are relevant to today's job market. (para. 2)*

Aimed at supporting student career development and employability as part of their education, co-op is contributing to ways post-secondary institutions are responding to the ongoing pressure to provide dynamic and evidence-based WIL programming (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023). To start connecting this common form of co-op to decolonization in higher education, I turn now to name some of the contextual dynamics of co-op within today's higher education climate.

CONTEXT OF CO-OP

Co-op emerged as a form WIL education focused specifically on preparing students to transition into the workforce upon completion of their studies. In the early 1900's, as Annie-Marie Fannon (2023) summarizes, "rapid industrial advancement was highlighting a requirement for better-trained workers to meet the needs of industry and society" (p. 147). While an increase in service-industry jobs and other non-standard forms of work (Taylor, 2019) highlight a changing modern context of employment since those early years of co-op, the popularity of co-op and other forms of WIL continue in the face of ongoing challenges students face in navigating the transition from education to work (Sawchuk & Taylor, 2010). It is in this context that conversations about decolonization and co-op need to identify the cultural climate in which co-op exists, specifically neoliberalism.

There is no shortage of commentary on the influence of neoliberalism within higher education (see Bottrell &

Manathunga, 2019; Davidson-Harden et al., 2008; Spooner & McNinch, 2018; Stein, 2019a; Tett & Hamilton, 2019), including examples of WIL research and curriculum (see Björck, 2021; Johnston, 2011). Very broadly, neoliberalism refers to the ways in which society is structured to sustain a socio-economic arrangement based on liberal values of personal freedom (i.e. individualism) that are rooted in the structures of capitalism to sustain that freedom. Neoliberal impulses orient educational experience around equipping individuals for success within these structures of capitalistic modern society. As Sharon Stein (2019a) notes in her analysis of modern higher education, this approach involves a "(neoliberal) model of *students as customers and entrepreneurs* … educated to rationally pursue affluence, maximize utility, and enact seamless progress and development through the supposedly universal governing architectures of the nation-state and global capital" (p. 133, emphasis in original).

In co-op, and WIL generally, this lens of neoliberal individualistic success is a common approach (Johnston, 2011). Within this view, the purpose of education is to maximize individual success in ways that contribute to neoliberal socioeconomic structures, a "human capital perspective that views [higher education] as an investment which 'pays off' in subsequent employment opportunities and earnings" (Burke et al., 2017, p. 89). Curricula like co-op, then, provide the hands-on work experience that enable to students to experience this sort of value in higher education. In my interactions with future co-op students, for example, I often see this when they enroll with a hyper-focus on the personal benefit of WIL in their education. "How will co-op help me get a better job?" is the type of phrase I hear repeatedly from students as their rationale to join the program. And considering the complexities of modern employment and economic uncertainty, along with the aspirations to overcome socioeconomic barriers that a co-op job can help overcome, it is not surprising that co-op is viewed in these terms. In the Canadian context, which is likely similar in other locations, a focus on individual career development within a competitive job market (CEWIL Canada, 2018), contributes to a co-op structure that reflects the neoliberal principles of individual hard work as the pathway for employability (Bal & Dóci, 2018; Letts, 2019). In this context, co-op student success is often dependent on a student's ability to fit this mould of neoliberal employability oriented around values of personal responsibility, work ethic, and confidence. For students who do not fit this mould, however, there can be negative impacts, such as lack of support and relationships and gaps in academic and career preparation (Nielsen et al., 2022). As the second scenario introduced, students coming from more community-oriented cultures, such as Indigenous students, can feel pressured to conform to these expectations for professionalism that contradict some of their own community values. For students coming from a background that includes the intergenerational legacy of colonization, these neoliberal expectations can be significant barriers to participation.

Yet I do not think these socio-economic trends of neoliberalism mean that co-op is resigned to operate within neoliberal assumptions. While all curriculum is informed by its larger context—in this case, neoliberal socio-economics—zooming into the particularities of place (Donald, 2020) can be a way of imagining alternative approaches that reflect other characteristics of context that tend to get lost in the noise of larger cultural trends. While the full-time, paid employment of co-op is practically beneficial in preparing students for the modern workforce, what happens when calls for decolonization in education call into question the very assumptions and structures at the core of co-op success? To begin answering this question, I first acknowledge the disruptive nature of this analysis (Regan, 2010) and then turn to the wisdom of Papaschase Cree curriculum theorist Dwayne Donald for helpful guidance on decolonization and education.

THE UNSETTLING OF DECOLONIAL THEORY AND EDUCATION

It is important that co-op educators prepare themselves for the unsettling nature of decolonization more broadly, especially for educators working within settler institutions as most universities are in their history, structure, and culture (see Marker, 2019). Decolonization is by nature disruptive in not only interrogating the structures of modern education, but in demanding changes to the structures that perpetuate injustices on the Indigenous lands on which they operate. This is why settler educational researcher, Paullette Regan (2010), in her book *Unsettling the Settler Within*, invites educators to embark on a "decolonizing journey" (p. 12) that connects concepts of decolonization to the practical implications of these ideas in their own practice. Such work of decolonization cannot be taken lightly as it will no doubt be difficult in the contextual complexities and obstacles that educators will face along the way. As the authors of *Developing Stamina for Decolonizing Higher Education* pointedly ask, "How much effort are you, and

others in your institution/office/department, willing to put into your own learning (and unlearning)?" (Stein et al., 2021, p. 33).

Alongside recognizing the unsettling experience that decolonial directions in education present, it is also important not to navigate these challenges alone but to accept the wisdom and presence of others in the process. Here is where I am grateful to the teaching of curriculum theorist Dwayne Donald (2022) in providing helpful guidance for educators on this journey of decolonization, particularly in his reflections on the practices of unlearning and relationality. Within decolonization, Donald (2022) suggests, unlearning requires educators to identify the problematic aspects of colonialism, such as the ways "different aspects of a human being are increasingly fragmented and disassociated as a person becomes educated" (para. 6). Identifying this fragmentation, Donald (2022) proposes unlearning colonialism as a practice of interrogating the structures of education, a way of "decentring, denaturalizing, and unlearning colonial logics of relationship denial as curricular and pedagogical common sense" (Donald, 2022, para. 8). In the case study below, I share how interrogating assumptions in co-op can be a practical way to engage this unlearning.

Alongside unlearning, Donald (2022) also notes the importance of relationality, what he describes as renewing "kinship relations" (para. 9), a recognition of the interrelatedness of all things that is a fundamental teaching in Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Receiving the wisdom of Indigenous knowledge, Donald (2020) notes elsewhere, requires practices of ethical relationality in which all forms of knowledge are valued—not just Eurocentric "decontextualized and universalized approaches to knowledge and knowing" (p. 157; see also Donald, 2009, 2012). Learning in connection to local Indigenous communities, as this case study explores, is one way to practice relationality in co-op.

Together, Donald's emphases on unlearning and relationality as practices of decolonization in education have inspired my own approach to co-op curriculum and programming in which I seek to engage a "decolonial praxis" (Gahman & Legault, 2019) for co-op. Decolonial praxis refers to the concrete ways decolonial directions are embedded in curricular practices situated within the local context of Indigenous people and land. The remainder of this paper explores these theoretical directions in a case study of unsettling co-op at the University of the Fraser Valley.

UNSETTLING CO-OP: A CASE STUDY

The University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) is located on the territory of the Halq'eméylem speaking Stó:lō people who have resided in this territory since time immemorial. UFV is committed to journeying in relationship with Stó:lō communities and land in all areas of the institution, including the type of community connections that co-op is part of (see University of the Fraser Valley, 2024a). As part of the university's strategic plans for Indigenization and Reconciliation, this commitment includes engaging ways that curriculum and programming are "designed to educate, build awareness, and develop capacity" for how the institution engages in unlearning and relationality in connection to Stó:lō people and land. UFV's Teaching and Learning Centre supports these directions through equipping staff and faculty to engage Indigenization within their work as follows:

> *Indigenization is a process of naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts. In the context of post-secondary education, this involves bringing Indigenous knowledge and approaches together with Western knowledge systems. This benefits not only Indigenous students but all students, teachers, and community members involved or impacted by Indigenization. (University of the Fraser Valley, 2024b)*

In UFV's co-op department, we are accountable for developing ways for co-op to support these institutional commitments, which has led to two areas of focus in decolonization and co-op that I will share for this case study: interrogating neoliberal assumptions and fostering holistic student experience. While I have identified these as two relevant areas for this case study, I should note that they are not exhaustive or complete. Each topic reflects the current reality in the ongoing journey of decolonization in UFV's co-op program.

Interrogating Neoliberal Assumptions

The first area of unsettling co-op at UFV has been interrogating the neoliberal assumptions that exist within the structure and practices of co-op in our context. An important part of unlearning, as Dwayne Donald (2012; 2022) instructs, is to examine the colonial logics in curriculum as a way to identity problematic areas that get perpetuated in education. Donald's instruction relates to the observations

by a team of WIL practitioners from the University of Victoria who in speaking specifically to ways decolonization can inform WIL describe how educators must be "checking our assumptions and adjusting our understanding" in order to adapt the contextual demands of WIL experiences (Ramji et al., 2021, p. 315). What has interrogating neoliberal assumptions looked like in co-op at UFV?

Under the direction of UFV's Indigenization specialists[22], co-op curriculum was updated to reflect aspects of Indigenous ways of being and knowing, particularly those of Stó:lō people and land. While I will show ways that this learning informed approaches to student experience, here I will first note how it has also highlighted ways that the neoliberal assumptions in co-op can perpetuate the colonial logics that decolonization is addressing, specifically, in how student success is understood and pursued.

Historically, co-op at UFV has operated within the common co-op structure in which students are required to navigate the demands of searching and applying for jobs, and if successful, working for periods of full-time employment was part of their educational journey. The neoliberal assumptions for employability outlined here have characterized the general approach to co-op at UFV, not surprisingly considering its context within a public Canadian university. As a result, students who wish to succeed in both their academic program and the additional work experience of co-op have to expend additional time and energy to be successful in the program, especially when academic credit is typically additive (i.e. not part of their academic program credit load) and jobs are secured competitively (CEWIL Canada, 2018). In my observation of successful co-op students, it is the students who can best conform to these demands that are successful, and the system rewards their individual hard work with a valuable career development experience.

This approach to success in co-op reflects common assumptions in modern workplaces, in which "the focus on the individual employee indicates the implicit assumption that the individual is primarily responsible and accountable for ensuring employability, high quality jobs and engagement at work" (Bal & Dóci, 2018, p. 542). To clarify, it is not necessarily the demands of time and energy that require unlearning. Rather, in ways that mirror demands for conformity to Western conceptions of knowledge and individuality that are prominent in all areas of modern education (Donald, 2012), these neoliberal definitions of success risk perpetuating these settler colonial assumptions of superiority within co-op. Organizational psychologists Matthijs Bal and Edina Dóci (2018) note that the influence of neoliberalism is significant in definitions of success in the modern workplace: "The core principle of neoliberalism is that human welfare will be maximized when individuals have ultimate economic freedom to act" (p. 538). Neoliberal ideology, they continue, has a specific idea for what individual workplace success involves:

> *Each individual is expected to be self-interested, and to pursue maximization of one's own outcomes. Individualism refers not only to the opportunity for individuals to pursue their individual goals and desires, but also to the individual responsibility and accountability for one's actions and well-being … people are expected to be self-reliant, and to ensure their own well-being, education, employability, wealth, societal success and so on." (p. 539).*

These neoliberal assumptions for workplace success are reflected in the demands co-op places on students to succeed in these ways, an implicit demand for conformity to this vision for workplace success that has little to say about complex socio-economic issues in the local contexts of co-op work terms or address ongoing injustices related to society and Indigenous lands on which co-op jobs are located. One way of unsettling co-op at UFV, then, has been to examine where these assumptions show up and explore ways to address and change them where necessary.

One area where we have identified the persistence of these neoliberal assumptions of success are the ways that programming and communication offer repeated calls on students to conform to these expectations of success through words, actions, attitudes, and overall administration of co-op. The co-op team has had to practice what is sometimes referred to as institutional reflexivity

2 The UFV Indigenization specialists have the following role in UFV's Teaching and Learning Centre: "UFV's Indigenization Specialists play an integral part of the work of Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation at UFV. The Indigenization Specialists work with faculty, staff, and students to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action and UNDRIP. The Indigenization Specialists are available to work one-on-one, small and large groups to assist and support faculty and staff by building relationships while supporting Indigenization and reconciliation efforts in the world of academia from an Indigenous perspective." (University of the Fraser Valley, 2024b)

(Antonacopoulou et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2018; Westerlund et al., 2021) in assessing ways our programming and administrative structures are stuck within these neoliberal assumptions of student success. We are early in this analysis and recognize that such interrogating is part of larger institutional dynamics within higher education, a context in which we are only one small part. However, we have begun identifying areas for potential change, such as co-op course learning outcome terminology, program descriptions and advertising, and workshop language. A first step has been naming these neoliberal assumptions as I have outlined here. Interrogating assumptions, however, is only one step that has led to the additional areas of unsettling co-op in how we approached student experience.

Fostering Holistic Student Experience

In efforts to respond to ways neoliberal assumptions existed within co-op, we engaged in learning from Stó:lō Indigenization specialists at UFV. During a curriculum development workshop (Andrews & Joe Senóqw'iye, 2024), Stó:lō educator and curriculum developer Leanne Joe Senóqw'iye noted the congruence between the experiences of co-op and Indigenous ways of being and knowing taught by Stó:lō communities. Stó:lō people learn practices of responsibility to the land through mentoring and hands-on learning, which are also common aspects in all forms of WIL, including co-op. A central part of Stó:lō teaching is the belief that each person's giftedness—their knowledge and skills—is to be shared with the community. Each person has a responsibility to share their gifts with the community. All individuals' gifts are part of the interconnected relationships between the community and land in which they belong. Personal success, then, is measured in terms other than just common definitions of employability that emphasize skill development to increase job opportunities and potential earnings (Burke et al., 2017). Instead, the focus is on ways that education can strengthen students' sense of giftedness within the context of community (Andrews, 2023). In review and revision of UFV's co-op curriculum, my colleagues and I are asking, how does co-op work experience enable a new or strengthened sense of giftedness? Reflecting on this question has led to incorporating the language of giftedness and responsibility in framing the purpose of co-op education and updating some of the terminology in reflection assignments to align with these directions.

Another element to student experience related to unsettling co-op is to invite students into the complexity of decolonial praxis themselves within the course of their co-op experience. Through the development of a land acknowledgment exercise at the beginning of every work term, UFV's co-op curriculum now invites students to understand and respond to the legacy of settler colonialism within the context of their co-op employment. They are invited to do so in ways that receive the gift of wisdom, people, and place represented by Indigenous desires for the future (Tuck, 2009) and specifically with local Indigenous peoples and land (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In practice, this activity involves a version of the following activity:

> *Using the address of your co-op employer's location (if working remotely, use the address of the company's main office), identify the local Indigenous communities using the website Native-Land.ca or Whose.Land. Spend some time exploring the various links provided to learn more about the Indigenous people and land of your work term location. For further reading, see Davey (2023), "Indigenous Inclusion In Employment."*

Following this first step, depending on which work term co-op students are completing, they are invited to reflect on the following:

- **Work Term #1:** Based on your learning, list 2-3 topics of learning that were noteworthy to you. For example, if you are working within Stó:lō Téméxw (land/territory), are there history, characteristics, or programs that stood out to you (e.g. see https://www.stolonation.bc.ca/)? Why did you pick these? Explain in a short paragraph (100-200 words).
- **Work Term #2:** Based on your learning, what are some potential areas of connection between your co-op job and one of the Indigenous communities you learned about? For example, if you are working within Stó:lō Téméxw (land/territory), is there a Stó:lō program or service (e.g. see https://www.stolonation.bc.ca/programs) that your job or industry is related to? Explain in a short paragraph (100-200 words).
- **Work Term #3:** Based on your learning, reflect on the following: Does your employer have any current connection to local Indigenous communities/groups/tribes? What are some challenges that Indigenous people may have in your field of work? Brainstorm 1-2 practices you believe you and/or your employer could engage that are connected to a program or service of one of the local Indigenous communities (e.g. see https://www.

stolonation.bc.ca/programs)? Explain in a short paragraph (100-200 words).

By inviting students to connect their co-op work experience to the Indigenous people and land, they have the opportunity to consider how personal career development can occur amidst practices of responsibility within the particularities of place (Donald, 2020) in which they find themselves. It is just one small action within the larger process of engaging Indigenous people and land in UFV's curriculum, but we are hopeful that the knowledge and relational connection to the Indigenous communities and land that emerge can be one way UFV's co-op program participates in this important work.

At the time of writing this article, these curriculum changes have only just been implemented for the first time, so we have yet to get in-depth assessment of the impact of these directions. The first set of student reflections have given some initial indications for possible impact. For example, students have stated that this land acknowledgement exercise was an experience of new learning about the local history and experience of Indigenous communities. Several students noted how this was not something they had considered before, especially in relation to a work experience. Some students, however, admitted a struggle to make connections between their area of work and Indigenous communities and land, highlighting a possible need for some additional student preparation prior to the work term experience. I envision a follow-up to this study that explores the impact of these directions more thoroughly, for students, but also for employers and the local community.

CONCLUSION: THE ONGOING JOURNEY OF DECOLONIZATION

These two brief examples of unsettling co-op at UFV are just a sample of the ways that decolonial directions in education can inform WIL in modern higher education. No doubt the neoliberal context of higher education will continue to place demands on co-op programming and student experience that will require ongoing unlearning and relationality within the unique contexts of co-op across the spectrum of higher education, including at UFV. But with each step in the ongoing journey of decolonization, while the unsettling will continue, there is a chance to heed Dwayne Donald's (2021) challenge for educators "to facilitate the emergence of a new story that can repair inherited colonial divides and give good guidance on how to proceed differently" (p. 57). Through unlearning and relationality, co-op can be one chapter in the ongoing story of decolonization.

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