

Why Teach with Integrity in Public Education?

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### Abstract

Given that students are compelled to attend school in British Columbia and the legacies of colonialism, including cultural genocide, the author asks the question: Is it moral to teach in the public-school system? Morality is defined in both personal and general terms, drawing from life experiences and critical reflections on the morality of education, colonialism, and genocide. The answer to the question of whether or not teaching is moral depends on the function of public education, or its purpose and practice, in reality. An overview of how this function is articulated in government policy and direction, such as through the *School Act*, the *Teacher Act*, and the British Columbia Teachers' Council, and through regulation of the profession, is provided. Together, the government and the teaching profession, require teachers to practice respect, dignity, and recognition of Indigenous rights. In order for teaching to be moral, it is argued, these policies must be implemented, in full and as formally articulated. Strategies for how to implement moral teaching, drawing largely from an ethics of integrity, are provided.

*Keywords:* philosophy of education, moral philosophy, ethics, policy, colonialism, genocide, Ts'msyen, Tsimshian, Haida, Nisga'a, Gitksan, Indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal, British Columbia, reconciliation, contradiction, respect, dignity, sanctity of life, integrity

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

I am a teacher in a public school in British Columbia. My job requires that I teach students who are compelled to attend school. I teach these students according to a government prescribed curriculum. I am also a government employee who is charged with supervising, teaching, and evaluating the students in my classroom. I am eligible for employment as a teacher because the government recognizes my membership in the teaching profession – given that I have received the necessary credentials through completion of a prescribed series of formal education and training programs at government recognized (and funded) universities. The government itself, not the profession, recognizes membership in the non-self-regulating professional body of British Columbia teachers, as the government regulates the teaching profession through its Teacher Regulation Branch, the Ministry of Education generally, and local School Boards.

Even though I am certified and employed as a public-school teacher by the government, the government does not control whether I choose to be a public-school teacher or not. This decision is up to me. Indeed, I have willingly consented to each step of the process to become, and to continue to be, employed as a public-school teacher in British Columbia. It was my choice to complete the courses and programs required for a certificate of qualification. I willingly consented to the entry requirements, including to the background checks, fees, and submission of references as required by the Teacher Regulation Branch. I voluntarily applied to my position. I agreed to the terms of my employment. I am compensated for my work and I may resign at any time. But I work with students who are compelled to attend school, without compensation.

Education in British Columbia is compulsory for students to age sixteen. Each student with whom I work is, therefore, required – by law – to participate in school (*School Act, 1996*).

While students have a choice in terms of program offerings (such as home school, distributed learning, public, or band school, etc.), many students come to school as a requirement, because it has been mandated. According to the Teacher Regulation Branch (2012), my job, as a teacher, is to help foster the “emotional, esthetic, intellectual, physical, social, and vocational development of students” (p. 4), regardless of why they attend school (by choice, compulsion, or otherwise). This requires, for my job to be carried out as expected, that each student learn what is intended. This leads to two questions about my role as a public-school teacher. First, what justification is there for me to facilitate the acquisition of government prescribed knowledge and skills within the students of a compulsory education system? Second, is being a teacher, in the public education system in British Columbia, a morally just thing to do?

The answer to these questions depends in part on the purpose of education, which is reflected in how “education” is defined or understood. For this paper, my intent is to use the common meaning for education (i.e. “education” is what generally takes place in the actual schools of British Columbia). This term is also used in accordance to the legislative and regulatory mandates of the publicly funded K-12 system in British Columbia. According to the *School Act* (1996), educational programs are “an organized set of learning activities” that are “designed to enable learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society, and a prosperous and sustainable economy” (Part 1). (Band schools are operated by First Nations, are funded by the federal government, and exist in a different, but similar, legislative, administrative, and regulatory framework. When referring to a band school, or other First Nations school, the jurisdictional definition for “education” of that program applies.) But education is broader than its legislative or policy mandate. Education is also a

philosophy of relationships, based in certain ideals that are reflected in educational culture. This broader meaning also reflects the actual teaching and learning that takes place in schools throughout the province. This paper, in whole, provides an overview of my understanding and application of this philosophy of relationships.

The purpose of education is also determined in its function. A function of publicly funded educational systems in Canada has historically included the forced assimilation and colonialization of First Nations and other Indigenous children. According to Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the residential school system for Indigenous people in Canada was composed of “centres of indoctrination” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p.vii). Sinclair, in the introductory statement of Volume One of the Commission’s final report, writes that “seven generations of Aboriginal children were denied their identity through a systematic and concerted effort to extinguish their culture, language, and spirit” (p. vii). Sinclair’s conclusion: “It is clear that residential schools were a key component of a Canadian government policy of cultural genocide” (p. vii).

Legal scholar Raphael Lemkin (1944) coined “genocide” soon after the Second World War, in *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Analysis, Proposals for Redress*, describing the techniques of genocide across the political, social, cultural, and economic fields. Lemkin defined *genocide* as “the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group” (p. 79). He continues that this does not “necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation” (p. 79). Genocide is any “coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves” (p. 79). According to Lemkin, techniques of genocide within the cultural field seek the systematic prevention of a nation’s culture, including linguistic

and artistic expression – as a means to ending the nation itself (p. 84). Residential schools were one part of the Canadian government’s effort to eliminate Native Peoples, efforts which included the banning of cultural practices (such as the potlatch) and the establishment of different classes (or statuses) of people that unequally recognized civil, political, and economic rights depending on one’s status and that separated communities from each other, on a racialized basis. These differently recognized communities were not only separated, but were positioned unequally in terms of property rights, mobility rights, and other aspects of legal standing within the structure of Canadian society generally.

Education for the purpose of genocide is morally wrong. Without quibbling over whether or not “genocidal education” can be education (meaning that, by definition, education is not genocidal) the point is that if “what generally takes place in the actual schools of British Columbia” is genocidal, then this would be immoral (a term defined in chapter two). Simply put, if genocide is immoral then so too is education in the furtherance of genocide. Given the context in which I teach (at a school with more than half its students Ts’msyen, Haida, Nisga’a, Gitksan, or of another coastal or inland First Nation), this is not an abstract question. Canada’s cultural genocide is an historical reality for the families and students with whom I work. Given the gravity of this history, an important question must be raised, and deeply considered: Am I now contributing to cultural genocide by teaching in a public provincial school located in Ts’msyen territory?

To properly answer this question requires understanding both the history and the present of schooling where I teach. It also requires imagining a future free of colonialism’s historic wrongs. While the history of residential schools and cultural genocide is well documented, including in the government’s own reports and official apologies, the fact that schools in Canada

have historically been agents of cultural genocide does not make today's public schools genocidal. There is hope in that a genocide can end before the elimination is complete, if stopped in time. The historical chapter of Canada's genocide can be closed. Moreover, there is also the possibility that public schools, and other institutions, can now work in opposition to genocide and other effects of colonialism. Indeed, making such a possibility into a reality is one way to end a genocide. But if public schools failed to close the chapter and continue the legacy of genocide, then there would be no moral basis in teaching in the school system. Likewise, if public schools turn back genocide and move past colonialism, then it is certainly *possible* for teaching to be moral.

### **Why Teach?**

Robert Genaille, a friend and colleague, asked this question at the start of the school year: *Why teach?* He was speaking at an opening session of a teacher-led inquiry project, at a point when participants were sharing our guiding questions for an upcoming year-long inquiry project. Genaille, who is Stó:lō/Saulteaux and a member of the Peters First Nation, asked the question for himself, as himself. Like me, Genaille teaches on Ts'msyen territory. He and I both are newcomers to the land where we each teach. (We teach at the same middle school.) Unlike me, Robert is a member of a First Nation. As an Indigenous teacher, Genaille brings to teaching a point of view that is different from any point of view that I can hold. When he asked the question, I heard him asking it as an Indigenous teacher, in a way that was different from how I would ask the same question. I heard him ask: Why does an Indigenous teacher teach in the public-school system? But for me, the question is: Why do I teach – in the public-school system, as a Settler teacher, and in this territory? I attribute this question, the central question of this



thesis, to Robert – not only because he asked it first, but also because I had been struggling to come up with a meaningful question for my thesis until I heard him ask the question of himself.

Back to the question, as *I* mean it. I teach as a moral response to the wrongs of colonialism and to help make a difference in how Canada moves past its colonial past. In short, I teach to help end colonialism. I consider colonialism immoral because of the harm it causes in terms of unjust acquisition and allocation of land and resources, systematic dismantling and denial of sovereignty, and the resulting harm to the dignity and well-being of First Nations and other Indigenous peoples. According to Edward Said (1994), colonialism and imperialism are closely connected, yet distinct, systems. To Said, colonialism is often a subsystem of imperialism, with imperialism being “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (p. 9). An almost always result of imperialism is colonialism, which according to Said is the “implanting of settlements on distant territory” (p. 9).

It is an historic fact that British Columbia is a former colony of the United Kingdom. Prince Rupert, where I live and work, is a colonial settlement in one of the most distant realms of the British Empire, founded at the time of the empire’s decline at the turn of the last century. Canada was founded as a colony, first of France and later of England. By the time of settlement of Prince Rupert, in the early 1900s, Canada was part of an imperial order that projected power from Western Europe and the United States through a system into which Prince Rupert was one of its most distant settlements. Contrary to Said, I conflate these two terms, meaning that my understanding of “colonialism” is based on Said’s linked concepts of *imperialism* and *colonialism*. This conflation of the two terms into one makes sense given what colonialism has generally come to mean in Canada today (domination) and how Canadians have come to rarely

talk about the country in terms of its place in an Empire (imperialism through settlement). In common usage the terms are conflated, and I do so throughout this paper as well.

To end colonialism requires changing social structures, or the sets of human relationships in action and form that define the dominant Canadian society to this day. Ending colonialism is, therefore, focused on the future and not on the past. Thomas King (2012), who is Cherokee, German, and Greek, writes that Indians want “a future” (p. 193) which he believes depends on sovereignty. King believes that “if Native people are to have a future that is of our own making, such a future will be predicated, in large part, on sovereignty” (p. 193). He defines this as “supreme and unrestricted authority” (p. 193) and, in practical terms, as a “functional form of governance” (p. 193) which is “never an absolute condition” (p. 194) but rather a series of ongoing processes and steps that includes governance. According to King, governance is expressed in the levying of taxes, establishing citizenship, regulating trade and commerce, and in agreements between nations (such as treaties). It is also expressed in the establishment of legitimacy and clarity in government, in who governs.

In asking how I should teach, given the realities of the students with whom I work, the historical and contemporary contexts of the place where I am a teacher, and the moral purpose that underlies my decision to be a teacher in order for my teaching practice to be moral, I start with my personal journey of moral development (described in chapter two). This process of development weaves through three ideological contexts: American nationalism, Marxist critical theory and socialism, and transformative Christian faith (liberation theology). In telling that story of development I hope to describe how I came to hold these three bedrock beliefs as core to my work. These three beliefs are: (1) Human life is sacred; (2) Everyone is born worthy of unconditional respect; and (3) Human dignity is endowed, inherent, universal, infinite, and

absolute. In chapter three, I explain the basis for an apparent contradiction between respect and control, a contradiction seemingly at the heart of public education. If true, this apparent contradiction would also make moral teaching practice impossible. I describe this apparent contradiction in chapter three and then, in chapter four, I explain how an *ethics of integrity* makes reconciling respect and control unnecessary, rendering the contradiction apparent and not actual. Finally, I explain how, through the practice of integrity, moral teaching is possible and share strategies for teaching with integrity.

### **Who Am I?**

Sara Florence Davidson, who is a Haida/Settler educator and scholar, starts her talks by saying that her mother taught her that knowing, and saying, your identity matters. I have not asked Sara Davidson to explain what exactly she means by this, but usually she follows this statement of identity by sharing who she is related to, and where she and her relations are *of*. She says that her mother, Susan Davidson, is a “self-identified colonizer”. She notes that her mother asks that she be identified as such, even though Sara Davidson has a hard time seeing her mother as a colonizer, especially given her mother’s role in connecting Sara Davidson to her Haida ancestry. But out of respect for honouring the identities that we each choose for ourselves, Sara Davidson describes her mother as a colonizer, rather than as a Settler. Sara Davidson also says that her father, Robert Davidson, is of Haida/Tlingit ancestry. In her introduction, Sara Davidson goes on to share her clan and the clans of her other relations. I have been taught that it is traditional in Haida, Ts’msyen, and many other coastal First Nations, to say who you are when introducing yourself, in terms of your people, clan, nation, and other relations.

Sara Davidson’s way of introduction is different from the Settler way of introduction that I am most familiar with, which is to say your name, organizational affiliation, and credentials. I wonder, when I am in the territory of another culture, should I introduce myself in accordance to my own tradition? Should I say that I am Tom Kertes, a teacher of a middle school, and a member of the teachers’ federation? Or should I follow another tradition, such as the one followed by Sara Davidson, by saying that I am Tom Kertes, son of Jeanne and Dean Smith and Al Kertes? Jeanne’s family is from Oklahoma and Washington state, originally descendent of England and Prussia – all Settlers as part of the United States conquest of First Nations’ western territories. Al’s family is from Hungary and Ireland. My grandmother’s Irish-Catholic faith lived

through the migrations, a lasting and vivid connection to my ancestry. (Dean was my step-father. His family, too, immigrated to North America from Europe.)

When Sara Davidson makes a point of introducing herself as Haida/Settler I do not think she is primarily speaking to whether or not one should adopt one form of introduction or another – as she is simply adopting the form of introduction given to her. But I do hear her make a larger point, and that is that we are all *of* someplace – and where we are of puts us into relationship with others. That point matters. Given that North America has been (and is being) systematically and structurally colonized by European nation states and ideas (carried out through warfare, land disposition, settlement/resettlement, family separation, racist ideologies and practices, the provision of health care and education, and economic and political systems of control) it does matter how we each place ourselves within this reality.

With all of the above in mind, let me introduce myself again. First, I am Tom Kertes. I was born in the United States and am an American citizen. I live and work in Ts'msyen territory. I immigrated to Canada in 2007 out of opposition to the George W. Bush's policy of openly torturing "enemy combatants" as part of an illegal war of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq. I am now a citizen of both Canada and the United States. I was born in Ellensburg, Washington (the territory of the Yakama). I am married to Ron and I am a member of the LGBTQ+ community. My ancestors immigrated to the United States from Europe, including from England, Prussia, Hungary, and Ireland. I am a member of the British Columbia Teachers' Association and the Prince Rupert District Teachers' Union. I am a Catholic who is a member of the Anglican Church. I believe in social justice and I am a socialist. I do my best to stand up for all others and to treat everyone with respect and dignity.

Second, I am also Tom Kertes, a white Settler teacher from the United States teaching Ts'msyen, Haida, Nisga'a, Gitksan, and other Indigenous students in a British Columbia provincial school located in Ts'msyen territory. I am a colonizer, Settler, and immigrant. I am also a newcomer to the land and country where I live and work, having just moved to Ts'msyen territory last year and to Canada in 2007. I was born on Yakama land that was colonized by means of warfare and forced relocation by the United States government, barely over a generation before my birth. I work for the public-school system and provide compulsory education. I occupy a privileged and powerful place in the community, holding a well-paid and highly secure job as part of a unionized profession with a high degree of professional autonomy. I hold a position of authority for many of the young people in my community. I am entrusted by parents and families to provide structure and support, and to apply positive discipline, for their children. I mark students' academic work and assign grades. I teach students how to read, write, solve problems, and share stories and information that influences how students think and see themselves in the world.

## Chapter 2 – What Is Moral Teaching?

### Moral Scope

The question of why I teach leads to questioning whether or not teaching, in the public-school system generally (and in the specific school and classroom where I currently work), is a morally right thing to do, for both myself and in universal terms. The scope of this paper therefore focuses on answering the following question: Is my vocation as a teacher morally justified? (Am I doing the right thing?) In this sense, the answer to the opening question (*Why teach?*) is: I teach because it is a moral thing to do. I would not be a teacher if I believed it immoral. But since teaching in British Columbia takes place in the shadows of historic and contemporary colonialism, and in the direct aftermath of the shameful legacy of the Indian residential school system, for my teaching to be moral, the aim of this work must help dismantle and end colonialism, and all of its legacies – including the legacy of cultural genocide.

To answer the central questions of the thesis first requires knowing what is “moral”. For this paper, I will not attempt to provide a universal definition of what is moral or not moral, as that is beyond its scope. I will instead explain what “moral” means to me, both generally and specifically (in relation to the question of whether my vocation as a teacher is moral). In general, a moral matter is one that requires doing right by others. This requires both not harming others and being good, or of help, to others. I would like to help others and not harm others, and when I do both of these things my behaviour is moral.

All moral matters are relational. I can intend no harm but be harmful. I can intend to help but be unhelpful. The impact on the other person, whom I am either helping or harming, determines if moral intent is realized or not. Moral matters are also real. I can attempt something that is morally good but fail to realize the attempt. A poorly considered attempt that results in a

bad outcome is immoral if it causes harm or does not help, even if I intended otherwise. More than good intentions are required, as I must exercise responsibility and be truly reflective of my conduct and the implications of this conduct – especially when I am in a position of power or authority.

Moral matters are also proximate and connected. How I behave affects people I do not know, especially across systems at the scale of human societies. For example, I pay taxes. The government uses these taxes to provide health care for my neighbours. This is a presumably moral outcome. But the government also uses those taxes in other ways, such as to fight wars. A portion of each United States or Canadian bomb dropped on a home of an innocent bystander is paid for in part by me because I am complicit in the system that built, shipped, and dropped the bomb – as I consent to paying taxes to both countries. Even though it may seem that one does not have a true choice to pay taxes, comply with a draft, or to do as otherwise compelled by the government, the reality is otherwise. Non-compliance is always an option but can come at huge costs. These costs can include loss of liberty and even death. The question of what is moral does not need a realistic or reasonable answer. At times, the moral choice seems impossible. That is why in daily life we must decide on the best option, or the least bad option, based on all known variables.

Because everything is connected to everything, there comes a point when deciding whether or not to “act morally” requires making a moral choice around where to draw a line at an imagined point of disconnection. While making a reasonable choice does not make the matter moral, it does allow for action. Otherwise, you cannot do anything (not even not-act), as *everything* could cause some harmful outcomes for someone (or something) – given all of the near infinite levels of connection. For example, in my twenties I struggled on the question of



paying taxes that supported the government of the United States, an imperial power in a seemingly endless war that clearly harms many people – including innocent civilians such as young children. I ultimately decided to consent to paying taxes given the process of dilution from my direct action (paying taxes) to the indirect action (the government purchase of the bomb that kills a child). I still consider it immoral to kill children in illegal wars of aggression and yet I pay taxes that make that killing possible. I pay the taxes not because this is moral but because I am too far from the nexus of power with respect to this particular action to make a difference; the matter lies beyond my personal “line of moral consideration”. That said, I could refuse to pay “war taxes” and either accept the consequences imposed on me by the state or try to evade legal consequences. In every instance, I am making a choice with moral consequences – a moral choice. On another question, more direct but purely hypothetical, when I was sixteen, I decided that if I were drafted by the government to serve in an immoral war (as I deemed it) that I would be a pacifist or a conscientious objector. I would refuse to fight for the government in an immoral war. I would either leave the country or refuse to serve.

As a child and young teen, I lived in fear of another Holocaust and was vigilant for the warning signs that a similar mass genocide (or totalitarian state) would emerge at home. I wanted to avoid two things: Being a collaborator and being killed. To avoid both required recognizing warning signs, seeing past propaganda, and being strong (in all senses). There were always clues, which I recognized into my adult years: United States covert wars in Central America, the legacy of the mass enslavement of African peoples, and torture regimes within the United States government in places like Chile and Iraq. But liberal states behaving badly are not totalitarian. I was also radicalized (a term that I more fully explore in chapter four) through the process of coming out as gay in my late teens. I had an ambitious imagination as a child and young teen,

with political aspirations at the highest levels of United States government. These plans were (also in my imagination) dashed when I decided, at age eighteen, to be out to myself and everyone else. I believed that an out gay person had no chance of a “real” political career, which led me directly to the path of political resistance.

I never felt threatened by the state for my life, but in the 1990s I believed that the United States government had intentionally under responded to the AIDS pandemic because policy leaders wanted those with AIDS to die. At the time, I believed that this was akin to a genocide, a view shared by other radical AIDS activists of the time – including Larry Kramer. Kramer’s book *Reports from the Holocaust* (1989) formed the basis for my belief that AIDS neglect was genocide. The book was a collection of essays and newspaper editorials written by Kramer in the years 1978 to 1988. It provided me with a look back at a recent history that I could not have known, given the taboos around discussing gay men and AIDS at the time. I read Kramer’s book soon after I graduated from high school. The history chronicled by Kramer happened while I was still in the closet and barely ready to accept the implications of my sexual orientation, cut off from almost all information relevant to my sexuality. It is hard for me to remember or understand how naïve I was then, but a newspaper article by the *Seattle Times* on a 1991 forum on teen sexuality, on which I was a panelist, chronicles where I was at the time. According to the article, one panelist said that “when you are being sexually active you are playing Russian roulette with five bullets” (Cronin, 1991). The panelist called for abstinence, saying that there was no choice in this matter of life and death. In response, I said “every time I have sex I realize that I am taking a risk of contracting AIDS. I take as many precautions as possible, and I pray to God” (Cronin, 1991). I was eighteen. A few months later I read *Reports from the Holocaust* and was radicalized. I went from frightened prayers to angry activism.

One chapter of Kramer's book was of a speech, *Whose Constitution Is It, Anyway?*, given in 1987 to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the United States Constitution. Kramer said, "This is not a good time in history to be a gay man or lesbian, but particularly a gay man" (Kramer, 1989, p. 177). He continued that "the AIDS pandemic is the fault of the white, middle-class, male majority" (p. 178) who did not grant equal rights to gay people. Kramer's theory was that the marginalization of gays and lesbians resulted in our subculture being defined by sex, creating the conditions that made the AIDS pandemic possible. Moreover, Kramer asserted, that "conscious genocide is going on" (p. 178) because the administration of President Ronald Reagan was determined to "not do anything sufficient to fight the AIDS epidemic" (p. 178). Kramer believed that the aim of inaction was the elimination of the gay minority. His point that the government's neglect was an act of genocide resonated with me, and I felt called to resist. (I no longer hold this view.) I joined in direct action protests. I thought that interrupting politicians, spewing out hateful rhetoric, and being wildly disruptive was the best moral response to the AIDS pandemic, government inaction, and LGBTQ+ discrimination. To provide context, coming out at the end of the first chapter of the AIDS crisis in the United States, before effective treatments were fully developed or known, was terrifying. The community I came out to felt almost wiped out, with a loud and silent echo of an entire generation of gay men dead lingering in the shadows of our community.

The point of sharing this part of my past is that in my early adulthood I strove for a personally moral response to the reality of the times. From the vantage point as a young gay man in the 1990s this called for action in the form of resistance. Resisting the social order, from the outside (or from an illusion of the outside), seemed like the morally justified course, never mind that AIDS treatments were developed with the capital of corporations and governments and with

the ingenuity and tenacity of nurses, doctors, public health officials, and scientists. It is with this outside-looking-in lens that I approached becoming a teacher, which I decided to do twenty years after coming out (when I was in my forties).

Being killed is not a factor in deciding to teach, barring an outlier accident or tragedy. But being a collaborator is in play. Canada, a liberal constitutional monarchy, is certainly not totalitarian. But it is colonial – as evidenced, in part, by the *Indian Act* and its resulting institutions. And therein is a contradiction: Liberalism, in its broadest meaning as an economic, political, and moral philosophy and methodology, is in contradiction with colonialism. Liberalism is also in contradiction to traditional (Indigenous) North American ways of knowing. Private property, individual human rights, liberty, and capitalism (likewise: socialism or social democracy), are not indigenous concepts or ways of knowing to Indigenous North America. They are colonial imports, not only brought to Canada but also imposed in the form of a regime that seeks absolute dominion in terms of its ideologies, laws, economics, and control over the land and people here. Regimes exist everywhere, and all regimes have ways of knowing (such as certain ideologies and epistemologies) and, by definition, all regimes seek power over land and people. There is nothing inherently wrong with the existence of a regime, but when a regime is imposed violently or oppressively there is harm to others. This is immoral.

Earlier I discussed my fear of the Holocaust recurring and how a failure to respond to AIDS, perceived at the time as a form of genocide, was formative to my moral development. This fear continues to this day but in a new form. Canadian government inquiries have recently charged Canada with two forms of genocide: the “cultural genocide” of the Indian residential school system and the “Canadian genocide” of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. For some, these charges of genocide, which were made by government panels against the

government itself, are baseless. The facts leading up to the charge, or description, of a genocide are accepted as true and appropriate to assert, but the term “genocide” is not deemed appropriate for what happened by those who question whether this is the correct way to describe events.

For example, according to an article in the *National Post*, Andrew Scheer, leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, said that “*genocide* isn’t the right word to describe what’s been done to generations of Indigenous women and girls in Canada” (Canadian Press, 2019) in response to the findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Sheer is also quoted as saying that the “ramifications of the word *genocide* are very profound” and that it “carries a lot of meaning” (Canadian Press, 2019). As discussed in chapter one, Raphael Lemkin (1944) defined genocide as any “coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves” (p. 79). The question of intent matters for this definition. But I consider intent and purpose, or function, as linked. Even without intent, if the purpose of colonialism is assimilation and displacement of entire nations, then the desired outcome will be elimination of those cultures. If the function is domination, which results in great harm, then even if the intent is domination without harm the end result is still harmful and not moral. This becomes a contradiction when values such as individual liberty and universal dignity are imposed, through conquest or other systems of control without consent.

The Indian residential school system removed children from their families, forced children to not use their language, pulled children from their land, and taught children another culture’s ways of knowing and being. This by itself is a wiping out of Peoples, even if the schools had not fostered severe sexual, physical, and emotional abuse for many of the children forced to be in those schools. Cultural genocide is unique in that it is carried out through the

living, by displacing culture through education rather than by the killing of everyone within a targeted group. People may survive this, but humanity does not. More complex is the Canadian genocide of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, which takes a systems-approach to understanding how colonialism affects First Peoples – lateral violence included. Colonialism is genocidal when it aims to displace one set of Peoples with another. Domination and displacement are inherently wrong, with or without the label “genocide”.

The contradiction between liberalism and colonialism, the deeply immoral intentions and outcomes of colonialism (which may be deemed as genocidal), and my role as a colonizer and a public-school teacher in the territory where I live and work, provide the context for the central question as to whether my vocation as a teacher is a moral endeavour or not. Given the scale of the matter, I cannot resolve (reconcile) the contradiction between liberalism and colonialism (as I alone cannot end either one of these hegemonic aspects of the Canadian regime). I simply do not have the means to do either of these things on my own. But I can reconcile my teaching practice with the aim of helping end colonialism (or at least mitigate its effects) through teaching. This is to say that I can reconcile my teaching with the values of respect and dignity, of teaching as humanization, but only if I adopt and practice teaching that is anti-colonialist.

Being a teacher is not the only choice in terms of ways that I can be moral and oppose colonialism. For example, I could return to activism, fighting from the sidelines, in the forms of protest and rhetoric, against the contradiction between liberalism and colonialism. In this I would seek power by working with others to make a meaningful demand that colonialism be fully ended and dismantled. I could position myself in opposition to colonial systems, from the outside. I could even go one step further and actually disrupt colonial systems and institutions through direct action. But I did not choose these other possibilities, because I wanted to do more.

I chose to be a teacher, working within a school system that is itself deeply embedded within the regime itself. This paper documents how I have come to decide that being a teacher is a morally right response to colonialism and its ill intents.

Colonialism is a dehumanizing process. Its aim is total domination, whereby people of one culture displace the people of another culture in order to resettle the land. In the end, those whose culture has been dominated are dehumanized. While settlement may be the intended aim, the means is always some form of domination (unless the colony is truly on unoccupied territory, such as a new moon or Mars colony). Stó:lō poet Lee Maracle (1988) writes that “each time I confronted white colonial society I had convince them of my validity as a human being” (p. 15). She continues, “the attempt to convince them that [I was a human being] made me realize that I was still a slave” (p. 15). Maracle considers this realization, of her “enslavement”, as catalyst for resisting the “burden of a recent colonial history” (p. 15). Maracle notes that she internalized the baseless view of herself as not fully human, which she came to reject through the process of critical self-realization. Chronicling this process Maracle describes colonial schools as having “showed themselves to be ideological processing plants, turning out young people that cannot produce the means to sustain themselves, but who are full cover-to-cover with the ideological non-sense of European culture” (p. 113). Writing in the 1980s, Maracle refers to the third generation of young people educated by this system, beyond the height of the residential school system as the means for this form of schooling. She explicitly links resistance to this as the pursuit of “empowerment” (p. 113).

The means to this empowerment, according to Lee Maracle (1988), is Native education. She questions if separate schools, or segregated schools, for Native students is the answer to achieving this goal because the point is not to “add a sprinkling of our culture” (p. 114) or to

staff schools with teachers “who have been processed in the same fashion as every other teacher” (p. 114) but rather to educate for a different purpose all together. This education would resist ideologies of individualism, exploitation, and capitalist notions of success. Rather than aim schools at helping students to be successful, Maracle calls for education that promulgates “the knowledge and culture of a given society in the context of a given historical perspective” (p. 115) – the society and perspective in this case being Indigenous and critical. This is a challenge to the root basis of the colonial system, which seeks the imposition of a liberal economic and political system. Her approach to education builds on human power in the critical construction of living culture, for the development of embodied culture for the purpose of humanization, emancipation, and the repatriation of Native knowledge. It is the means to “build a new history based on the positive histories of both” Native and Settler cultures (p. 118).

### **Moral Basis**

Earlier I defined a moral matter in terms of doing right by others: Not harming and doing good for (i.e. helping) others. Moreover, I consider moral matters to be relational, real, proximate, and connected. The following section describes what I consider to be good and explains how I came to develop this sense of goodness. Again, I do not attempt to provide a universal meaning for what is, in fact, good or not. Instead, I simply hope to explain the basis for how I, personally, determine whether or not my behaviour is good or not. To answer this, I will briefly describe my personal journey of moral development. The journey is long and complex, full of unanswered questions and deep contradictions, but I will skim past this as much as possible to stay focused on the central question of how to be moral in my teaching. The story weaves through three sets of ideological contexts: American nationalism, Marxist critical theory and socialism, and transformative Christian faith (liberation theology).



Beyond being a human being, son, and husband, I am a Christian, American, and democratic Marxist socialist. Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered half a decade before I was born. His legacy, and the aftershocks of the American Civil Rights movement, galvanized my development as a political self. I grew up in a small, almost entirely white, town in eastern Washington state – the rural (and not coastal) part of the state. Directly behind my childhood home was a wheat farm and there was a grange in town. During the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 and the boycott of the Soviet Union, huge stockpiles of wheat were piled in the centre of town. Hearing stories of the American South and of Black Liberation was like hearing about another country. My parents – who were in their late teens and living in Washington state during the height of the Civil Rights movement – had almost no way of relating directly to this part of their formative development. But they did share stories with me about the history of their times. They taught me that the Civil Rights Movement was a morally good historic moment and instilled in me an appreciation for civil disobedience, racial equality, and treating everyone as fully human.

I also grew up in the immediate years after the Vietnam War. I was a child of a generation nearly torn apart by war. The war's impact on my parents and their generation carried to my generation. For example, as a child I did not know that going to basketball games played by legless young men in wheelchairs was unusual, especially for a town of less than 10,000. I also did not think it unusual that my uncle, who served on a swift boat in Vietnam, was blown up, put into a body bag, and woke up (in the bag), survived, and suffered from severe combat injuries and post-traumatic stress. This was life. Parents and uncles were in the Vietnam War. (And would eventually die from injuries sustained during the war.) They also knew people who shot flies on the ceiling, lived in total isolation, or whose legs were amputated. I had no way to

understand that a war that essentially ended when I was born would define the experiences of my parents. The war's upheavals, in terms of life and limb, societal tension, identity, and the formation of the young adults who raised and educated me, were my upheavals too. I grew up afraid of war and deeply skeptical of authority when it came to protect us from its ravages.

My sense of "being American" also comes from what it means to be born in the aftermath of the disruption of de-segregation, the legacy of mass enslavement, and in a time of endless war. Not only did the Vietnam War end just before I was born, the Cold War was simmering from before my birth to my final year in high school. United States military actions in Central America were in full force the entire time I was a child. The Persian Gulf War took place in my last two years of high school. A decade later, the United States launched its War on Terrorism, invading Iraq and Afghanistan. And there was also Bosnia, Libya, and Panama. I think that this is why Martin Luther King, Jr. is an anchor for my sense of American nationalism, how I can most simply tell the story of what it means to be an American. King embodies all of this history, and he tells this history in moral terms. And most importantly, he represents hope and calls for action. In an essay about him that I wrote in Grade 7, for a contest by the Black Student Union of the state college based in my hometown, I wrote that King was "a true martyr" who "fought for his cause with all his heart and soul". In his life story, he provided a moral bedrock that helped me make sense of the times, one that I would return to in the stage of my moral development.

As I mentioned before, coming out in the early 1990s (when I was eighteen) was formative. Up until then I saw myself as mainstream. At the moment that I decided to come out, I recognized that, far from being mainstream, I was deep in the margins. I was angry about this, even though I came to recognize being marginalized as a great gift: The gift of perspective. In that anger I became "radicalized" which meant to "focus on the root cause of things" and to act

on these causes to change unjust and immoral outcomes. I believed that I could help lead a revolution that would transform the root cause of all injustice – ending injustice for all and forever. This belief, coupled with action, is exhilarating and can lead to endless and passionate disappointment. This phase of my development literally took me to the edge. A street activist, living on the margins, and at times homeless, I was out of control, clinically depressed, and overwhelmed.

It took years to right myself, and thanks to the unwavering love of my mother, friends, and family, by my mid-twenties I went back to the source of youthful optimism and a balanced approach to “doing the right thing” that had preceded coming out. Not incidentally, the community organizing work that I focused on during this time was explicitly grounded in the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. I came to work with a group of social justice organizers who were continuing the anti-poverty movement that King helped lead, as he shifted from civil rights to a broader focus on human rights, including economic human rights and an end to poverty.

This group was based in two aspects of King’s work: Christian faith and critical theory. While King did not consider himself to be a communist or a socialist, his associates were Marxist and King was certainly anti-capitalist. In a speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King said, “One day we must ask the question, ‘Why are there forty million poor people in America?’ And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy” (1967). King believed that any system based on human exploitation was morally wrong. My route to Marxism moved through the path of my Christian faith, in part from King’s teachings on a moral economy and also from those inspired

to continue his work following his murder in 1968. I view Marxism as the lens to deconstruct capitalism and Christianity as the foundation to build its alternative.

Willie Baptist and Liz Theoharis were both mentors in my work as part of a social movement to end poverty. This was a movement centred in education as leadership development through a process focused on developing “an engaged intelligence that will outsmart, not only out organize, the current conditions that cause poverty” (Baptist & Theoharis, 2001, p. 161). Baptist, Theoharis, and other movement organizers helped develop an approach to education and leadership development based on a pedagogy of “plowing the fields and planting the seeds” (p. 162) through critical consciousness, praxis, and community learning. According to Baptist and Theoharis, the teaching methods and activities included collective study, self-study, teaching in dialogue, the use of art and music, leadership tours, immersion programs, and reality tours (pp.165-167). Education was through action, such as marching from the United Nations headquarters to Washington, D.C. or by organizing hunger strikes in demand of living wages. Actions and demonstrations were organized in order to engage participants in critical thinking and knowledge development. This work was conducted through a network of community organizations, ranging from homeless day labourers in Baltimore, tomato pickers in Florida, and families on welfare in Philadelphia. My work with these organizations and the educational models developed influenced both my moral and pedagogical development.

My moral development occurred within the context of American nationalism (growing up and being an American), Marxist critical theory (working to end poverty and deconstruct capitalism), and transformative Christian faith (applying liberation theology as the basis for my moral self) leads to three core beliefs, beliefs that I explicitly brought to my initial teaching and which were challenged by what I actually needed to know and do as a teacher. These beliefs are

that human life is sacred, that everyone is born worthy of unconditional respect, and that human dignity is endowed, inherent, universal, infinite, and absolute.

**Human life is sacred.**

I believe that human life is sacred because it, like all life and all creation, is a creation of God. The sanctity of human life is expressed in the commandment that “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:21, English Standard Version). Second only to loving and serving God, the commandment – to love all others as yourself – speaks to the sacred value of human life as integral to the Christian viewpoint. While I personally hold this belief as a reflection of my Christian faith, the sanctity of human life means simply, in secular terms, that one honour human dignity, treat all other humans with respect, and safeguard human life. Honouring human dignity, treating humans with respect, and safeguarding human life are secular goals as well. And while my Christian faith provides the moral basis of my belief in human life as sacred (or as worthy of respect, dignity, and safeguarding) these beliefs are certainly not exclusive to the Christian tradition. People of many faiths and philosophies share a recognition that human life is sacred, or ought to be treated as such.

The recognition of human life as sacred is an expression of *praxis*, which according to Paulo Freire (1970/2017), is “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 79). Praxis – reflective action – is humanization, a means by which the sanctity of human life is animated; it is how the sanctification of human life is both made possible and how it is realized. Praxis is also at the heart of education. Praxis, as a form of learning, connects to Lev Vygotsky’s conception of the zone of proximal development (learning proceeding development) by how learning, in this sense, makes humanization possible. According to Vygotsky (1978), “properly organized learning results in mental development and

sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning” (p. 90). This makes organized learning (education) a “necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). Praxis (reflective action) and learning (proximal development) are at the heart of “humanizing education”, which is explored further below.

**Everyone is born worthy of unconditional respect.**

“Respect” is the recognition of another person’s human power. (More broadly, respect is also the recognition of any power, but his paper refers specifically to human power.) I came to accept this definition after years of struggling to articulate what I meant by *respect* in both the contexts of my community organizing and teaching work. While on a visit to the Nisga’a Memorial Lava Beds, I read the oral testimony of a Nisga’a Elder, posted in the visitor centre exhibit hall, about the traditional law of the Nisga’a. To the best of my recollection, she defined respect in this way – as the recognition of another person’s human power. This was the first time I read of respect in explicit terms as *recognition* and human power. I wish I had been more careful at the time in recording the actual source. I have not been able to locate the document that I recall reading, even upon later visits to the visitor centre (and a new museum). But I do vividly recall reading this definition, because at the time I was actively seeking a clearer meaning of respect, one that could be applied to teaching as the practice of respect. (While the original source of this definition is the woman quoted in the visitor centre exhibit, the interpretation that follows is my own and may not reflect Nisga’a law or the Elder’s meaning of respect at all.)

There are two equally meaningful parts to “respect as the recognition of another person’s human power”. First is recognition. Second is human power. Recognition goes beyond merely noticing. It is both seeing and responding. Moreover, recognition is a form of appropriate

response, or response that takes into account what is being noticed or seen. Respect as the recognition of power applies across contexts. One can respect a boulder falling down a hill toward them by recognizing its power, in the form of moving out of the way. One can respect the power of an opposing military force by recognizing its power, by perhaps building a bigger military, forming an alliance, or becoming a vassal state. In the specific context of respect between persons, it is the recognition of *human* power. Human power is both dignity (defined below) and capacity to do (as intended). Dignity is infinite and cannot be measured, decreased, or increased. But the capacity-to-do is finite, can be measured (at times), and can expand (increase) or restrict (decrease). Capacity is understood in terms of both praxis (learning as exercise of human power) and the zone of proximate development (learning as expansion of human power).

**Human dignity is endowed, inherent, universal, infinite, and absolute.**

“Dignity” is an inherent and irrevocable human quality, which is intrinsic to each human and of equal (and infinite) value for each human. While dignity is an inherent and intrinsic quality of each human, dignity is recognized on an individual basis and is not always universally recognized. I believe that dignity is endowed, or is a gift given by God. (In secular terms, this means that dignity is self-recognized and does not require the recognition by others to exist. It does not have to be a gift from God for dignity to be endowed in this sense.) Human dignity is an inherent characteristic of being human and it is universal to all humans. Infinite and absolute, dignity is equal amongst all human beings, there is not greater or lesser value to any one human being over (or below) another. Given what dignity is and how everyone is equally endowed with dignity, the realization of dignity as a value requires equal respect, equal value, and equal

treatment of each other. In practice, dignity is part of human power (defined above). This means that everyone is equally powerful in this aspect of human power. Respect recognizes this.

Human dignity is not exclusively a Western concept, but it does have a long history in Western thought. According to George Kateb (2011), Pico della Mirandola's speech on the *Dignity of Man* in 1486 based dignity on the core idea that "humanity is the greatest type of beings" (p. 3) and that, given this, "every member [of the human species] deserves to be treated in a manner consonant with the high worth of the species" (p. 3). Kateb writes how the universality of dignity has been contested, given that a "universal dignity" mocks the suffering of humans. He writes that this leads some to assert that we "must grant dignity only to those persons who have acted morally" (p. 4) given that there is distinction between victims and victimizers. Kateb proposes two kinds of human dignity. One is the dignity of every human being and the other is the dignity of the human species. My conception of human dignity is that of the individual. We are all equal in dignity as individual human beings. Kateb asserts that the dignity of the human species means more, that "no other species is equal to humanity" (p. 6). In contrast, I consider life, and all creation, to be of equal sacred worth. Whether creation has "dignity" is not the point. Humans can be of equal dignity to each other without being of more dignity than other living beings.

The moral basis for education is rooted in these values: life as sacred, respect as unconditional, and dignity as universal. Like Lee Maracle, I consider the function of education as critical and humanizing, making it anti-colonial. When she writes of the positive traditions of both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, my hope is that I have something to share with fellow human beings to help end the oppressive and dehumanizing nature of colonialism. I am guided by core values, which come from my Settler/Western upbringing and moral framework.



These values, for me, are steeped in the Western education and moral development of my upbringing. Does this fact negate the possibility that I can teach without harm to Indigenous people, without dominating and oppressing those for whom I am a teacher? This question is not merely abstract, as the practice of teaching requires that I use power and authority, stemming from my place in a colonial system, to advance and empower values that I hold dear. Is there a place for me in helping end colonialism through my practice as a teacher?

With the above questions in mind, my decision to be a teacher is informed by a belief that the values of respect, dignity, and the sanctity of human life are enough to ensure that, when enacted, my teaching is neither dominating nor oppressive. These values both inform and enable the practice of education, as a deeply humanizing and inherently liberatory endeavour. But the profession of this belief is not enough, for several reasons. First, teaching is more than the expression of three sets of values. It is far more complex task than this, involving aspects of both freedom and control – an apparent contradiction. The apparent contraction between respect, which is inherently liberatory, and control requires examination. In the next chapter this apparent contradiction is addressed. Reflection on this, and other apparent or actual contradictions, provides the second reason for why mere profession is not enough. Moral behaviour requires reflection, especially in order to move from moral intent to moral realization. Given the limitations of true morality, such as limitations in knowing unintended harmful outcomes, reflection is essential. While reflection cannot ensure that one's actions are indeed moral, it does open up the possibility that action will help others and not harm others. It is the least of what is required for moral behaviour to follow.

### Chapter 3 – Apparent Contradiction Between Respect and Control

Oppression and liberation are not merely opposites, as the opposite of liberation is death. For Paulo Freire (1970/2000), liberation is humanization. Its opposite: Dehumanization. Freire starts the first sentence of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* writing, “While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological point of view, been humankind’s central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern” (p. 43). Being human has always been of value. But why, now, is it something more? For Freire, the answer rests in the reality of present-day relationships, relationships that are based in an “unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (p. 44). Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* during a period of political exile from Brazil, following a military coup. The reality he spoke of was the brutal force of post-colonial capitalism, a counter revolutionary force aimed at maintaining extreme wealth at the cost of those in poverty.

To hear about this order in the here and now, jump forward from Freire’s Brazil fifty years ago to British Columbia today. Listen to Lee Maracle (2000):

#### Carry Her Away

Cirrhosis  
of the liver.

Poisoned.  
bloated,  
spiritless.

Alone, no weapons to fight  
she despaired, drank and died.

(It took only 35 years)

To mangle our hearts  
with the vision of her pain.

Sweet grass and sage,  
smoke of the aged,

carry her away. (p. 26)

The woman in Maracle's poem had "no weapons to fight" and she was alone. She needed weapons because the reality is, absent an army, Canada is at war with Indigenous peoples. Fighting a war against gas company executives, land bureaucrats, school teachers, and drug dealers is hard. Fighting it alone, nearly impossible. To Maracle, this is enslavement (1988, p. 15). Like Freire, Maracle's idea of liberation is wrapped up in emancipation and humanization. The woman, alone and with cirrhosis of the liver, is carried away by the deeply human burning of smoke grass and sage, carried by the aged who recognize the 35-year-old woman as still human, even in her absence. Now, we are not alone.

American philosopher of education John Dewey considered growth central to education. In his view humans grow from a state of immaturity to one of development; a process of education. Dewey's conception of education as growth, with dependence as a power, has one similarity to Freire's process of humanization and Maracle's testament to it. For Dewey (1916), humans start in a state of immaturity and this makes infants and children dependent on others. He considers this as a power because, "from a social standpoint, dependence denotes a power rather than a weakness; it involves interdependence" (p. 52). Both Freire and Dewey agree that interdependence is part of being human. For Dewey, education builds on the power of children's dependent need, the means by which social groups educate their young. For Freire, the focus is on dependence between classes, not just of the young to the old; dependence is exploitation, violence. When this form of dependence is abuse, the process of humanization (Freire's word, not Dewey's) turns back on itself and becomes dehumanization. While Dewey and Freire share the point that people depend on each other, or that we cannot be both "alone" how this is applied differs. For example, Dewey writes "There is always a danger that increased personal

independence will decrease the social capacity of the individual” (p. 52). So far, there is agreement between philosophers, as Freire also warns of individualism as a risk to human power.

But Dewey clearly means something else, writing:

There is always a danger that increased personal independence will decrease the social capacity of an individual. In making him more self-reliant, it may make him more self-sufficient; it may lead to aloofness and indifference. It often makes an individual so insensitive in his relations to others as to develop an illusion of being really able to stand and act alone — an unnamed form of insanity which is responsible for a large part of the remediable suffering of the world. (p. 52)

For Dewey, the purpose of education as growth is to develop the power of the young to become part of the community, avoiding “an unnamed form of insanity” (p. 52).

Education is growth for the sake of growth, achieved through the practice of respect. Respect is a practice that expands power through co-recognition of each other’s human power – dignity and praxis. Through education human beings expand praxis, the capacity for reflective action. At the heart of all this is the value of respect, recognition of each other’s human power. That is why I consider respect to be the foremost value of education. In other words, respect-based education is building relationships that expand human power through understanding (reflection) and application (action) of knowledge (what is known, or true). Respect-based education is a transformative process that is *liberative, humanizing*, and grounded in *respect*. The opposite of respect-based education is exploitative process that is *oppressive, dehumanizing*, and ungrounded in *dis-respect*.

Education in British Columbia is compulsory in two ways. First, school age children are required to be students, to attend school (in some form that is recognized by the government).

Second, each person, with income above a certain level, is required to pay taxes in support of the public education system (funding public schools and private schools to varying levels). Given that the province is a liberal constitutional monarchy whose government is considered, by a vast majority of people in the province, as democratically legitimate, the question as to whether or not the compulsory nature of public education is morally justified is not a topic of this paper.

Compulsory taxes and compulsory schooling are assumed justified, even in the unceded territorial lands of First Nations in British Columbia. While government legitimacy in places where the *Indian Act* or the *Royal Proclamation of 1763* (proclaiming Aboriginal lands as Crown lands) prevails is contested, the scope of this paper is individual teacher moral action, not the moral basis for Canada's racialized colonial system of government. The contexts of colonialism and compulsory education are the environment in which an individual teacher acts, but these contexts themselves are assumed justified simply because practical boundaries for discourse are called for – in order to focus on a moral philosophy of teaching in that context (not the morality of the context itself). Even though compulsory education and a tax-supported education system is assumed justified, the fact remains that many students attend because they are required to be there. The operating question is therefore: Can a teacher whose students are required, by law, to attend school teach respectfully to (or for) those students?

### **Contradiction and Reconciliation**

What is reconciliation? Beyond the specific meanings of reconciliation in examples such as “truth and reconciliation” in the context of the Indian Residential School System or the context of murdered and missing Aboriginal women and girls, reconciliation has broader meaning. One meaning is reconciliation of a true contradiction, true in the sense that it is not an apparent contradiction. A true contradiction is when two things cannot both happen at once, such

as eating a cake and not eating it too. When there are any two conditions, forces, states, values, principles, positions, or other things that cannot both exist at once (or in tandem) an actual contradiction applies. An apparent contradiction is when it only seems as if two things cannot both exist at once. To reconcile an actual contradiction requires choosing which of the two conditions, forces, states, values, principles, positions, or other things will prevail. An apparent contradiction requires only figuring out that co-existence is possible; reconciliation is not required in the instance of an apparent contradiction.

An example of an actual contradiction is slavery and liberty. No state, such as the United States, can be both be a liberal republic and a slave republic. But the United States built both liberty and slavery into its founding documents. This nearly led to the state's collapse – as both a regime and an ideal. Reconciliation was achieved only through emancipation, imposed during the Civil War and gradually achieved through a series of social and political movements since the adoption of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution, the formal basis of emancipation. The contradiction was ended (or is ending) by ending slavery and the racist laws upon which institutional slavery was enacted. Another example of an actual contradiction is colonialism and liberalism. A political ideology based on equality of human dignity and equality before the law is contradicted by an ideology based on lesser rights for some people and not others. For liberalism, with its emphasis on the rights of property holders, colonialism based on land grabs presents a deep contradiction. Canada's political and legal systems work hard in an attempt to reconcile the legitimacy of Crown title over Indigenous sovereignty – but cannot succeed without ending colonialism, and colonial institutions in Canada. The state's claims over the land are practiced in reality – forcefully – but cannot be reconciled, or justified, by the internal logic of the regime. Liberalism and colonialism cannot

co-exist, and until Canada reconciles this contradiction by resolving the legitimacy of its relationships with Indigenous Peoples and ending the colonial regime of the *Indian Act* Canada it cannot be the liberal constitutional monarchy that its legal, governing, cultural, and economic institutions claim it to be.

In education there is an apparent contradiction between respect and control. Respect, the practice of co-recognizing each other's human power (dignity and praxis) seems in contradiction with control because education as respect expands human power through learning, knowing, and understanding. The recognition of the student's inherent human power demands expansion of human power because co-recognition of dignity animates dignity, the basis of this aspect of human power, and because recognition of one's power, as capacity – the ability to do as intended through praxis or reflective action, expands power. Recognition is not merely noting something, but also requires response. In the context of education, the response in recognizing a student's capability is to support growth, as that is the purpose of education (as I define education, see above).

In contrast, control restricts human power. Control is a limiting, or restricting factor, that denies dignity, limits capacity, or does both. This presents a practical problem, given that education in British Columbia is compulsory and colonial. The compulsory nature of education is a form of control, restricting non-participation in education. The colonial nature of education is also a form of control, given how colonial systems control land, people, and identity through a series of measures set out in the *Indian Act* and other colonial systems and their resulting institutions. But control, in the form of instructional discipline (that respects human dignity) and restricting (i.e. focusing) student behaviour (again, respectfully), is an essential aspect of the

teacher-student relationship. The teacher, in their educational role, provides controls that guide, limit, restrict, focus, and compel the student in certain ways.

If students (of all ages) willingly consented to education and were fully at liberty in the pursuit (or non-pursuit) of education, there would be no actual contradiction between respect and control in education. The teacher's role in providing discipline, or restricting student capacity at times as an intentional, and respectful, aspect to instruction would be essentially "self-control" because the student would be fully consenting to this. It is not difficult to imagine full consent in the student-teacher relationship between two adults, especially when the two adults are of approximately equal social and economic standing. But it is harder to establish full consent between a student and a teacher whose power, status, or means are disproportionate, such as when the student is a child and the teacher is an adult. While parents can legally consent on their child's behalf in many instances, a parent consenting for a child does not mean that the child willingly consents, and the child is not fully at liberty. Moreover, there are even legal limits to what a parent can consent to on behalf of their child. For example, a parent cannot legally consent to the denial of their child's basic dignity and cannot consent to intentional or reckless harm on behalf of their child.

The reality is that education (for children) in British Columbia is not willingly consented to by many students, either because education is compulsory or because the student is too young to consent. Children are required to be at school. This makes education a form of control, which is at odds with education as respect. While it is possible for all education (even compulsory education) to be politely implemented and for all education to recognize the capacity of all students, it is not possible for compulsory education to be free from control. Does this present an actual contradiction between respect and control in education? No, it is not a contradiction, but



only if the purpose of education is grounded in respect, the practice of education is fundamentally respectful, and the control has an educational purpose, or it is not at odds with the purpose of education. Control, therefore, must have an educational purpose, given that the purpose of education is grounded in respect. Likewise, any control must be fundamentally respectful, given that the practice of education must meet this criterion as well.

For each of the above criteria “education” refers specifically to the K-12 public education system of British Columbia – in its entirety. This system includes public schools, publicly funded private schools, government regulated alternatives, and band schools or other First Nations schools. The system is compulsory for students up to age sixteen and is funded or subsidized almost entirely with provincial tax revenue (band schools receive federal funds). Teachers in the vast majority of the above institutions are regulated by the Teacher Regulation Branch, of the Ministry of Education, and are members of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation. Most public schools are governed by local school boards. The *School Act*, *Teachers Act*, and other statutes provide a legislated basis for most education in the province. Therefore, the purpose of education in British Columbia is articulated in statute and policy. It is written down.

Additionally, the practice of education is formally regulated, with written policies in place. What this means is that the written purpose, policies, regulations, standards of practice, and codes of conduct (for teachers and other educators) should (1) meet the above criteria for respectfulness and, if the criteria are met, (2) be adhered to.

### **Defining Roles in Education**

At its heart education is about learning, which I define in terms of social constructivist theory with two necessary elements for learning to be present. First, learning results in knowledge. Second, learning is a social-symbolic process that supports human development.

This notion of learning draws largely from Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky, "an essential feature of learning is that it creates the *zone of proximal development*; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people" (p. 90).

Because learning results in knowledge, the process of learning is, in part, a process of knowing. To learn something is to know *that* something. Learning, as defined for this paper, is best understood in light of a pluralistic philosophy of truth, which William James (1899/2005) considered as "too great for any one actual mind, even though that mind be dubbed 'the Absolute,' to know the whole of it" (p. 9). James recognized that "the facts and worths of life need many cognizers" and that there is "no point of view absolutely public and universal" (p. 9). While learning is knowing, many conceptions of actual truth may be present in actual learning. In sum, learning is defined as a social-symbolic process supporting development and that results in knowledge.

As mentioned above, the Teacher Regulation Branch (2012) defines the role of a teacher as meeting the "emotional, esthetic, intellectual, physical, social, and vocational development of students" (p. 4). This development is achieved through instruction, based on the provincial curriculum, and is focused on supporting student learning at school ("school learning"). *School learning* is learning defined in terms of education and educational outcomes, which Leonard (2002) defines as "what the instructor intends to have the learner master as a result of the learning activity" (p. 114). As *learning* "school learning" also results in knowledge and is also a social-symbolic process that supports development. In British Columbia, outcomes of school learning are defined in statute, regulation, policy, and curriculum. A specific aspect of Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development is relevant to how school learning is

defined. According to Vygotsky (1978) “properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning” (p. 90). This makes organized learning (of which school learning is a subset) a “necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

“Teacher” is defined by the legislative and regulatory frameworks of British Columbia that govern compulsory education in the province. For most teachers in the province, their role is defined by the *Teacher Act* and the Teacher Regulation Branch (Ministry of Education, 1997-2017). According to the *Teacher Act* (1996), a teacher is:

a certificate holder who has carried out one or more of the following duties in the preceding 2 years in the course of his or her employment:

- (a) design, supervision and assessment of educational programs;
- (b) instruction, assessment and evaluation of individual students and of groups of students; (Part 1)

The Teacher Regulation Branch (2012) further states that teachers “help foster the “emotional, esthetic, intellectual, physical, social, and vocational development of students” (p. 4). (Some teachers work outside the *Teacher Act* or the Teacher Regulation Branch, but still within the provincial compulsory education system. When this is the case, whatever jurisdictional definition for that specific teacher applies). “Teaching” is the process of realizing (fulfilling) intentions of learning for (or with) a student (to be clear, intentions of the teacher are realized through teaching). Teaching requires both learning (of the learner) and intentions (of the teacher). Teaching is therefore a social-symbolic process supporting development that results in

acquisition of intended knowledge (knowledge intended by the teacher, knowledge acquired by the student).

“Student” is any person who is permitted and/or required, by law, to participate in compulsory education in British Columbia. This includes a person who is “enrolled in an educational program provided by a board” (*School Act*, 1996, Part 1) and who is a resident of British Columbia, school age, and under the age of 16 years (*School Act*, 1996, Part 1).

Furthermore, the *Teachers Act* (1996) defines student to also mean:

- (d) a child engaged in a program of studies at an educational institution operated by
  - (i) a first nation, as defined in section 1 of the *School Act*, or
  - (ii) a Community Education Authority established by one or more participating First Nations under the First Nations Jurisdiction over *Education in British Columbia Act (Canada)*, or
- (e) a child participating in a kindergarten to grade 12 program of studies provided by a treaty first nation under its own laws; (Part 1)

A student is simply a learner in the educational system who is required to attend a government recognized educational program.

### **The Purpose of Education and Its Basis in Respect**

The *School Act* defines the purpose of an educational program as an “organized set of learning activities” that according to one of several educational authorities recognized in statute “is designed to enable learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy” (1996, Part 1). With “learning” as a social-symbolic process supporting development that results in knowledge, “learners”

(students) as persons required to attend a government recognized educational program, and organized sets of learning activities as the practice of “teachers”, whose profession is to support the process of realizing (fulfilling) intentions of learning for (or with) a student, the purpose of education has two goals. The first goal is to support individual student potential. The second goal is to support student contribution to society. Specifically, this contribution should be in support of the larger goal of pluralism, prosperity, and sustainability.

Respect-based education expands student power through recognition of student human power, which is both capacity (praxis) and dignity. The educational purpose of developing individual student potential is aligned with this aspect of respect as student potential is fulfilled through expanded praxis and co-recognized dignity. The means of supporting this aspect of the purpose of education must be respect-based. Additionally, the goal itself aligns with respect. There is no inherent contradiction between respect and this aspect of the purpose of education. Pluralism is an ideological underpinning of liberalism, especially prioritized in the Canadian expression of liberalism. Pluralism does not contradict dignity and has the potential of expanding individual power within a society. It is aligned with, as one possible expression of, respect. The goals of prosperity and sustainability are beyond the scope of this paper, given that these aspirations, as stated in the *School Act*, are not well defined and can be interpreted in many ways. For this paper, it is assumed that the kind of prosperity and sustainability sought through the purpose of education is grounded in respect. This assumption requires that the student whose individual potential is fulfilled through education shares in the prosperity and sustainability of the economy (or that the purpose of education does not lead to the student being oppressed by the economy). An unfair and disrespectful economic system may be the reality, but so long as the purpose of the educational program is not to integrate students into an unjust economic order,

then it is assumed that whatever is meant by “prosperity” and “sustainability” in the *School Act* is not intended to undermine the dignity or capacity of the student.

Teachers in the public-school system are members of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) and are certified as members of a profession by the government’s Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB). Both the BCTF and TRB hold professional teachers to a standard of dignity. The BCTF’s code of ethics for members, who comprise all teachers of the public-school system, states that the teacher “speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity” (BCTF, n.d.). The TRB’s Professional Standards for BC Educators states that “educators treat students equitably with acceptance, dignity and respect” (British Columbia Teachers’ Council, 2019, p. 1). (The term “educator” refers to teachers, principals, vice principals, and superintendents – all of whom are required to hold a professional certificate issued by the TRB). Moreover, the standards state that “educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and the future” (p. 3). This standard includes a call to work towards “truth, reconciliation and healing” (p. 3) and that teachers focus on “connectedness and relationships to oneself, family, community and the natural world” (p. 3) as a pedagogical approach that is based on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis ways of knowing and being. All of this speaks to the specific practice of dignity in relationship to First Peoples. Teachers in publicly funded and regulated private schools are held to a similar standard by the regulatory body for those teachers. Dignity is therefore a core value, or standard of practice, for teachers in British Columbia.

The purpose of state-governed education in British Columbia for students in the K-12 years is moral, given that its purpose is grounded in respect and that teachers are required to treat to standards with dignity. The first criteria for a moral basis in education is met, as teachers are

required to respect students, the purpose of education includes respect, and dignity of students is a core value of education. The written purpose, policies, regulations, standards of practice, and codes of conduct (for teachers and other educators) do meet the criteria of respect. Therefore, teachers who adhere to these policies in practice are fulfilling education's moral purpose. This requires fidelity to the face-value nature of the statutes and policies that govern education, which – if adhered to – will be respectful and will honour student dignity.

#### **Chapter 4 – An *Ethics of Integrity* (Co-Existence of Respect and Control in Education)**

Given that education's purpose is moral, and that teacher standards require treating students with respect and honouring student dignity, fidelity to this purpose and these standards is required for the actual practice of education and teaching to be moral. Teachers must act with integrity, with regard to the purpose, fulfilment of that purpose, and the related standards of practice – in all aspects of their work as professionals. An *ethics of integrity* makes possible both respect and control in education, rendering an apparent contradiction moot. This is because, with integrity, teachers act in accordance to the stated aims and do what is in their professional power to achieve these moral aims. As covered earlier, the *educational* aims of education are moral because these aims recognize and expand student power through learning and growth. Education, as defined by the *School Act*, recognizes student human power, seeks to expand that power, and provides the means by which to facilitate this growth. In British Columbia, teachers are required to teach with respect to their students and in ways that honour student dignity. This requires integrity.

#### **The Meaning of Integrity in Education**

*Integrity* is root strength and is radical, grounded in the essential or the root reason. Root strength is more than being simply strong or powerful, as it is strength grounded in the roots, or foundations, of an enterprise, institution, profession, or any other endeavor. For schools, this foundation is education. Radical is essential, or basic. It is root reason. For education, this root reason is humanization through learning and knowledge. A radical approach centres entirely on the reason, or purpose, of (or for) something. An example of root strength is courage, standing up for something of value despite fear or risk. In this example the value that you are standing up for is the root and courage is the strength. Another example of root strength is patience, taking the



time required to achieve something of value. Again, the root is the value, the thing itself that you are taking the time to achieve. Taking the time required is the strength. Other examples of roots are tradition, faith, conviction, and vision. And other examples of strength are intentionality, perseverance, and commitment. Radical and fundamental are similar, essentially two sides of the same coin. A radical approach seeks to know the cause of something, its reason for being, and then seeks to understand the cause in order to act upon it. Integrity, which is both root strength and radical, acts upon this understanding with core values and core aims in mind.

The roots of education also include knowledge, learning, student and teacher relationships, and educational aims (or intentions). Embedded within knowledge is inquiry, literacy, critical and creative thinking, and truthfulness. Embedded within learning is understanding, self-awareness, focus, self-discipline, intentionality, growth, content and knowing, experience, and exploration. Embedded within student and teacher relationships are values, cultures, and practices. And embedded within educational aims (or intentions) is curriculum – both visible and hidden.

Root strength is the capacity of the teacher and student to gain knowledge through learning, the means by which educational aims are fulfilled. Root strength in education is capacity drawn from knowledge, learning, student and teacher relationships, and educational aims (or intentions). In British Columbia, educational relationships and aims are grounded in respect and dignity. The fundamentals, essential components necessary for education, are human power, praxis, and dignity. Human power fuels education. Praxis is the process of education. Dignity is its basis. Teaching with integrity is rooted, strong, and essentially grounded in human power, praxis, and dignity.

### **The Practice of Integrity in Teaching**

The practice of integrity requires both root strength and a radical approach. In practical terms, there are two fundamental strategies to integrity in teaching. These are truthfulness and focusing on the essentials. The strategy of truthfulness operates at two levels: Knowledge and dialogue. First, education – as defined above and as required to be a moral endeavour in the contexts discussed in this paper – must teach students knowledge. This is required because for education to expand students’ human power (i.e. to be respectful) students must know things, must know reality as it actually is. Otherwise the acquired information will not expand human power as it will not be based on reality; false information does not provide a firm foundation on which to engage with intentionality and power in the world. The second way in which truthfulness operates at the strategic level is in dialogue. According to a talk that I attended by Carla Rinaldi, dialogue is “mutual listening” and dialogue starts without its endpoint known by any participate in a dialogue. The point of dialogue is to listen, responsively, to each other in order to know each other better through a process of continual dialogue. The second fundamental strategy of truthfulness is to focus on the essentials. The essentials are the roots, described in detail above. Many of these roots are embedded into “traditional” teaching practices, which are described below in more detail.

I did not enter K-12 public education expecting to focus on traditional teaching practices. For example, in my Grade 7 classroom, students do daily drills, are expected to learn multiplication facts and are tested daily, work silently for at least an hour and a half most days, copy from the board extensively, write outlines for almost all nonfiction reading materials, stand when speaking before the class at times, raise their hands before speaking, are required to complete thirty minutes of homework each weekday (with time provided at school), learn reading basics, write three research papers in the course of the year, and complete mid-term and

term exams. Students who are late to class, talk out of turn, turn in sloppy or otherwise incomplete work, or who waste time in class attend detention, missing the first twenty minutes a forty-minute lunch break to work silently on schoolwork while they eat their lunch in the classroom instead of in the hallway with friends. Most traditional of practices is the focus on marks and letter grades. I follow the reporting order on marks and grading explicitly, applying standards from samples in the B.C. Performance Standards and teach students how to use formal rubrics, how to meet province-wide standards, and how to understand the meaning of an “F” or an incomplete mark. Many students receive incompletes throughout the year, with the opportunity to learn the material and demonstrate mastery of the material in time for the final grade.

I did not expect to do any of the above “traditional” practices when I first entered teaching because instead, I thought I would facilitate student learning through some form of classroom democracy, that would seem explicitly student driven and open ended in style. My view then was that respect, a core value held since before the start of my teaching career, meant putting the student in charge of their own learning. I believed that respect required that the teacher follow the student’s lead, rather than the teacher leading the student. I planned to simply mentor self-directed students as they explored their own interests and passions, worked through problems in their daily lives, and to be a helping guide when asked. This assumed that students had any passions at school, that students viewed school as integral (or at least relevant) to the rest of their lives, and students wanted me as a guide. It also assumed that students had the basic skills required to do these things. Skills like being able to pay attention to what a teacher is saying and actually hear, understand, and remember what was said. Other skills that this assumed were being able to focus on a project or task for a long time (long enough to engage with it,

complete it, or solve it), being able to work with others to express ideas or solve problems, being able to read and follow instructions, knowing what is happening in the world and what is of interest to them. Other basic skills are self-regulatory skills, such as sitting in a chair for a sustained period of time, keeping materials where they belong (i.e. not throwing pencils or books across the room), controlling your temper, and other expressing your needs to those in a position to help. All of the students that I work with can certainly learn these skills, moving to the higher levels of self-engaged inquiry, but first they must learn how to demonstrate the skills in their practice as students.

As a matter of integrity, I shifted to a “back-to-basics” approach to teaching that was focused on fundamentals (reading, writing, numeracy, core knowledge closely aligned to the provincial curriculum, a sense of connection to schooling and formal education, and a sense of belonging in a community that welcomes you and cares about you) because I listened to students (in a dialogue) who clearly asked me to perform the more traditional version of a “teacher”. I heard students ask me to be strict and fair, to manage a calm and productive classroom, to hold students to high yet achievable expectations, to use traditional testing and grading approaches, and to make school seem like school. Students seemed to want to be held to clear expectations that let them prove themselves by demonstrating mastery of skills and concepts, rather than to freely explore things on their own. Students also seemed to want explicit instruction, step-by-step tasks, and to do things like drills, research papers, book reports, and exams. These tasks seemed to fit into their notion of what school culture is, and when I expect students to do this work, they tell me that I am fitting their notion of what a teacher should do. It took time for me to figure this out and required that I stretch a great deal because I did not want to be perform this

role at first. I believed – entering the profession – that the traditional role was limiting of students, externally motivating, inherently disrespectful, “old school”, and authoritarian.

What surprised me most was how much traditional grading, such as the grading that is required of teachers in British Columbia public schools, was based on respect. Teachers in the intermediate and secondary years are expected to mark the quality of student work based on performance standards. A passing grade is indicative that a student meets the minimal standard for the grade and subject. Teachers or principals exercise judgement in determining whether or not a student’s work meets the “standard”. This judgement should align with the actual standard, which is broadly defined through exemplars, rubrics, and curricular goals. There is room for teacher professional autonomy in this process, but there is also an expectation that a teacher uses this autonomy to communicate to the student whether or not they are working at or above standard (or not). Students are not to be ranked by ability. Student attitude and work habits are not part of grades. Rather, the student’s actual work, as a demonstration of competency and understanding, are simply compared to an achievable standard. The point is to communicate to the student whether or not they are meeting that standard, and the level of quality of their work. This is sharing information about performance, not a system of control. I see improved educational outcomes the more closely, and explicitly, that I align my teaching to this aspect of the education system. (Sara Davidson, who helped mentor me as a first-year teacher, was influential in helping me recognize the importance of this.)

Grading is a tool for helping students learn, and as such it is simply a means and not the ends. The ends are knowing. As with grading, I have found that the system, with its focus on a provincial curriculum, already has in place what’s essential for respect-based teaching. Teaching as respect is about building student power, together with the student and for the student (led by

the student but with leadership from the teacher as well). Learning supports this development. The role of the teacher is to help the student focus on learning that enhances their power. The provincial curriculum provides a useful framework for this. Teaching literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and core knowledge, and supporting and encouraging students to develop a strong and healthy relationship to self, community, and others, empowers students. As with grading, the more I focused on these core skills and concepts, tying instruction directly and explicitly to the provincial curriculum, the stronger that students generally performed. I believe that students want to know things and they want to know that there is a basis in what I teach them. They want to know that I am teaching something of value, and one way to know this is to see how I am doing as I am expected to by the government that employs and compels them to attend school.

### **Strategies of Integrity**

While the narrative of listening to students, going “back-to-basics” in terms of grading, and explicitly adhering to the provincial curriculum in terms of instruction describes how I have generally applied integrity in my teaching, this approach goes beyond a general sense of being “traditional” in my teaching. Integrity in teaching is essentially making the system itself (the public education system) work as it claims to intend. My path to that has led me to listen, grade according to performance standards, and adhere to the curriculum. I have found, in addition to these approaches, that strategies grounded in integrity are essential to the work itself. These strategies are: (1) Require that the system explicitly base its power (and purpose) in respect and dignity, and then insist that this is, in fact, implemented; (2) Follow the rules to the limits that are required to ensure that the first strategy is carried out; (3) Use all the power that you have to build the power that you need to follow the rules to the limit; (4) Base everything you do on the purpose; (5) Be honest with students and all others (and above all, yourself); (6) Respect student

time and treat every moment of students' time as sacred (of infinite value); (7) Hold yourself to account and be open to critical feedback (encourage it) and respond respectfully; (8) Do what is essential and approximate everything else; and (9) Listen and respond to those who actually understand colonialism and other forms of oppression. The nine strategies are described in detail below.

**Require that the system explicitly base its power (and purpose) in respect and dignity, and then insist that this is, in fact, implemented.**

Do not teach for a system that does not, at the minimum, claim to base its practice in respect and dignity. And if you do work for a system that at least claims to be based on these values, then proceed as if these claims are actually bedrock to the system itself. (If the system does not at least make these claims, build the power to change that first. Then teach within it.)

**Follow the rules to the limits that are required to ensure that the first strategy is carried out.**

The assumption is always that policies, regulations, vision statements, codes of ethics, and all other claims for the system to be based in respect and dignity are to be taken at face value. Once these claims are asserted by those in charge of the system, proceed as if they meant it. Follow the codes and processes with absolute fidelity. Use the rules, such as reporting orders, provincial curriculum, collective agreements, and policies, to their limit. Force the system to reconcile itself however required to ensure that these rules are enacted, at face value, to the ends that every student is respected, and that student dignity is paramount. This means that students receive an *education*, that they learn knowledge and skills that supports development and empowers students.

This strategy speaks to working from a position of uncompromising power from within the education system. Therefore, do not cherry pick rules and regulations. Do not even misappropriate a paperclip, as any level of compromise weakens your integrity and makes it harder to achieve the aim of bending all aspects of the educational system to delivering the education to which each student is entitled. Integrity and courage are not universally valued within any valuable (resourceful) system. Expect to be targeted. Follow all rules and make all rules follow the assumed prime directive of delivering actual education, based in respect and grounded dignity for every student in the province.

**Use all the power that you have to build the power that you need to follow the rules to the limit.**

Start by assessing your actual power to deliver education for the students in your charge. Use this power to actually deliver it. Teach. Follow the mantra of “do the work” of teaching, which will expand your power as a teacher in two ways. First, you will indirectly expand your power by expanding students’ power. This is the purpose of your job. Second, you will expand your power by demonstrating your commitment to the core values of education, based in respect and dignity. As you do this, reach out to others in the system and support them. Be a relentless champion of every person in the school system, students included, who advance the purpose of education. Build your power by teaching and supporting all others whose work supports teaching.

**Be honest with students and all others (and above all, yourself).**

Integrity requires honesty, so be honest. Build trusting relationships by speaking the truth respectfully and with purpose. Stand up for the truth. Focus on knowledge, as integral to both the process and product of education. Most importantly, be honest with yourself. Constantly



question yourself, seek feedback from others, challenge yourself, hold yourself to high standards of conduct.

**Respect student time and treat every moment of students' time as sacred (of infinite value).**

Students' time (and attention) is the fuel of education. When you are teaching you are directing student time for the purpose of education. Misdirecting student time not only wastes their efforts, but it uses time and effort for another purpose. Treat student time as precious, as a sacred gift that students share with you in trust. Every moment matters and should be in support of learning, of education. This does not mean that students should be drilling away all the time, as education is built through motivation. Time spent with friends, having fun, celebrating community, and resting are important. Just be certain that the time is for the students, not anyone else.

**Hold yourself to account and be open to critical feedback (encourage it) and respond respectfully.**

Seek feedback and respond to it. Ask students what matters to them. Ask students how you can better support their education through service to them. Listen to all feedback, spoken and unspoken. Seek accountability by others in the education system, especially those with authority or power. Be prepared for feedback that requires that you change course. And be prepared to follow the feedback. Hold yourself to account however necessary and possible and insist that others do so as well.

**Do what is essential and approximate everything else.**

Focus on the learning, on providing education for the students in your charge. Do the work of teaching, focusing on all that is essential for students to have the education to which they

are entitled. Embody respect and dignity through your work as a teacher. Build power for the purpose of expanding human power. Direct all your effort and energy to educational excellence, providing rigour for students. Once you have achieved this, then be prepared to approximate, fall short, on anything that is not essential.

**Listen and respond to those who actually understand colonialism and other forms of oppression.**

Integrity in the context of colonialism and other forms of oppression also requires listening and responding, in direct response to these contexts. Beyond treating students with respect, building power for education, and exercising authority with responsibility, integrity requires fidelity to the educational intent of ending oppression, in all its forms. This requires listening and responding, to those who experience oppression directly. Attend community events. Talk with mentors who share your students' experiences of oppression. Pay attention to the critical feedback of your allies, especially from those who have a direct stake in the challenge of ending colonialism and oppression. Make space and use that space to see and hear from those whose voices are silenced or marginalized. Listen and learn. Be led by leaders in the community you seek to serve.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Teaching for the purpose of education requires integrity. The essential nature of education, the expansion of human power through development and knowledge, requires that teachers apply both root strength and a radical approach to their work. Education in British Columbia exists for the purpose of expanding the human power of students, a purpose which justifies the apparent contradictions within the public education system between respect and control. Respect is the recognition of each persons' human power, which is both capacity and dignity. By recognizing student dignity, responding to it, and by expanding capacity through praxis, teachers expand students' human power. This justifies the compulsory nature of public education and helps students to transform the world in their own interests and values. Teaching with integrity empowers teacher and student to actually achieve this purpose.

Strategies of integrity empower moral teaching and require that teaching be for the purpose of education. These strategies extend beyond the student-teacher relationship and take into account the political and economic nature of schooling. Strategies of integrity provide a powerful base from which teachers can do their work. By focusing on what is essential for education, and building the capacity to actually teach *for* education, these strategies ensure that the stated educational aims of education are the actual drivers of the system. Integrity is root strength, basing your action on the actual basis of the work itself. It is foundational. As such integrity is radical, focused entirely on what is essential to fulfil the promise of the educational endeavour.

I started with the question: *Why teach?* I teach because I believe that education is worthwhile and that I can help end colonialism by being a teacher in the public-school system. Education expands human power, respect, and dignity. It is human potential in praxis, a process

of humanization. I teach to embody this process, to witness human transformation for the purpose of humanization. I teach to be with other people who are growing and developing themselves to be their fulfilled selves. I teach for the joyful and loving power of dignity. I teach to be transformed by my work with students, to grow and to become myself. I teach because it is a moral endeavour grounded in a community of loving relationships. I teach because I am a human being and I thrive in shared human spaces. I teach to be part of something that matters, that helps others and myself. I teach to be a moral human being and an actor in the stream of human history for the good of myself and of my fellow human beings.

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