Revisioning Educational Leadership Through Love and the Ancillary: A Critical Self-Study

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ABSTRACT
Engaging in a bricolage of critical self-study allowed one school administrator to better understand his roles, responsibilities, and formation of identity within the context of a school system while envisioning the divergent possibilities of a yet-to-be-known future through the lens of love. The primary intention of this paper is to discuss alternative possibilities for educational leadership considered through an ancillary vision of walking alongside enacted through pedagogies of love. Pedagogies of love can be understood as more than the embodiment of romantic notions of the word. Pedagogies of love enact relationality: blending care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust. Ever-evolving and situational, these pedagogies are understood as tentative. During the critical self-study process, personal affective experiences were reflexively interrogated to draw out and unpack themes regarding one lived teaching life. Personal positionings, over time, emerged as a crucial part of studying one's self as a means to explicate previously misunderstood privileges. The criticality of this self-study can be found in the ways that the relationships between power, authority, knowledge production, and contextual social relations are illuminated and mediated.

KEYWORDS
Self-study; pedagogies of love; ecological sensibilities; critical study; relationality; educational leadership.

INTRODUCTION

> To understand education, one must love it or care deeply about learning, and accept it
> as a legitimate process for growth and change. To accept education as it is, however, is
> to betray it. To accept education without betraying it, you must love it for those values
> that show what it might become. (Battiste, 2013, p. 190)

Education is political. Regardless of the intention, education inadvertently promotes the status and standing of groups in power and with privilege. Education is the enactment of societal understandings, beliefs, and values. However, while we may envision a possible future through education, enacted education is always entangled within our lived affective history and experience. The structures, curricula, and pedagogies of education come into being through the enmeshed experiences of the past, present, and possible future. When enacted in a good way, education may afford engaging, enlightening, and emancipatory possibilities—possibilities of hope and love. I understand hope to be the unwavering ability to imagine an unknown future. Hope may allow for the possibility of disrupting currently entrenched understandings and beliefs and help us recognize that there may be other ways to view, interpret, or name the world. Markides (2017) suggests, "in a Western worldview 'hope' becomes fragmented and measurable—*acceptable research*" (p. 293), research that is bounded by a history of safe and quantifiable commensurability. In this context, love becomes the enactment of relationality—a responsibility and reciprocity for and to all within a community.

By reflexively drawing-out themes by engaging in the process of a critical self-study in a similar manner to Samaras (2011), I have come to better understand that there are many ways to enact educational leadership in schools, and these enactments are intimately connected to leader paradigms and school culture. Throughout this paper, I will discuss my potentially alternative paradigm and theoretical framework existing in the confluence of the critical and complex and then share the themes that have emerged. Each of these themes could afford for a new, possibly more adequate vision of education—one which contradicts the safety and security of an absolutist and objective education—which is, in fact, social, messy, and interconnected. When we envision schools and educational leadership through a lens of ecological sensibilities and relationality, educators have the opportunity to engage learners in a previously unimagined way, creating possibilities for broadened understandings of knowledge production. This educational leadership vision is non-positivistic and ancillary—leaders as guides walking and learning alongside teachers and students—enacting pedagogies of love.

Locating and Positioning

Absolon and Willett (2005) suggest that "neutrality and objectivity do not exist in research... we write about ourselves because the only thing that we can write about with authority is ourselves" (p. 97). I share who I am with no attempt to hide or remove biases and initiate this dialogue to foster a sense of relationality and trustworthiness with readers. As Kovach (2017) states, "it is not simply about trust in the findings and 'validation of the data'; it is about trust in

the relationship" (p. 224). Therefore, it is up to the reader to make sense of, accept, deny, or struggle with my emergent themes. As Mishler (1990) suggests, "focusing on trustworthiness rather than truth, displaces validation from its traditional location in a presumably objective neutral reality, and moves it to the social world—a world constructed in and through our discourse and actions, through praxis" (p. 420).

I recognize and acknowledge that I enjoy the privilege of working as a school administrator, which will not only bring me credibility with readers who happen to have administrative experiences but may serve to reduce my credibility as a veteran teacher. The perception of trustworthiness is not simply whether the reader has faith in the data that I present. It cannot be that simple. Trustworthiness has to do with how readers will come to trust me. The trustworthiness of the stories that I share begins with the way I choose to articulate them and then concludes with the ways in which readers choose and continue to choose to connect their histories to these stories to make coherence in their understanding. The validity of these stories becomes less about objectivity and more about relationality.

I am a veteran teacher-turned-administrator with diverse K-12 teaching experiences. I began my teaching career as a mathematics and physics teacher in high school and have since taught a wide variety of subjects throughout K-12. I grew up in rural northern British Columbia, Canada, and am a fierce advocate of student inclusion and supporting a balanced approach for student access to fine arts, academics, physical education, and complementary courses. I have a solid connection to nature and land-based pedagogy and have coached and competed in athletics to the post-secondary level. I am a father and husband and am highly influenced by my partner's paradigms and pedagogy. I recognize and understand that as a collective of educators and staff, all schools have unique cultures and histories and, as a result, seek to enact improved practices and opportunities for learners in varied ways. As an educational leader, I continuously engage in critical reflexive practices individually and with colleagues to foster emergent possibilities for students while challenging hegemonic practices.

On Being Critical

Through self-study, I have been able to formalize my current understandings of the criticality of my pedagogy. I align my understandings of criticality with Paulo Freire (1996) when he shares, "to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of fuller humanity" (p. 29). I now better understand that all education and associated pedagogies are political. As a result, the enactment of paradigms and what we believe about students will, in turn, define what possibilities may be afforded through education.

By using the term *critical* and incorporating critical pedagogy, I adhere to the understandings of Freire (1996), Steinberg and Kincheloe (2018), Giroux (2011), and the descriptions that Henry Giroux shares as part of an interview with Tristán (2013).

Critical pedagogy illuminates the relationships among knowledge, authority, and power. It draws attention to questions concerning who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge, values, and skills, and it illuminates how knowledge, identities, and authority are constructed within particular sets of social relations. Similarly, it draws attention to the fact that pedagogy is a deliberate attempt on the part of educators to influence how and what knowledge and subjectivities are produced within particular sets of social relations. (para. 2)

Enacting critical pedagogy thus promotes critical reflexivity whereby teachers and students are challenged to engage in an "investigation of their social location in the world as well as their relationship with the world" (McLaren, 2015, p. 46).

Contrasting Two Paradigmatic Possibilities?

For this paper, I would challenge readers to consider a possibly alternative paradigm that may contradict the historically adequate convergence-focused safety of an absolutist and positivistic paradigm. When enacted in the *best* and most efficient way, this paradigm for education and educational leadership was believed to be predictable and controllable. Alternatively, I put forward a messy, interconnected, and collective understanding of education, where learning and learners may be understood through a more adequate paradigm for the possibilities associated with the multiplicity of cultures, beliefs, and understandings of a social, interactive, (inter/intra)-connected collective and complex humanity. The embodiment of this paradigm I consider to be enacted through pedagogies of love as defined by bell hooks (2001) as the relational enmeshment of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust.

I suggest that educational leaders have the opportunity and the ethical and moral responsibility to evaluate, consider, and challenge how appropriate or adequate their inherited curricula (Tarc, 2011) are within the current and emerging cultural and collective context. Educational leaders are now called upon to make decisions through multiple lenses in a responsive manner that considers the past but creates the opportunity for their transformative work to become tacit and readily subsumable through future iterations of reinvention to disrupt hegemonic teaching paradigms through pedagogies of love.

Doll (1993) suggests that "it is not the individual as an isolated entity which is important but the person within the communal, environmental frame. In fact, the concept of isolated or rugged individualism… is a fiction" (p. 92). The wants and desires and the successes and failures of each society are as diverse as our planet's ecosystems, and no one way to exist can be considered the hierarchical best way. Through transformed possibilities for education, teaching and learning would not be "about convergence onto a pre-established truth, but about divergence—about broadening what can be known and done" (Davis & Sumara, 2007, p. 64). Doll (1993) suggests that such a shift would make it so that "the focus would now be on a community dedicated to helping each individual, through critique and dialogue, to develop intellectual and social powers" (p. 174).

Shifting paradigms would not negate the learning of content; rather, it will require an increased level of richness, recursion, relation, and rigor (Doll, 1993) by considering learning as reflexive processes. Educators who consider this critical and ecological framework may create a space for pedagogies of love—education that is ancillary and not necessarily causative. I hope that all educators may understand that the vision of the absolutist and reductionist teaching paradigms are no longer adequate to support students as they move into uncertain futures. This possible new consideration aligns with Doll (1993) when he suggests that education "is a process—not of transmitting what is known but exploring what is unknown" (p. 155). Therefore, it is the responsibility of ethical educators and leaders to be both dependent and accountable for the unknown.

Doll (1993) also states that "a constructive curriculum emerges through the actions and interactions of its participants" (p. 162). The divergent possibilities of the not-yet-imagined ecological sensibilities may allow students to consider schools as places—no longer disconnected from life outside of school—where vivid memories of community, complexity, and collectivity facilitate long-term connections to the process of learning. Through the embodiment of ethical relationality, Donald (2016) envisions that "people face each other as relatives and build trusting relationships by connecting with others in respectful ways through the embodiment of ethical relationality. In doing so, we demonstrate that we recognize one another as fellow human beings and work hard to put respect and love at the forefront of our interactions" (p. 10). By (re)imagining schools as complex ecosystems, educators and learners may embody the transformative pedagogies of love.

When one comes from a paradigm of control, a certain element of fear exists with an inability to predict or control all aspects of what could happen in the classroom. Alternatively, connected curricula and the associated pedagogies of love, afford for the (re)imagining of education as inherently messy; occasionally uncomfortable; open, biological/ecological, chaotic; meaningful, transformative, empowering, and emancipatory. By considering the classroom as a complex adaptive system, we can enact an ancillary teaching paradigm where classrooms and learning may be understood as collectives that are self-organizing and generative—environments where students with agency adapt and impact their own and all others' trajectories. Considering the actuality of complex understandings of education could require educators to shift their paradigm to recognize the enmeshed nature of the classroom collective—complex relationships that are codependent and often bottom-up. When considered through this alternative lens, Doll (1993) postulates:

> The teaching-learning frame switches from a cause-effect one where learning is either a direct result of teaching or teaching is at least a superior-inferior relationship with learning. The switch is to a mode where teaching becomes ancillary to learning, with learning dominant, due to the individual's self-organizational abilities. (p. 101)

Education embodying and enacting historically adequate paradigms of control, presupposes that teaching effectively prepares students for a known future by *ensuring* that

learning discrete and static pieces of knowledge. Perpetuating these understandings may solidify for students and teachers that content area disciplines or classrooms are mutually exclusive and disconnected. When language that supports absolutist and reductionistic metaphors for students is used, positivist binaries of learning are perpetuated to future generations—leaving no room for acceptable divergent alternative epistemologies. It is important to emphasize that the current hegemonic, positivistic, convergent, data-driven teaching paradigm is but one possibility for education, one of a multiplicity of possibilities for education.

Bricolage and Critical Self-Study

> To know the past is to know oneself as an individual and as a representative of a socio-historical moment in time; like others each person is a victim, vehicle, and ultimately a resolution of a culture's dilemmas. (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995, p. 25)

The multimethodological nature of the bricolage allows for the opportunity to widen one's senses to a divergence of possibilities in inquiry, avoiding the reductionistic tendencies of singular research perspectives. By employing bricolage, researchers are not necessarily tied to the axiomatic foundations of a singular research method and fully acknowledge the complexity and subjectivity of social research.

> As bricoleurs recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive structures of one disciplinary approach, what is missed by traditional practices of validation, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, the inseparability of knower and known, and the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience, they understand the necessity of new forms of rigor in the research process. (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681)

For this reason, social research is not and should not be considered objective. Therefore, it is up to the researcher-as-bricoleur to recognize and embrace uncertainty and messiness within social contexts in the pursuit of robust research. By recognizing their active participation within and onto research, the bricoleur acknowledges their undeniable impact on social research through relationships that allow for their increased expertise in the relationality of power and oppression interior to disciplines.

The bricolage is a process that acknowledges the complexity that has been ignored within social research. The bricoleur works to uncover the interrelated nature of social research, looking toward relationships rather than things (Kincheloe, 2001). This type of research's complex interactions and relationality necessitate the reconsideration of a methodological framework in an active manner rather than a passive and static methodological stance. Accordingly, the bricolage affords what many of us already understand: that "we occupy a scholarly world with faded disciplinary boundary lines. Thus, the point need not be that bricolage should take place—it already has and is continuing" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 863).

SELF-STUDY

Self-study is a critical, dialogical, and relational qualitative research and necessitates an interdisciplinary and responsive methodology that, in this case, affords the honoring and witnessing of an administrator's stories. As a result, no one method can adequately accommodate both the researcher as (emic) insider and (etic) outsider (Innes, 2009) while allowing for the recognition of the emergent nature of social research. Self-study research exists in the confluence of biography and history (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) and the self and other, whereby the researcher situates themselves inside the process (Samaras, 2010). Self-study is "autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political and takes a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known and ideas considered" (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 236). This place of complex, contextual, and irreproducible interactions is at the center of self-study research where the everchanging and evolving space for personal research necessitates us not to focus specifically on the self but rather on the space between the self and the practice and the other.

According to LaBoskey (2004), the characteristics required for self-study methodology necessitate self-studies are: self-initiated and focused, improvement-aimed, interactive, primarily qualitative methods, and exemplar-based validation (pp. 842-853). Similarly, Samaras (2011) suggests a five-foci framework for enacting self-study research where self-study is personally situated inquiry, critical and collaborative, improvement-focused, transparent and systematic, and generative for knowledge and presentation. As the primary participant, critical self-study has allowed me to unpack and reconstruct my affective history to inform my professional and personal identity formation. In turn, I have gained meaning to my pedagogical understandings and made explicit the connections of my practice to theory (Samaras et al., 2004).

Foundational to this self-study research process were the following three possibilities for teaching as defined by Samaras et al. (2004): 1) self-knowing and forming—and reforming—a professional identity; 2) modeling and testing effective reflection; and 3) pushing the boundaries of teaching. (p. 913).

Self-knowing and forming a professional identity is intimately connected to reflexivity and autobiography. By unpacking and revisiting the enmeshed and affective past, I have envisioned a broader possible future. Reflective acts become those of reflexivity when we "consider what is not obvious and what is yet to become because a grounding in personal experiences encourages consciousness and being awake to themselves and to the contexts in which they are embedded" (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 915).

Modeling and testing effective reflection seem to be key to challenging and reimagining the possibilities for education. While there is a great deal of emphasis on self-reflection in preservice teacher training, time and the complexity of teaching life can become barriers to growth opportunities of self-study for practicing teachers and administrators. Through self-study and its autobiographical provocation, we can challenge the perception of the objectivity

of teaching, learning, and knowing and provide opportunities to better know who we are as educators.

Pushing the boundaries of teaching may come from a better understanding of self through self-study. Samaras et al. (2004) suggest that teachers drawing on their personal histories through self-study may "examine the inconsistencies involved in their teaching and showcase their failings so that they and others, especially their students, might learn from their mistakes" (p. 924). Reflection on personal histories may help teachers to understand better the multiplicity of affective histories and associated understandings that students bring with them into learning spaces, in turn transforming pedagogies.

Engaging in critical self-study through a critical and complexity-focused ecological lens allows for the disruption of sacrosanct understandings while broadening possibilities by considering complex connectivities. The recursive and iterative process involved autobiographical writing, interpreting critical friend feedback, and rewriting/reporting. Throughout these processes, I was challenged to (re)consider what I understood about educational leadership and schools as well as my professional identity.

Why Pedagogies of Love?

bell hooks (2001) defines love as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, where all of these characteristics work (inter/intra)-dependently. Weber (2017) states that:

> Love is not a pleasant feeling, but the practical principle of creative enlivenment. This principle describes the way in which living communities on this planet—groups of cells, organisms, ecosystems, tribes, families—find their own identities while also fostering the relationship that they have with others and with the system surrounding them. (p. 6)

Additionally, hooks (2010) suggests that "the loving classroom is one in which students are taught, both in the presence and practice of the teacher, that critical exchange can take place without diminishing anyone's spirit" (p. 162). Love is inherently interwoven within strong professional relationships and care. Darder (2017) suggests that "greater possibilities for school and social transformations can be realized" (p. 96) when we engage in dialogue where love is at the heart of the work.

While there is no question that romantic notions of love exist, through this critical self-study, my intention has been, at least partially, to trouble common perceptions of what love can mean and what pedagogies of love can afford. From the bell hooks' definition of love, I have come to better understand that love can provide room for failure, struggles, and mistakes but ultimately to grow. Richard Wagamese (2016) suggests that:

Love is not always the perfection of moments or the sum of all the shining days—sometimes it's to drift apart, to be broken, to be disassembled by life and living, but always to come back together and to be each other's glue again. Love is an act of life, and we are made more by the living. (p. 151)

As educators of generations of young people, it is our responsibility to (re)consider our understandings of classroom pedagogies with a sense of urgency and humility—(re)focus on a shift toward pedagogies of love. Clingan (2010) shares:

If we humans move beyond the feeling and the fears about love, stretch our minds past our wondering about love, and take our greatest philosophies and thoughts about love to a consistent practical application, that we will see, healthier communities that are filled with and sustained by love. (n.p.)

Enacting a pedagogy of love can allow for an equitable and socially just education which allows for stronger, collaborative, and kind relationships.

Changing Roles of Educational Leaders

Educational leaders' roles have changed greatly throughout the past decades and the impact of these leaders on student learning is second only to those of classroom teachers (Adams, 2016). The roles of school leaders have shifted from a role primarily focused on management toward ones that also include instructional leadership, community engagement, mentorship of new and upcoming inductees, and engagement and consultation with the community. All of these shifts require the enactment of pedagogies of love. Table 1, adapted from Bedard and Mombourquette (2015) illustrates how the roles of leadership have changed and continue to change for educational leaders, and I use indicators of *From* and *Toward* as a recognition of a constantly evolving reference frame.

Table 1. Shifts in Educational Leadership

From	Toward
Compliance based	Capacity building shared commitment and dignity, and focus on mission and vision
Administrative matters and managerial work	Instructional Leadership, relationality, building culture
Loosely connected divisional elements	Robust professional networks
Traditional, top-down decision making	Sharing and collaborating, and more permeable boundaries between district and schools
Narrow data collection	Broader means and acceptance of data collection, specifically around qualitative data
Leadership succession	Focused, standards-based identification and selection
Outside, expert-based professional learning	Embedded professional learning and increased leadership autonomy over school professional learning
Passive engagement of stakeholders	Building relational trust with stakeholder through consultation and increased transparency

The prominent changes that stand out in the righthand column in Table 1 allude to the understanding that community engagement and collectivity are recognized to be drastically more important than in the past. Ultimately, leadership is now, more than ever, pedagogical responsibility and relationality—the art and science of modeling effective practices with learners and communities in an ancillary manner. Through a deeper, more dynamic awareness of (our)self, we may be able to shift pedagogies from those of the "impossible imperative assignment" (Markides, 2018, p. 42). Put differently, educators and educational leaders, through the consideration of an alternative, emergent, and interconnected paradigms "are being asked to consider identity not so much as something already present, but rather as production, in the throes of being constituted as we live in places of difference" (Aoki, 1993, p. 260).

Self-study has allowed for the critical illumination of ways to afford interconnected possibilities in educational leadership. It is this ancillary and ecological sensibility, envisioned as a direct challenge to the reductionistic, fictitious simplification of classroom dynamics that may challenge pedagogies that conjure a singular, prescriptive, and safe understanding of living classrooms—classrooms that are ever-emergent, continually adapting, and divergently redundant. These alternative spaces of the possible and the not-yet-imagined can be fertile locations of growth and change.

EMERGENT THEMES

In this section I will share and discuss a summary of the themes that emerged from the critical self-study process. The themes listed in the following section will read as a summary and short literature review of ideas. Each of these themes has emerged through the overarching framework of pedagogies of love and is based on bell hooks' (2001) definition of love as the enmeshment of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust within the theoretical framework in the confluence of criticality and complexity.

Love and Wisdom

Many of the metaphors for wisdom are related to age and experience, however, these understandings seem to be rooted in love. Cozolino (2013) suggests that wisdom is the way in which intelligences are brought harmoniously together—the synergy of the heart and mind. For Staudinger (1999), those who appear to be wiser are "creative, endorse a judicial, and nonconservative cognitive style, furthermore, are open to new experiences and show personal growth, as well as having been exposed to existential life events and/or to certain professional settings" (p. 660). Wisdom appears to be embodied within a life of love, a comprehensive experience and outlook, an empathetic and kind outlook, an attitude to/for others, and resiliency for personal responsibility toward growth-focused solution attainment. Wisdom is not simply gained through experience, time, or existence.

Becoming wise appears to be more about openness to hearing, witnessing, and envisioning the possible. "While knowledge gives you the capacity to understand what you are

doing, wisdom helps you to attain correct, prudent, and just application of that knowledge" (Cozolino, 2013, p. 209). Wisdom may be about experiencing and then better knowing how to respond in the future because "Knowledge is not wisdom. But wisdom is knowledge in action" (Wagamese, 2016, p. 130). Wisdom can be about supporting others through one's own experiences by challenging how *best practices* rhetorics have evolved to *better practices* and then to *wiser practices*—always evolving. For "it is in the journey that one becomes wise" (Wagamese, 2019, p. 51).

Wisdom in the context of educational relevance can be understood as embodied pedagogical dampening helping us to believe that we are on the correct path to supporting learners and can provide us faith in the pedagogy of love as a means to trust and commit to supporting all learners. Wisdom requires a deep understanding of specific content so that we may be better able to listen to our students through writings and dialogues and truly hear their intentions and not just our own—seeking to listen for contextual meanings and not searching for faults.

Love as Radical Listening

Winchell et al.*,* (2016) suggest that "radical listening involves consciously valuing others by attempting to hear what the speaker is saying for the meaning he or she intends, rather than the meaning the listener interprets through his/her own view of the world" (p. 101). They draw on the teachings of Joe Kincheloe (2008) where they specify that in order to gain critical consciousness, first, one must recognize that, 1) knowledge is contextual and can never be separated from the knower; 2) the ways of knowing we reward as educators reflect what we value; and, 3) in order to re-envision our understanding of the world must listen in value what others have to say about the world specifically those with understandings that vary from our own (Winchell et al., 2016).

Radical listening allows for shifts in power dynamics within schools and requires teachers and educational leaders to be placed into a position where they are not the knower of all information. Decentering power is an act of love and is atypical of what most pedagogical practices and teaching metaphors necessitate. Winchell et al. (2016) challenge that, "it is possible that what might arise from being reflexively aware of radical listening included learning from other, setting aside one's own standpoints, and messing with axiology by intentionally dis-privileging cherished values" (p. 102).

Radical listening requires that we acknowledge the complexity of the messiness of humanity within schools. We must acknowledge what students bring in and what students' lives look like outside of the classroom while incorporating their knowledges into the work that we do every day. Radical listening demands that we acknowledge that students are autonomous beings with motivations and preconceived understandings. Radical listening requires the teacher to be brave and trust in the process of learning where knowledge is not some fixed understanding but rather how we negotiate the way we make sense of the world.

Radical listening allows for moving away from singularity of understanding towards a multiplicity of ways to make sense of ideas and concepts and requires teachers, in a loving manner, to encourage dialogue as a means for transformations. It shifts the privilege of hearing towards the student's intention when speaking. Freire (1996) suggests that:

> Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of profound love. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (p. 70)

Radical listening represents a decentring of the teacher's power, but still allows for direction and focus, by a caring and loving teacher who is a guide rather than the center of attention. This is a shift in a metaphorical understanding of teaching itself toward the ancillary—teachers as guides walking and learning alongside students.

Radical listening is a pedagogy of love when enacted within the classroom where a commitment to the learning process and relationality are prioritized. This commitment respects learners as individuals within the classroom community. Ultimately, "radical listening is thus prismatic in transformative, involving multiplicities of culture, experiences, and self, which works to counter the monochromatic epistemologies and ontologies that are prized by social efficiency and put forth as "universal truths" for all humanity" (Winchell et al., 2016, p. 106).

Love as Relationality

Relationality and trust are intimately interconnected and are enactments of love. As Kovach (2017) suggests, "relationality is a set of values; relationship is the action" (p. 223). When we celebrate differences, we enact pedagogies of love. As we recognize the complexity of relationality when working with other humans, we begin to see that there can be no singular way to understand, learn, or see. This does not mean that we cannot come to similar conclusions but helps us to recognize the infinite pathways we can take towards understandings.

By understanding the tentative state of flux (Kovach, 2017) in which we exist, we may challenge our perception of reality. We do not always have one-to-one means to map our paradigms and worldviews to those of others in order to communicate effectively. It is the recognition and valuing of difference as the place where we can incorporate an ethical relationality (Ermine, 2007) that can allow for dialogues that seek understanding rather than power. Seeing our paradigms as possibly incommensurable to those of others, we can then begin to consider different vantage points. It is this comfort with the discomfort of relationality that will allow us "not to extrapolate but rather to seek situational understanding" (Kovach, 2017, p. 221).

Dwayne Donald (2009) posits, "ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other" (p. 6). As educators interested in shifting classroom practices and pedagogies towards those of love, it is imperative that relationality is at the forefront of our work. Ethical relationality and dialogue

are entangled in a way that are co-implicit. We must seek to understand, hear, and radically listen to value student knowledges and thoughts.

Relationships within schools focused on pedagogies of love require care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, and it is the actions that the teacher carries out and the ethic that they uphold and foster within the space that fosters relationality. This relationality may allow for safe spaces for students to take greater risks which can allow for learning opportunities that transcend learning outcomes occasioning transference to other knowledges.

Love as the Beginnings of Decolonizing Education

> Modern educational thought finds actual human consciousness too messy to be studied, which may account for why youth get the facts but not the discussion of what their own purpose is within the life in which they are submersed. (Battiste, 2013, p. 31)

The education that I received was positivistic, a singularly, hegemonic truth taught through the narrative of racist myths (Donald, 2009)—a post-contact historical narrative. The strength of this education was its neat, orderly, fact/truth-focused absolutism, a form of cognitive imperialism that assumes that the dominant understanding of the world is the only possible, correct, and privileged knowledge that is perpetuated throughout Western society. According to Battiste (2013), when "knowledge is omitted or ignored in the schools and a Eurocentric foundation is advanced to the exclusion of other knowledges and languages, these are conditions that define an experience of cognitive imperialism" (p. 26). Unfortunately, cognitive imperialism will never be an adequate enactment of curriculum, "it denies the fact that human beings have their own ways of being and thinking, their own reasons and motivations" (Biesta, 2013, p. 3).

On a daily basis, caring educators enact the only curriculum that they know—a colonized, familiar, static body of knowledge—in order to help students achieve success in a fictitious known future. The singular colonized vision of success sets up a dichotomous reality of have or have-not, success or failure, normal or deviant. These binaries are the embodied and enacted politics of Eurocentric education and its curriculum which negates the plethora of possible alternative epistemologies. Little Bear (2000) posits, "no matter how dominant a worldview is, there are always other ways of interpreting the world. Different ways of interpreting the world are manifest through different cultures, which are often in opposition to one another" (p. 77). Because dominant culture is the culture that has instituted and maintained a colonized curriculum, it is this same culture that must undergo a transformation in understanding, lens, and pedagogy to decolonize curriculum. Therefore, divergent thinking is required for the decolonization of education.

The colonized curriculum ignores all but the dominant culture's truths and is based on students converging toward the attainment of discrete, measurable, quantifiable targets that are already fully understood—a dead body of knowledge. In this curricular context, students

must be objectively measured. This implies that a specific—often identical—expected behavior has already been anticipated as a measure of the successful attainment of the objective regardless of who the learner may be. Treating each of these learners as identical does not allow for the divergence of thought or variation of process. In this vision of education, deviation is easy to deal with, it indicates a failure on the part of the student that may be fixed. The "desire to make education strong, secure, predictable, and risk-free" (Biesta, 2013, p. 3) is deeply entrenched within the positivist curricular paradigm, however, it does not recognize learners for who they are—complex organisms that act both independently and as part of larger collectives. "It denies the fact that human beings have their own ways of being and thinking, their own reasons and motivations" (p. 3).

Transformations away from a simplistic, predictable, strong, safe, and quantifiable view of education (Biesta, 2013) can be an enactment of love and is decolonial work—a recognition that the persistent view of students as *controllable variables* has never been adequate. In education, students and classrooms are not *simply* related. But to view students non-mechanistically may require a completely different paradigm for curricula—one focused on relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility. Marie Battiste (2013) suggests, "the modern educational system was created to maintain the identity, language, and culture of a colonial society" (p. 30). So, we have caring people doing the best that they know how while perpetuating a continued convergence towards "a single intellectual and spiritual modality" (Davis, 2009, p. 192). How can we disrupt these static colonial paradigms? How can we begin to decolonize curriculum?

To decolonize education, we must begin by recognizing that education and teaching are always political acts and are more complex than previously understood—there can be no generic understanding of knowledges or experiences. Perhaps decolonization of curriculum begins with a recognition of the possible, the awakening to a multiplicity of epistemologies, and an awareness of the divergence of thought that just may be one of many truths. Decolonizing curriculum and classroom spaces is about honoring and celebrating relationality, truly listening to students, and de-centering knowledge structures—it is about enacting pedagogies of love. To decolonize education—to make it inclusive and empowering for all learners—we must recognize the complexity of learners and their lives; we must understand that all learners come with their own affective histories, aspirations, motivations, desires, and goals. Decolonization by enacting pedagogies of love "depends crucially on the extent to which we believe that education is not just about the reproduction of what already exists but is genuinely interested in the ways in which new beginnings and new beginners can come into the world" (Biesta, 2013, p. 4).

Pedagogies of love may foster emancipatory classrooms that "offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst" (hooks, 1994, p. 11)—a catalyst for hope, opportunity, and empowerment. School must be a place that recognizes the multiplicity of literacies and the multiplicity of narratives, one that rejects the singular

understandings of colonial education, one that nurtures students' aspirations and strengths, one that is supported by masters of their craft that facilitate the empowerment of *all* learners. This education needs to be experiential—an education that recognizes "that our experience is always incomplete" (Greene, 2013, p. 137).

Decolonizing the curriculum, according to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), "does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory and research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views from our own perspective and for our own purposes" (p. 41). It is not a complete rejection of the oppressive norm, but rather a divergent transformation that subsumes current pedagogical beliefs. Decolonizing curriculum and classrooms require teachers to enact pedagogies of love whereby they better know students for who they are and walk alongside them on a journey of coherence and understanding. For Little Bear (2000) "One of the problems with colonialism is that it tries to maintain a singular social order by means of force and law, suppressing the diversity of human worldviews" (p. 77). The risk of decolonizing education is that society will recognize the complexity that exists—complexity that is divergent, messy, and self-sustaining. By valuing the multiplicity of epistemologies, education may become more inclusive of all learners—supporting coherence of world-curricula (Lessard et al., 2015) and fostering acceptance of diverse worldviews.

The work, according to Greene (2013) for "teachers is to stimulate an awareness of the questionable, to aid in the identification of the thematically relevant, to beckon beyond the everyday" (p. 138). As educators, our every day must be spent realizing and normalizing decolonization, together. Shifting practices and pedagogies to ones that emphasize possibility and love. It is the work of brave educators as guides, to delve into the unknown of the not-yet-imagined, working alongside students to make these changes possible. Perhaps decolonization of education is about seeing education for what it can be—to afford hope for *all* learners through the embodiment of pedagogies of love.

CONCLUSION

Through this critical and reflexive personal history self-study I have identified the themes that I feel define my current identity-in-progress as an educator and administrator. Over my life, my paradigm has evolved from a passive, positivistic, predetermined recognition of the world towards that of an ecological, caring, relational, and interconnected world-in-flux—a symbiotic world where the human and more-than-human (Abram, 1996) world are irreducibly enmeshed. I feel that if educators and administrators can reconsider their understandings of education through a sense of wholeness, embodying pedagogies of love, education may well become the catalyst for societal growth and change. The themes drawn out through the process of self-study were love and wisdom, love as radical listening, love as relationality, and love as the beginnings of decolonizing education.

By looking further than statistics and effect sizes and considering the wholeness of learners and their affective experiences, education may possibly achieve substantially more

than it was ever intended to do. "When we act from love the results transform for the good. With love our laws can change, our systems can change, and we can in fact begin to heal the world" (Clingan, 2010, n.p.). Life preparation—a known, predictable life—is no longer the purpose or intention of school. Pedagogies that serve as a catalyst for social awareness, decolonization of curriculum, and social change should and can be the hope and possibility of education—ancillary possibilities.

Pedagogies of love can be understood as more than the embodiment of romantic notions of the word. Pedagogies of love enact relationality: blending care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust. Ever-evolving and situational, these pedagogies are tentative and can help students in understanding *who they are is as important as what they understand; and what can be shown on assessments*. This shift in pedagogy presents the possibility for students to better understand their interconnection and inherent responsibilities to others and the world. Students can be motivated to see the beauty of the messiness that is the enmeshed complexity of society and the human and more-than-human worlds.

Rochelle Brock (2005) suggests that "when education targets wholeness of being…individual and collective transformation happens" (p. 94). Education that prioritizes the ethical engagement of students and respects their academic well-being while winning their hearts and souls will prove to support social change. bell hooks (1994) is adamant that by teaching "in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (p. 13). By departing from the safety of the oppressive rational ideal of an already imagined future we can consider a future through a pedagogy of love that is not yet imagined—a place of the possible.

Ultimately, the self-study has emerged as *a story* of impact and possibility—perceptions of the subtle perturbative evolution of leadership and teaching paradigms for the transformation of pedagogies from reductionist and positivist towards enmeshed and relational ancillary possibilities of love. As Kahn and Kellner (2008) suggest, "education, at its best, provides the symbolic and cultural capital that empowers people to survive and prosper in an increasingly complex and changing world and the resources to produce a more cooperative, democratic, egalitarian, and just society" (p. 25). I believe we deserve this society.

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