

Article

Classrooms as Sacred Space: Structures for Holistic Teaching and Learning Practices in Higher Education

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Abstract: This article explores the notion of the classroom as a sacred space, through the lenses of Indigeneity and Waldorf-inspired practices to examine the ways pedagogical practices create spaces for learning and holistic well-being. Using a series of qualitative ethnographic studies highlighting courses at higher education institutions in Arizona and Minnesota, this article examines student reflections on experiences within the courses and curricula. Student responses point to conceptions of the course “rituals” that fostered emotional and mental wellness and contrasted these to courses in the “real world” that did the opposite. The article concludes with reflections on structures within the classroom and implications for teaching and learning.

Keywords: indigeneity; Waldorf-inspired; teaching; learning; higher education

The experience of sensing places, then, is thus both thoroughly reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic. When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anybody’s guess (Basso 1996, p. 107).

The truth is, you don’t have to live in a quiet place to know the Infinite (Bailey 1996, p. 38).



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1. Introduction

This article explores the notion of the classroom as a sacred space, through the lenses of Indigeneity and Waldorf-inspired practices, to examine the ways pedagogical practices create spaces for learning and holistic well-being. Utilizing ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979), analysis of classroom artifacts such as class evaluations, unit assessments, paintings, drawings and other artistic representations (Saldaña 2013) and field notes and conceptual memos, this inquiry explores the experiences of students at a number of college and university campuses to examine their experience of the pedagogical approaches described here. In the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences within a classroom taught using Indigenous-based and Waldorf-inspired methodologies (Oberman 2008). Reflecting on their time in class, students noted the significant differences in their experience of the course in question as compared to their other, more traditional, didactic courses. These previously documented reflections (Muñoz 2016, 2021) noted the multiple forms of engagement within the course and their impact on student focus, desire to engage in course content, and overall sense of well-being.

The incorporation of Indigenous-based epistemologies and knowledges, combined with structures of Waldorf Education—though seemingly incongruous—has found resonance in a number of Indigenous communities, including the Lakota Waldorf School in North Dakota and The Everlasting Tree School in Ontario. Teachers, administrators, family and community members of these schools frequently reflect on the similarities between Indigenous and Waldorf systems with the focus on the sacredness of the student (Muñoz 2021). As one teacher at the Lakota Waldorf school noted:

We feel that the Waldorf method of education is in harmony with our own traditional holistic approach. The Waldorf motto—receive the child in reverence, educate him in love, send him forth in freedom—reflects closely Lakota values and the respect for each child’s sacred mission on Earth. (Lakota Waldorf School 2015)

Exploring how these Indigenous epistemologies and Waldorf education “reflect closely”—and the implications for creating a classroom space—requires careful attention to complementarities and congruences without promoting assimilation and erasure.

Using a series of qualitative, ethnographic studies highlighting courses at higher education institutions in Arizona and Minnesota, this article examines student reflections on experiences within the courses and curricula. Student responses point to conceptions of the course “rituals” that fostered emotional and mental wellness, and contrasted courses in the “real world” which did not. The article concludes with reflections on structures within the classroom and implications for teaching and learning.

2. Positionality

Before shifting to the remainder of this article, it is important for me to take space to share who I am and the way that my identity shapes my relationship to this article and its ideas. I am following the history of my academic ancestors and relatives to draw attention to the multiple identities of myself as a researcher, to highlight the “visible . . . and invisible tools” to show “how culture is strategically . . . used” (Reyes 2020, p. 220). This is especially necessary when researchers write about race, culture and Indigenous epistemology, to foreground how social positions shape, and are shaped by, interactions with power and privilege (Reyes 2020).

My identity as an Indigenous (Yaqui) and Mexican-American person plays a direct role in how I live, teach and learn. I was born and raised in what is colonially referred to as “Arizona” and now live in what is colonially known as “British Columbia” As a teacher educator, I work to develop pedagogies for future teachers to recognize concepts central to Indigenous experiences. This is a critical step to my anti-racist and critical Indigenous literacies approaches (Muñoz 2022). In spite of being far from the homelands of my community, I work—and try to teach how—to develop and practice affinity and allyship to Indigenous Peoples, while simultaneously acknowledging an outsider status.

3. Indigeneity, Spirituality and Resisting Neoliberal Logics

The notion of a classroom as a sacred space is something many Indigenous communities would find both comprehensible and plausible. The epigraph from Keith Basso at the beginning of this article points to the Western Apache conception of place as carrying sacred wisdom, while Brendtro and Brokenleg, in their Circle of Courage Framework, note that “spirituality is infused into the learning environment” a significant departure from the “dominant culture (that) contradicts important spiritual beliefs and traditions” (Brendtro and Brokenleg 2001, p. 43). For many Indigenous communities, the sacredness of place, including the classroom, is a foregone conclusion. “Education and spirituality are not separate from, but intimately interwoven into, the fabric of daily living” (Brendtro and Brokenleg 2001, p. 43).

This Indigenous lens of the spiritual nature of the classroom space must be understood as a function of both Indigenizing and decolonizing institutional spaces. In an Indigenizing and decolonizing approach, the organization of pedagogical time in the class seeks holistic learning experiences for students which are authentic, experiential and enjoyable. Battiste (2013) recognizes and affirms the “learning spirit” (Battiste 2013, p. 180) of students, and this spirit guided the approaches to curriculum and pedagogy design. Maori scholar Alice Te Punga Sommerville describes her course development process as centering Indigeneity and Indigenous students, noting that “if I build the course with Indigenous student well-being in mind, it is good for everyone else, too” (A.T.P. Sommerville, personal communication, 7 October 2022). This Indigenous well-being is grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and knowledge systems that are decolonial (Kauanui 2016;

McKay et al. 2020), where “human connections are central” and can “critique settler colonial and neoliberal logics” (Museus and Wang 2022, p. 16). Building course experiences where Indigenous norms are central are key to transforming learning spaces to places that nurture and support holistic wellbeing—including the spiritual—that transmutes the mundane to sacred and “cultivates the heart” (Shirley 2022, p. 13) that is healthy and unoppressed.

4. Spiritual Learning and Sacred Classrooms

Some non-Indigenous communities and scholars, notably, Nel Noddings and Parker J. Palmer, have written extensively on the spirituality of teacher education (Palmer 2003a), the potential for education providing spiritual formation (Palmer 2003b), and the potential growth from this (Halford 1999; Noddings 2008). Waldorf Education has also demonstrated significant attention to the spiritual life of children (Finser 2001; Petrash 2002; Richards 1980) as well as considering the inner work necessary for teachers to successfully engage with students (Steiner 1919, 1920). Most of this research and theory has focused on individuals in the classroom, namely, students and teachers. Waldorf Education engages concepts of composition and aesthetic experience of the classroom space itself, though almost exclusively for the purposes of Waldorf schools. One significant area for growth and development then—and the one most crucial for the field of teacher education—is conceptualization of the classroom as a sacred space, particularly in response to more traditional, didactic classrooms (Brendtro and Brokenleg 2001; Museus and Wang 2022; Naylor and Naylor 2011). The course described below seeks to offer a vision of this work, illustrating examples of sacred space of the classroom in ways that teachers can take up and implement in their own ways. This exploration and practice offers the possibility to “open minds to the intellectual and emotional possibilities in religion and spirituality” (Noddings 2008, p. 186).

The particular focus on Waldorf and Waldorf-inspired education emerges as both personal and professional. Developed in Europe in the early 1900s, Waldorf education was formulated and implemented through the work of an Austrian philosopher and educator, Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), who articulated the education in response to the violence of World War 1 (Oberman 2008). While the personal connection to Waldorf education has been described elsewhere (Muñoz 2016) the professional interest stems from Waldorf connections to Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (North America) and to various levels of incorporation. In exploring the connections between Indigenous schooling and Waldorf and Waldorf-inspired education, one consistent theme that emerges is the centering of the spiritual life of the child as an area of agreement between these two seemingly disparate educational approaches (Muñoz 2021).

In teacher education practice, the significance of shifting perspectives to conceptualize spaces of teaching and learning as sacred is paramount, especially because the teacher workforce continues to be overwhelmingly white-European ancestry. Engaging teacher education as one facet of a decolonized humanities is one method to support a more pluralistic teacher workforce attending to educational practices that resist colonial impulses, and honor the sacred in every person, each in their unique way. As Battiste (2013) points out, teachers must play a role as knowledge builders to support the transmission of local Aboriginal knowledge, to make “a tremendous step forward in advancing cognitive and knowledge pluralism . . . in building a more inclusive society” (Battiste 2013, pp. 116–17). Battiste calls for our work as teacher educators to critically question the mainstream, to ask “whose is the main that is streamed? Whose experiences are normalized as center?” (Battiste 2013, p. 107).

Embedded within this questioning is the consideration of the entirety of a person. This includes the work of social emotional learning and its application to students (Sam et al. 2015), the attention to embodiment as a function of well-being that has brought forth numerous programs such as meditation and yoga in the classrooms, and, as is argued here, the need to engage practices that strengthen and develop the community of learners.

From an Indigenous perspective, this requires the development and sustaining of connection and relationships, which builds mutual interdependence and practices of reciprocity, and leading to establishment and creation of trust, mutual care, and a collective concern. From a Waldorf perspective, this means engaging in curricular practices which attend to the multiple faculties of students, whether through the use of story, the incorporation of play, art, music, and daily rhythmic class structures to maintain a student's wellness (Petrash 2002). The teacher's work also incorporates these holistic practices, including the regular meditative practice of teachers to develop a deeper understanding of students and the collaborative college of teachers that governs every school. In many ways, both Indigenous and Waldorf systems maintain the holistic well-being of the individual in community as the focal practice of pedagogy and curriculum (Petrash 2002).

In the course explained here, the development of community amongst students to facilitate well-being, trust, and connection was the foremost consideration. The work of the course was a secondary consideration. Though certainly the content was a necessary engagement, it was not the means to an end. Rather, it was a medium for a practice of developing a sacred space within an institution.

5. Indigenous Community, Waldorf-Inspired vs. "The Deadly Dull"

The remainder of this paper explores spaces for classroom reimagination through the incorporation of structures which emphasize connection, artistic expression, and community building, structures which assume—and hope to cultivate—the spiritual wellbeing of students. This classroom reimaging, the sacred in the everyday (Bailey 1996), also provides an important counterpoint to pedagogies and curricula students are more familiar with: didactic structures, depersonalized classrooms, an over-emphasis on objectivity, and an ethos derived from neoliberal and market ethics (Muñoz 2018b). The course highlighted here was designed to provide students with opportunities to engage in learning structures that seek to resist schooling in the "cult of efficiency" (Callahan 1962), the "school as factory" (Rist 1973), and a "culture of competition" (Goldman and McDermott 1987). As early as the 1960s, education scholars identified a problematic influx of neoliberal and market driven logic within the classroom that applies the rationale of economics and free-market capitalism to the ecology of the classroom, in ways that are often deleterious to students and teachers. Rather than acknowledgement and building from the lived experiences of people, these neoliberal teaching approaches emphasize quantitative results, standardized approaches and assessments, and individual achievement versus collaborative problem solving (Muñoz 2018b).¹

One area where there is some overlap in the 'market as ethic' approach and the 'reimagination' approach is in the space of developing "rituals" in the class, defined here as predictable and repetitive structures of classroom experiences. From the market as ethic approach, the implementation of classroom rituals facilitates efficiency of time and movement for the teacher, to allow for more time on content. These structures are not necessarily malevolent; these predictable and repetitive movements can be significant supports for younger students as well as neurodivergent students and students faced with the anxieties and traumas of modern life. A common Waldorf aphorism, rhythm replaces strength, speaks to the supportive power of 'ritual;' in the classroom. The incorporation of predictable and repetitive activities for students in this course became a series of rituals. The regular processes—composed of poetry-based opening and closing of the class, Indigenous-based circle work, intentional community building, communal and collaborative art practices, and open discussion—were perceived as distinct from the "deadly dull" (Kearsley 1998, p. 47) practices students were familiar with in their other courses. Student interviews highlighted the differences of their experience in the classes utilizing these guiding principles and structures, describing the space as being communal, friendly, embracing, and enjoyable (Muñoz 2016).

In order to more fully explore student's experiences of the course in question, samples of student language from interviews are presented here. Student reflections pointed to the

significance of these course structures in supporting their well-being in class, to engage them in ways their traditionally delivered, didactic classes did not, and to foster the development of authentic and genuine community in a classroom setting (Muñoz 2016). Two student examples, from Tara and Grace (all student names are pseudonyms), students in a college-level reading course, illustrate a sentiment that many students shared: the importance of connection and unification fostered through the course structures. During the interviews, Tara and Grace were asked about each of the structures of the course, and they reflected on the ways the structures impacted them personally, on other students, and on the class as a whole. When asked to reflect on community building work of the class, both Tara and Grace referenced the regular kinaesthetic games with beanbags as a point of reference. These exercises included movement, name recognition and memorization as a means to teach names, to teach students about each other's lives, and to build cohesion through shared experiences. Tara reflected on the ways that the game supported learning in the course overall:

I think the bean bag games kind of helped the discussions . . . we had to learn each other's names and learn specific things about our classmates [so] when you're in discussions and in class, you can't just insult somebody . . . you almost become friends with everybody in the class . . . it almost becomes a family.

Similarly, Grace noted the value in the community that was built through the games:

learning each other's names, starting to get a little personal . . . and kind of a community with these people that I had never even met before. It was very fun . . . I loved the new class. And it was just like "well, welcome!" (Muñoz 2016, p. 127).

Both Tara and Grace's responses connect to the conception of the sacred space of the classroom, the affirmation of the learning spirit that is "holistic," "experiential," and "communal" (Battiste 2013, p. 181). This one activity produced diverse benefits for the students, who noted the experience of community building that supported content engagement in the class ("helped the discussions") while at the same time fostering a positive affective experience ("I loved the new class").

6. The Academy and the Spiritual: Sacred Sites of Indigenous Knowledge and Waldorf Education in the Classroom

Beyond educator's perennial search for the so-called best practices, the structures employed in this course were an attempt to remake college level courses in fundamental ways. This approach was communicated explicitly to students through the syllabus and in introductory material on the first day of class, to inform but also to provide an opportunity to opt out. Sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, students were informed of the structures of the course: experiential learning centered in conversation and dialogue, the centering and privileging community building, and time for artistic play, to help students orient to the humanizing pedagogies of the course (Fránquiz 2012; Franquiz and Salazar 2004) that also values the unique contributions and wisdom students bring with them to the classroom. Indigenous epistemologies and knowledges and Waldorf-inspired education centers the individuality of the child, which includes their unique spiritual experience in the world, and the course structures built on this belief, with the hope that the structures would create the best possible conditions for emotional, psychological, academic, and spiritual creativity and expression.

In the following section, three key structures of the course will be highlighted: the incorporation of Indigenous circle and story work, activities for community building (such as the kinaesthetic name games) and the use of art as play and creative expression, all of which formed the basis for the sacred space of the classroom.

6.1. Indigenous Circle and Storying: Opening Space by Opening Hearts

Santa Clara Pueblo Tewa scholar Dr. Gregory Cajete (2015) articulates the foundations of this course reimagination, connecting notions of Indigeneity, community, education,

and the essence of being human. He notes that “relationship is the cornerstone of Indigenous community, and community is the place where we learn what it is to be related” (Cajete 2015, p. 23). Relationship and community are the foundations of Indigenous ways of being in the world and are the genesis of personhood the “nature of relationship, responsibility and participation in the life of our people” (Cajete 2015, p. 23). This conceptual map can be illustrated through the circle—like the medicine wheel—which reflects archetypes of the world and human beings, as “it reflects the aspects of human nature: physical, mental, spiritual and emotional (Cajete 2015, p. 10). Organizing community with and through circle is not additive, it is not a best practice or pedagogy to deploy; “community is the medium and the message” (Cajete 2015, p. xiii) and circle is a framework by which to practice being in community.

This framing of circle and community through an Indigenous lens is crucial to counteract the erasure that often occurs when circle work is incorporated into classroom spaces. Circle discussion and circle work is often connected—or attributed—to Restorative Practice and Restorative Justice movements, rather than to a much older tradition of supporting healthy and positive outcomes for Indigenous communities, as well as others most negatively impacted by carceral structures. Multiple texts teach the structure and practice of circle work (Kay 2019; Pranis 2005; Zehr et al. 2015), with a number of resources specifically for the incorporation of circle work in schools and classrooms (Boyes-Watson and Pranis [2015] 2020; Evans and Vaandering 2016; Riestenberg 2012). Some of these texts provide a context of circle work, acknowledging and honoring the Indigenous histories of circle work in Turtle Island (North America) and Indigenous communities in West Africa (Davis 2019; Pranis 2005; Valandra and Hokšila 2020). However, circle work is frequently employed with no mention of its Indigenous roots on Turtle Island. It is crucial for practitioners of circle work to develop a practice that acknowledges and celebrates the Indigenous origins and influences of this practice, particularly in relation to reconciliation work here in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015).

Boyes-Watson and Pranis ([2015] 2020) note the significance in grounding circle work as an intentional engagement of Indigenous practices, philosophies and ways of knowing. These are communicated, implicitly and explicitly, through the structure of the circle, the events that occur within the circle practice itself, and the residual effects following the completion of circle work. By focusing on relational work and relationship development, the classroom can transition from a didactically dominated, banking model of education (Freire [1970] 2005) to a space that values the “interconnectedness of all things [where] every part of the universe contributes to the whole and is equally valuable” (Boyes-Watson and Pranis [2015] 2020, p. 28).

One practice within circle work implemented in this course, and familiar to both Indigenous communities and Waldorf educators, is the incorporation of story as a pedagogical tool (Petrash 2002). Story was engaged as a consistent practice during circle work to further community development within the class. Circle work emphasizes story as rapport builder for vulnerability, honesty and relationship building (Boyes-Watson and Pranis [2015] 2020; Pranis 2005) and storying together was a medium for this. As one student noted in an informal, written evaluation:

Personally, I enjoy this class. It’s the only class out of all of my classes that makes me feel comfortable. And the only class where I actually know everyone’s name. I think one of the most important “concept” we do is the talking circle. It makes me get to know everyone on a deeper level. (anonymous student, personal communication, 22 October 2019)

This storying approach, allowing students to directly engage in dialogue together to develop community and cohesion, is a crucial step in creating an environment of openness. This openness contributes to a transformed classroom where sacredness and connection are the primary objectives, where learning, teaching and engaging together is not didactic, but communal and humanizing.

6.2. Community Building: Intentional Activities for Connection and Community

At the beginning of each class session, students engage in some movement activity, where, in circle, students would toss beanbags to each other and recite names and facts like favorite colors or songs. Students might also toss a small soccer ball to each other and ask questions related to class readings or concepts discussed in a previous course. These activities reinforced the creation of a warm and friendly tone in the class. By having all of the students know each other's names, rapport could be established, which supported more vulnerability, honesty and intimacy during our class discussions. The movement games also served to counteract persistent assumptions that college courses are tedious, strenuous and largely unenjoyable affairs to be tolerated (Muñoz 2018b). One student, Kaileigh, reflected on this structure in the class as being important for alertness and a sense of community:

I like that we start class untraditionally. I enjoy how you are trying to break school system stereotypes. I think a lot of us will bring that back into our own classrooms/jobs. By starting class with bean bags, it helps me wake up and be more alert for class. I also like how we have to learn everyone's name, because that is very important. (Kaileigh, personal communication, 23 October 2019)

Another structure incorporated into each course session was an opening and closing verse, a structure familiar to Waldorf schools, and somewhat familiar in public schools in school recitations of the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States. Taught as an anchoring point to developing Waldorf teachers and incorporated as a foundational tenet observed in Waldorf classes across the U.S. (redacted-, 2016), opening and closing verses are described as learning structures that promote an atmosphere of unity and collaborative experience. The verses provided a practical structure as well, signaling the beginning and ending of the class and as well providing a buffer for students arriving after class officially started. The value of these poetic recitations was beyond the practical, however. The opening and closing verses were specifically chosen to connect to themes of the course, and the poems offered students a moment to engage in language play and oration, without expectations of flawless performance or evaluation.

Reflections on the use of the poetry and verses in class elicited many different responses. One student, Olivia, described the verses in the beginning and ending of the course as completing the class, saying the recitation "brought the class together . . . it was kind of like a 'hello' and 'goodbye' for the class." Other students also recognized that the verses created an atmosphere of familiarity and community. Amelia noted that recitations inspired openness, speculating: "let's say you forgot to recite the opening and closing verses . . . I would think that we would be more closed off. Not able to really open."

The community building within the course was also incorporated within the major working components within it, namely, reading, writing and dialogue. These core components of the course were also facilitated with the intent of developing student engagement and connection to the class and to others in the class while offering the opportunity to engage in conversations regarding philosophical concepts like love, God, justice and death (Muñoz 2018a).

6.3. The Sacred Spaces of Art and Drama

In Waldorf education teacher training and professional development, the importance of art as a primary and valuable mode for instruction is frequently communicated (Muñoz 2016). Following the lead of Waldorf teachers and teacher trainers, artistic practice became a central structure of the course. A regular practice of art, consisting of at least 30 min per class session, included visual art and drama as mediums of practice. As with the kinaesthetic and storying circles, the inclusion of visual and dramatic art components served multiple functions; while having the opportunity to deepen their engagement with texts and concepts, students would also have the opportunity to engage in play as pedagogy, a necessary opportunity to foster their creative and imaginative capacities

(Toliver 2022). Many students, reflecting on their experience with artistic practice, noted fear and trepidation, followed by excitement and enthusiasm. Olivia noted an initial terror, predicated on a negative self-evaluation of artistic ability, followed by excitement. Chloe described a sense of excitement on learning about art practice in the class; upon seeing the art materials being distributed, her thought was “yay! [laughs] I get to draw. I haven’t drawn with crayons in so long!”

Petrash (2002) describes the importance of art as a component of learning, connecting it to the development of student’s affective awareness and ability. He writes of his own experience of seeing how “artistic activities help children to become emotionally engaged in the learning process . . . [making learning] “a whole-hearted activity . . . upon which solid academic work will rest” (Petrash 2002, p. 60). This emotional engagement, a crucial function of well-being for students, also supported deeper learning of concepts of the course, as the art fostered time and space to “actually think” and provided “better understanding” by stepping back from the materials according to Chloe (Muñoz 2016). Art practices also contributed to a healthier class environment, as students noted a sense of equality and relaxation in the courses, countering neoliberal constructs in the classroom which drive competition and efficiency (Muñoz 2018b). Emily described the equality of artistic production from all students as fostering a sense of solidarity, noting a lack of self-consciousness in engaging visual art because “every single other person in the room was doing the exact same thing . . . and probably wasn’t going to look artistically good, aesthetically pleasing . . . so that made it better.”

7. Evaluation

Student evaluations provide valuable insights into teacher practice, and, when engaged meaningfully, can provide direction for pedagogy and curricular decisions. As the course developed over time, student feedback from formal and informal evaluations influenced the direction of the course. Often, student feedback and evaluation drew attention to the particular structures that were selected for community building as key to their success and enjoyment of the course. Students reflected on how circle, for example, was the most important element of the class, helping them to know their colleagues on deeper levels, or how circle contributed to community and relationship building. Students also wrote frequently about the benefit of being given space to breathe, to relax into the class work through circle. As one student remarked in a written evaluation of a class:

I found myself able to remember and learn the way I learn best. I think I will be a better teacher because of this class by remembering how to engage students. This class allowed connection with peers and focused on the individual within the community. (anonymous student, personal communication, December 2019)

A frequent question for students in the final evaluation of the class was “what worked well for you this semester?” Often, students responded with “circle” and “storying” as crucial to their success and engagement in the class. A recent set of course evaluations noted an appreciation for the focus on classroom culture, with a directive to continue with circle to “keep holding the classroom culture high in priority,” as one student wrote (anonymous student, personal communication, May 2020). Starting with circle work, another student wrote, was helpful for “grounding ourselves in the class” (anonymous student, personal communication, May 2020) while another commented that circle and storying “were effective for social emotional learning” (anonymous student, personal communication, May 2020), while another student cited circle work and storying as two means for cultivating a sense of community and belonging, which supported their engagement and learning of the class content.

While these examples are anecdotal, they provide useful points for inquiry into student experiences of classroom practices and structures that specifically seek to develop a culture of relationship, connection, and well-being and the reimagining of the classroom as a sacred space that nurture and welcome students.

8. Conclusions

In Foucault's essay "Docile Bodies" (Foucault [1975] 1977), he outlines the multiple institutions of society by which power struggles are fought and negotiated, in order to produce a more controllable populace. These institutions include the military, prisons, hospitals and schools. The conception of the classroom, when viewed through this Foucauldian lens, constructs a space for docile bodies, where the classroom, the teacher-student relationship, and the school/community connection are rife with constant power struggles for compliance. Rather than spaces for growth, expansion and liberation, schools become instruments of manipulation and control and reduce all of the members of the community to one-dimensional beings.

Turning towards a vision of the classroom as a sacred space, models from Indigenous education and knowledge systems and Waldorf-inspired education can inform and support our practice in reimagining. Our schooling spaces can be places where educators can engage with the whole persons in front of us, where the "understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (Tuck 2009, p. 416) supersedes organization of learning through lenses of efficiency and standardization (Muñoz 2018b). Tuck's call for desire-centered approaches that account for "the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities" (Tuck 2009, p. 417) is a crucial transition for educational practice. The hope and wisdom of students is apparent when we explore holistic visions of students, and in particular, seeing to their emotional and spiritual growth. Pedagogy and curricula offer spaces for transformation, but a fundamental question remains: what of the underlying principles which organize schooling structures, such as discipline and behavior management?

In teacher education, one of the most frequent inquiries from students is a request for techniques and approaches to classroom management. Frequently, these requests stem from experiences within the classroom of attempting to deliver content information while attending to varying levels of student engagement and attention. Teacher candidates lament their inability to effectively maintain student interest while content delivery occurs, and teacher candidates frequently seek behavior modification approaches to support content delivery. In inquiring about classroom management, teacher candidates inadvertently reference actions more accurately defined as control and manipulation: the creation of the docile body.

Teachers are in a bind however: while charged with the communication of information and knowledge from content areas like mathematics, science and literacy, they must also be prepared to develop the atmosphere where this content can be optimally delivered, which requires management techniques. While content delivery is one critical part of teacher work, it is important to challenge and critique a mindset that frames teaching activity as a space for controlling minds and bodies, rather than as spaces for learning and liberation. The too insistent focus on classroom management tools to ensure efficient and timely delivery of content not only dehumanizes students but contributes to a neoliberal logic which disconnects students from the totality of their own beings in favor of standardized and efficient solutions.

What if our mode of engagement transformed questions of control and docility to conversations of protocols of being together in sacred space? Indigenous communities frequently describe protocols for many aspects of being, from protocols of sharing stories to protocols for approaching elders for knowledge. What if our question of classroom management was answered through the lens of protocols, and specifically, protocols of being together? (R. Moyer, personal communication, 6 December 2022). This might encourage teachers to consider multi-faceted views of students rather than the one-dimensional articulations frequently communicated through structures like citizenship grades or disciplinary measures like detention or expulsion. Considering classrooms as sacred spaces, where the beings of students are seen as complex rather than simplistic, where student identity goes beyond the physical and the emotional to the more complex would require a reimagining of space and protocols of being together. Protocols of being together pro-

notes community building, relationship, vulnerability and intimacy rather than simplified evaluation and designation of students through simple numeric performance. These are familiar considerations within alternative schooling spaces such as Waldorf (Childs 1991) but are frequently unheard of in public schools, which frequently serve Black, Indigenous and People of Color and other marginalized students, those most in need of humanizing and holistic approaches in schools.

The reconsideration of teaching in schools is one part of the reimagining necessary for creating strong schools in strong communities. Schools can serve as vital spaces for the well-being of a community, particularly when they extend beyond the common practices which isolate schools and teachers. In this isolation, schools are often conceptualized as tools of social control rather than as sanctuaries for knowledge and holistic development. We must, and our schools must also, move towards models of being that centralize community and well-being. This must include considerations for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of students. To be clear, this does not imply religious or spiritual instruction or dogmatic communication. But rather, this consideration is an acknowledgment of the entirety of young people and a willingness to create schooling spaces that foster their inner capacities. Doing this can create environments where students can thrive and expand their experience and support their well-being. This reimagining can be true for k-12 systems as well as higher education.

Ceremony is education. It is a classroom. It has a curriculum that is legislated by natural law.

Our ceremonies were central to our original education system

(Ezoza 2021, November 28).

For many Indigenous communities, ceremony was, and continues to be, the modality of education: the content, the curriculum and the pedagogy. Ceremony deals with the essential questions of life, of living with each other, living with both human and non-human relatives, and living in balance with the world. As Ahenakew (2019) explains, the work of ceremony is an intentional engagement by people as extensions of land and place, in an effort “to re-activate our sense of entangled relationality that will show us that we are interwoven in (rather than with) each other” (Ahenakew 2019, p. 15) to foreground relationships to land and to each other. Classrooms can engage curriculum and pedagogy in service of this goal, with proper attention to the vast and complex composition of all people within the learning community, with attention to the health of the body, mind and inner being.

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Note

- ¹ It should be noted here that engaging in the classroom structures above does not indicate an educator practicing malevolence or intentional mistreatment of students. Nor should one assume a teacher who resists ‘the market as ethic’ is automatically engaging in spiritual and sacred assumptions of students and the classroom. There is far more complexity than a simple dichotomy.

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