



Picking up the Journey – Indigenous Education in a Changing Environment

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Situating self and context of presentation



PSE Today

- Impact of the pandemic, school experience for K-12, PSE
- Issues faced by students:
 - Connectivity
 - Access to resources at home (books/materials needed/issues of accessibility, family/parents for engagement & assistance)
 - “Stories abound of Canadian children who, one year into the pandemic, have limited bandwidth, are using old technologies, and are functioning without microphones or earphones” – many homes have multiple users in limited spaces
 - Low attendance, disengagement, social & emotional well-being impacted
 - Disruptions lead to a decrease in school completion
 - Impact remains uneven and inequitable; larger gaps with students who have been historically disadvantaged in the system
 - <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/learning-our-way-out-of-the-pandemic/>

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- Mental health impact
 - Higher levels of grief due to loss of family members
 - CMHA, nation wide study (2020) “found Ontarians are experiencing more anxiety, stress, sadness, depression, substance use and suicidal thoughts than respondents in other provinces...increased domestic violence” and self reported ratings of mental health has decreased over the pandemic
 - “Some groups are more likely to report declining mental health: • Young adults aged 18-24^{2,3} • Indigenous peoples² • Individuals belonging to 2SLGBTQ+ communities² • Individuals who use more substances³ • Female-identifying individuals^{2,3} • Those with pre-existing mental or physical health concerns” (CMHA, 2020)
 - Impact is exacerbated for FNMI where we already contend with higher levels of stress, health issues (Indspire, date unknown)
 - Overall, documented rise of racism during the pandemic – Anti-Indigenous, Anti-Asian and Anti-Black racism in particular
 - Impact on communities/individual of the residential schools and the location of graves
 - Culminates in ongoing trauma and impact of daily racism



Understanding the Context of PSE

“One of the **primary tools of colonialism** was the education system, and one of the more known forms of violence perpetrated by white settler society on Aboriginal peoples was enacted through the residential schools system”
(p.49)

- Mainstream education for Indigenous peoples has been a central part of colonization – often marked by violence
- In addition, consider the PSE classrooms are one site where narratives or colonial history are told
- As well, it is also a site where Indigenous students come to view & hear accounts of historical events
- Many Indigenous students experience challenges in PSE classrooms when they are expected to listen, talk about, and engage in narratives about their own history – these difficulties arise in the context of dynamics of the classroom



Research on Racism in the Classroom

- ▶ **Most profound finding was the extent & pervasiveness of racism that Indigenous students confront and negotiate**
- ▶ Esp. profound and painful **in mixed classrooms** where narratives of colonial violence are discussed
- ▶ Range of emotive responses inc: sadness, anger, shame and embarrassment

- ▶ Indigenous profs & students alike are constrained with negotiating both culture and identity
- ▶ Important to know that Indigenous students **also have a range of strategies to resist** ongoing colonialism and racism not self-identifying, accessing safe places including supports, raising critical consciousness, and acts of active resistance


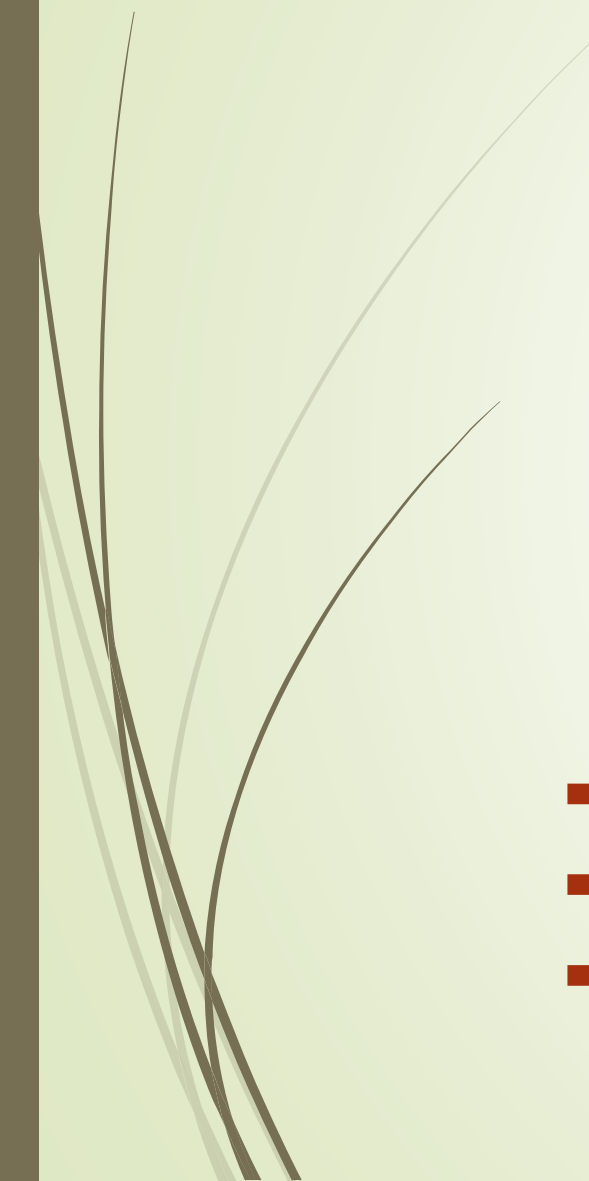
Well-being


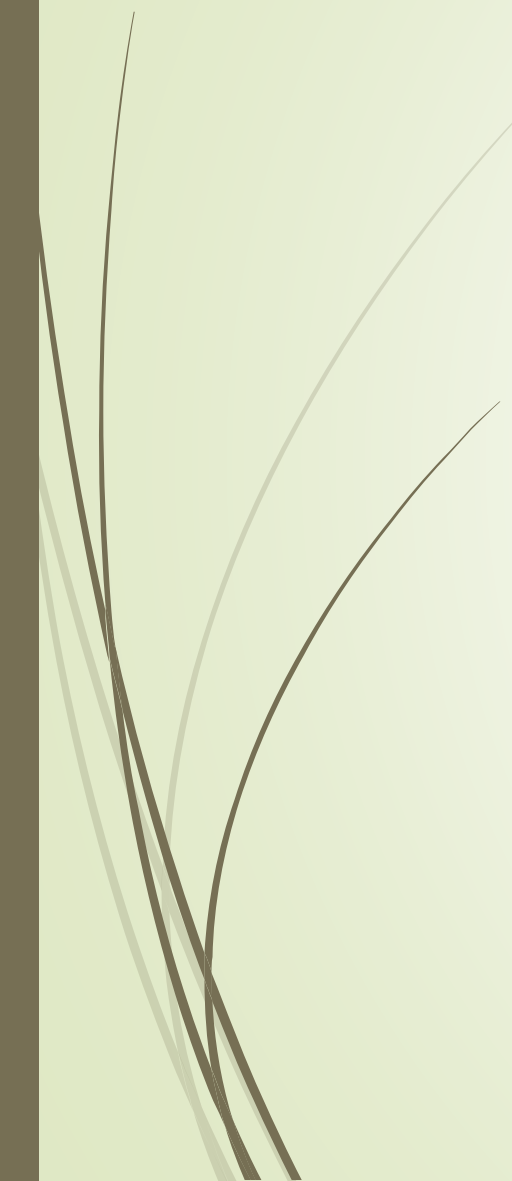
- Personally, need to understand how the context of how a sense of well-being is affected inc. how colonialism affects everyday experiences (led to my earlier research on Indigenous student/profs in the classroom)
- How colonialism manifests in systems like PSE (rooted in racist ideology) and results in extreme inequities
- The pandemic has intensified these inequities
- Uneven access, etc.
- Strain/stress levels on individuals, families and communities
- More recently we are seeing an increase in workplace exhaustion



How can we support students in this new reality?

- Mitigate impacts of the pandemic
- “Don’t act like its business as usual”
<https://www.edcan.ca/articles/learning-our-way-out-of-the-pandemic/>
- Acknowledge and validate experiences
- Its ok not to be ok
- Strengthen connections with/between communities to add supports for students overall well-being including mental health supports, academic supports - it can be incredibly important for Indigenous students to connect with other Indigenous peoples
- Encourage/build opportunities to “catch up”
- Look for opportunities to provide/partake in added summer learning programs

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- ▶ Looking at what institutions are able to provide, what's available there?
 - ▶ Are Indigenous students services available? Who and what? Ceremony, Elder support, safe space, a sense of belonging, academic supports, how do they reach out to students?
 - ▶ Linking students to those supports, are we doing a good job of linking to communities?
 - ▶ Visiting students in PSE on site if possible/coffee zooms; add mechanisms to increase communication to students
 - ▶ Available grief supports
 - ▶ Safety plans for domestic violence
 - ▶ Physical health is important, online walking groups etc

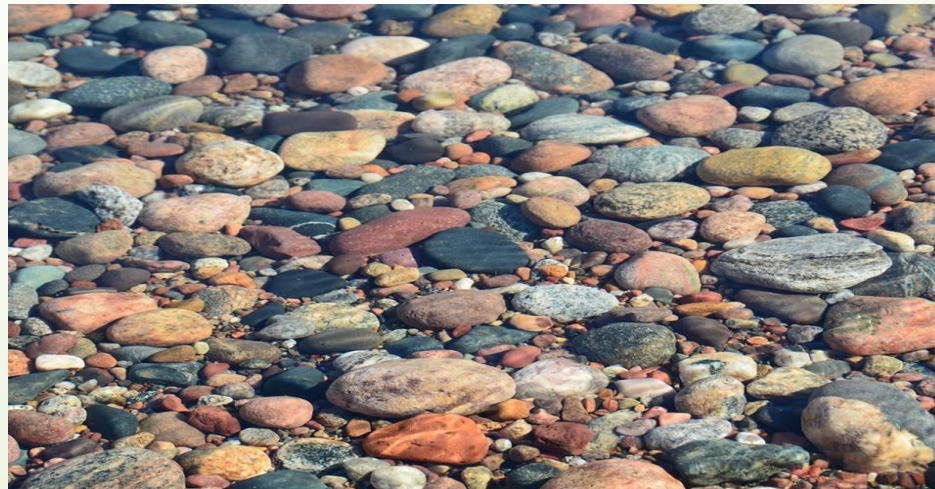
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- “Picking up the journey” provides an opportunity to acknowledge the strain and stress we all feel
 - An opportunity to understand the new realities students are contending with
 - An opportunity to build strategies for success and resilience
 - An opportunity to strengthen our “communities” of practice and “communities” of support

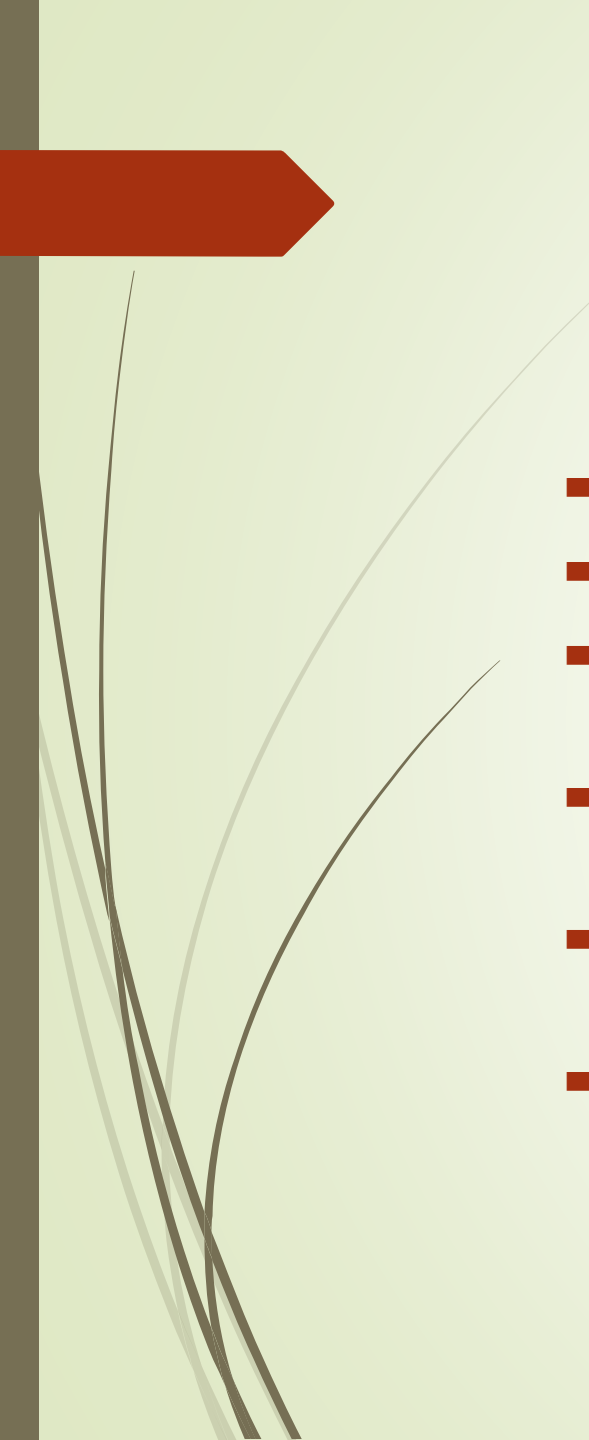
I know our ancestors faced many challenges.
I know we all face many challenges in this ever-changing world.

I know the stories and dreams of my ancestors.
I know my ancestors made a commitment to survival and living.
Every day I get up in this ever-changing world and recommit to living.

Every day I get up and I recommit to living well and building a better world!

Miigwech!



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- <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/learning-our-way-out-of-the-pandemic/>
 - Canadian Mental Health Association (2020)
 - Cote-Meek (2014). Racism, trauma and resistance in post-secondary education. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
 - Indigenous Post-Secondary Learners and the COVID-19 Pandemic (date na). Indspire Research Nest.
 - <https://indspire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/COVID-19-Ind-Student-Report-Final-EN-WEB.pdf>
 - <https://counselling.students.yorku.ca/scd-covid-19-resources>