

## **My teaching philosophy statement: Anti-oppressive, decolonizing teaching**

I am a white settler occupier and a cisgender, heterosexual, educated woman who is currently abled, neuro-typical, middle-aged, and middle class. I live in Amiskwaciwâskahikan in what is colonially known as Treaty Six territory and Métis Region 4. I deeply respect the diverse Indigenous Peoples who have been here since time immemorial and have spent much of my adult life working to understand what it means for me to live in Indigenous sovereignty. I extend this respect and affirm difference along lines of race, culture, nationality, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ability, age, economic status, religion, level of education, and more. To my very core I am an anti-oppressive social worker who has, over my career working in the homelessness support sector and in post-secondary institutions, actively sought ways to challenge my social work practice. It is to remain congruent and authentic that I bring this anti-oppressive, decolonizing lens to teaching social work (Campbell, 2002).

Academic institutions can mirror and replicate the oppressive dynamics of society as they “transmit ruling ideologies” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 36). Neo-liberal influences in education are oriented to maintaining the status quo and can lead to a waste of opportunity as students from a range of backgrounds and with diverse identities struggle to feel engaged, supported and valued, limiting their contributions. Without their diverse inputs, opportunities to challenge dominant white supremacist social work discourses can be lost, along with the emancipatory potential in post-secondary social work education (Valcarlos, Wolgemuth, Haraf and Fisk, 2020). Thus, it is crucial to use anti-oppressive theory as a lens through which to understand classroom dynamics, including power relations; to teach about oppression; engage in my own ongoing critical self-reflection; and use anti-oppressive tools to engage ALL students as active participants in their own and each other’s learning.

Decolonizing is a continual process of unearthing, challenging, and shifting the ways in which colonization has attempted (and attempts) to impose a euro-centric worldview. It is about surfacing assumptions and beliefs and the ways in which they are learned (Nahanee, 2020). Decolonizing is rooted in Indigenous wisdoms, value systems and worldviews in Canada and globally. The concept has evolved out of diverse colonial contexts, both historical and contemporary and is geared towards restoring Indigenous sovereignty and understanding our respective relationships to the land and the original people of this land, whether we are a settler, a displaced Indigenous person, an unwelcome or a welcome guest (Hernandez, 2022; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Many post-secondary processes are colonized and grounded in Western values of competition, hierarchy, individualism, independence, rigidity, and separation. It is imperative to explore ways to decolonize such processes and make space for Indigenous (and other) collectivist or communal worldviews, scholarship, and students.

It is a challenge for me to understand what decolonizing entails; every aspect of my being has been colonized. My work is to learn from my Indigenous teachers, from Indigenous knowledge keepers, and Indigenous and other diverse students, and to do my best to unearth where my practices are grounded in rigid Western values and remain open to alternative perspectives and approaches. Most important for me is grounding my teaching in relational accountability to students, to my peers, to the larger community, and to the institution. Ultimately, I believe that good teaching honours students for the wisdom and experience they bring to learning; engages students in discovering and exploring their own passions, directing their own learning, and the co-creation of knowledge; and instils in students the value of ongoing, continual learning throughout their social work careers.

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