**Abolition & Decolonization as Pedagogy and Practice**

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*What if abolition isn’t a shattering thing, not a crashing thing, not a wrecking ball event? What if abolition is something that sprouts out of the wet places in our eyes, the broken places in our skin, the waiting places in our palms, the tremble holding in my mouth when I turn to you? What if abolition is something that grows?*

*(Alexis Pauline Gumbs 2008:145).*

*Decolonization demands the valuing of Indigenous sovereignty in its material, psychological, epistemological, and spiritual forms. (Aman Sium, Chandni Desai & Eric Ritskes 2012: 11).*

**Introduction**

There’s this scene in the *Netflix* series *Dear White People* (2017) where a conflict breaks out at a house party on the campus of a fictitious Ivy League school and Reggie, one of the lead Black characters on the show, ends up with a gun pointed at his face by a university police officer. This incident causes Reggie significant trauma and, in the process, opens the audience up to the life and death politics and carceral realities of the education system for Black students. By carceral realities, I am talking about the systemic and all-encompassing ways in which young Black people’s lives are circumscribed by their relationship with mechanisms of state coercion (i.e. police, social workers, school administrators). This means that seemingly mundane activities (i.e. a small argument, sleeping on a bench on a university campus[[1]](#footnote-1), going to class) can result in an escalating interaction between that person and at some point an agent of the carceral system that can have significant consequence on their lived experience (including trauma, violence, incarceration, having children removed from their custody, and death). In fact, a recent study has showed that the primary cause of death of young Black men in the United States is killing by police officers (Edwards et al. 2019).

Later in the show Reggie and other students in the Black caucus (as well as the audience) discover the police were called by a white Teacher’s Assistant named Gabe who is a romantic interest of Sam, one of the show’s lead Black female characters. In the process of calling the police, Gabe sees himself as trying to return his school to *peace* after conflict between Black-led anti-racist activists and a group of students mobilized by the rhetoric of the white supremacist alt-right. A foil for white liberalism, Gabe, (consciously or unconsciously) works to secure the context of carceral violence against Black students on campus in the interests of stability and order, the hallmarks of peace within liberal democracy (Coulthard 2014). In *Dear White People* Gabe and other white students on campus (whether representing left or right on the political spectrum) are, as Harney & Moten (2013) exemplify in their analysis of the films *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) and *Shaka Zulu* (1987), portrayed as being surrounded by “natives,” inverting the role of aggressor so that acts of upholding or reproducing colonialism and white supremacy are made to look like self-defense (17).While *Dear White People* is a fictitious television series, the themes underlying the show are prevalent and familiar to racialized and Indigenous students on university campuses throughout North America and more broadly within all aspects of the education system.

This chapter contends that our pursuit of peace in the world must always be attuned to issues of justice and that re-imagining an education system outside of the structures of settler colonialism, white supremacy, and the carceral system requires that we not only teach about these concepts in the classroom but work to transform and shift our learning environments to align with these visions (Wang 2018; Grande 2004; Cote-Meek 2014; King 2016; McKittrick 2014).  What does an abolitionist and decolonizing pedagogy look like?  This chapter explores the radical possibilities that emerge out of movements in support of migrant justice, Black liberation, and Indigenous decolonization within, against, and beyond the limits of the secondary and post-secondary education systems in Ontario.

Drawing on campaigns like Education Not Deportation, Education Not Incarceration, and the continued work to respond to the call to decolonize and unsettle our education system, I argue that peace is a tenuous and precarious social condition that is always in the process of becoming. This process requires the dialectical work of grassroots struggles that both resist the current structures of oppression and open up space for prefigurative possibilities to take hold.

This chapter offers three fragmented case studies where students, educators, parents, and others mobilized as part of radical social movements to re-imagine the education system outside its carceral, white supremacist, and settler colonial limits as examples of abolitionist and decolonizing pedagogy and practice. Fragment one draws on my personal experience as a member of No One Is Illegal-Toronto organizing the Education Not Deportation campaign (Villegas 2017; Fortier 2013) to implement an “access not fear” policy in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools in Ontario. Fragment two analyzes the work of Education Not Incarceration, a Toronto-based grassroots organization of educators, parents, journalists, and community members that recently mounted a successful campaign to remove the presence of armed and uniformed police officers from the largest school board in Canada (Madan 2016; Morgan 2017). Fragment three draws on organizing at various university campuses around projects and activities that seek to take leadership from Indigenous communities, educators, and students on the possibilities and practices of decolonizing the academy.

The chapter concludes on a hopeful note arguing that, as Meyerhoff (2019) suggests, formal education is only one among many alternatives to learning and study and that there are various forms of abolitionist and decolonizing practices that are intersecting currently in secondary and post-secondary education in meaningful ways.

**The Carceral & Colonial Logics of Education**

The carceral and colonial logics of Ontario’s system of education exist within and beyond what is commonly described as the school-to-prison pipeline (Meiners 2007; Annamma 2016; Maynard 2017). As Meiners & Winn (2010) explain, the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor is used to explain how young people are shaped by the school system as being ‘superfluous’ to education and instead in need of surveillance and containment. They state, “School suspensions and expulsions are moderate to strong predictors of future incarceration that disproportionately impact youth of color” (273). These disciplinary measures are shown in both Canada (see Maynard 2017) and the United States to disproportionately target Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other youth of colour and to have a significant impact on their educational, social, and life outcomes.

In the *Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator (2014-2015)*, Howard Sapers finds that while eight percent of Torontonians are Black they make up more than twenty seven percent of those who are carded by Toronto Police. Moreover, Indigenous and Black youth make up both the largest and fastest growing (respectively) incarcerated populations in Canada (Sapers 2015). In expanding on the important work of scholars who have shown how government policies directed towards youth in schools increases racialized students’ exposure to the criminal justice system, Sapers’ report statistically confirms the link between increased surveillance and carding and the school-to-prison pipeline for both Black and Indigenous communities (among others).

This chapter makes the argument that, as currently constituted, education, criminal justice, and human and social services in Canada are rooted in logics of settler colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and other forms of power that undergird the stability of the liberal democratic settler state.[[2]](#footnote-2) This means that past injustices are not simply historic events, but actually structure the very institutions (i.e. schools, prisons, child welfare, courts) that we place our faith in when trying to deal with problems of racism and social injustice (Wolfe 2006). As Wun (2017) suggests, “Schools are part and parcel of a… logic of punitive carcerality, positioning Black and Brown bodies under constant observation and scrutiny through the school’s architecture, policies, and practices” (1). Educators, administrators, and students themselves function within the school system to police, discipline, and enact state-imposed punishments (Rodríguez 2010).

For Rodríguez (2010:8), “the massive carceral-cultural form of the prison has naturalized a systemic *disorientation of the teaching act,”* so that the role of teaching is often seen as inseparable from the punitive functions described above. In this respect, teachers serve the function of training front line workers, middle managers, administrators, intellectuals and potential inmates within the prison industrial complex, clarifying that this is the case “whether the classroom is populated by criminalized Black and Brown youth or white Ph.D. candidates” (Rodríguez 2010:10). They also practice such punitive practices in their classrooms whether it is related to surveilling tests, penalize students for late assignments, or engaging in microagressions in their lessons (Hogarth & Fletcher 2018). In the era of neoliberalism, the increased precarity and disposability of both teachers and students creates a context that heightens these disciplinary roles in ways that limit academic freedom, negate the ability to engage in deep learning, and make peripheral pedagogical frameworks that centralize the experiences of racialized students (King 2015; Meyerhoff et al. 2011).

The school system also functions as a site of white possession (Moreton-Robinson 2015). As Geonpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains, the sovereignty claimed by settler states like Canada and Australia are founded on patriarchal regimes of property that justify the illegal acts of possession which is “most acutely manifested in the form of the Crown and the judiciary, but it is also evident in *everyday cultural practices and spaces*” (58, *emphasis added*). Through its possessive logic, the education system in settler states like Canada and the United States is one of these everyday cultural practices and spaces that is entwined in the colonial violence of dispossession and assimilation of Indigenous peoples. This violence is enacted through the *act of teaching* (Cote-Meek 2014)*,* through the *carceral nature* of forced education in spaces like residential schools (Regan 2010), through *corporal punishment* and abusive scientific experimentation on Indigenous students (Mosby 2013), and through the *construction and expansion* of state-run education institutions on Indigenous lands (La paperson 2017).

Following, La paperson (2017), the *nom de plume* of anti-colonial scholar K.Wayne Yang, we should not regard the school as a monolithic institution but rather an assemblage of technologies. These technologies comprise physical structures, pedagogical approaches, administrative protocols, legal jurisdictions, but perhaps most importantly teachers, staff, and students. So, while the foundations of the Canadian school system are rooted in the histories and institutions of carceral and settler colonial violence, there also exist within (and outside) of the school abolitionist and decolonizing actors and spaces. La paperson describes these actors as, “decolonizing dreamers who are subversively part of the machinery… [but, who] wreck, scavenge, retool, and reassemble the colonizing university into decolonizing contraptions” (xiii). This chapter seeks to present some snapshots of these spaces of subversion within academic institutions in southern Ontario.

**Abolition & Decolonization as Pedagogy and Practice**

An oft-used slogan in political rallies in North America asserts, “No Justice, No Peace!” and this particular chant has been running through my mind as I work on this chapter. How do we speak about peace in the education system without recognizing the primacy of struggles for justice? What does it mean to teach peace-building if we are not also teaching how to disrupt the carceral and colonial foundations of settler states like Canada and the United States? In the opening chapter to this book, Bird & Ewert give us three key approaches to peace-building within the university, including: evidence-based science and truthful communication; a strong commitment to fostering and developing the capacity for rigorous thinking; and encouraging each academic discipline to excel in their specific areas. While I agree with the fundamental importance of these approaches, this chapter argues that peace-building must also occur through the disruptive and uncomfortable process of struggling for justice within, against, and beyond educational institutions in our society.

In this respect, we must not simply promote and encourage various disciplines to *excel* in their specific fields of study, but teachers and students must also be willing and able to *disrupt, resist, and transform* injustice where it inevitably emerges within our fields of study and research. The process by which we build peace must be a disruptive and regenerative process or else we risk simply fighting for stability and maintaining the structures of power that currently exist within academic institutions and broader society. Indeed, Harney & Moten (2013) argue that our work within the university must be a force of disruption. Emphasizing the importance of this disruptive work they exclaim, “We are disruption and consent to disruption. We preserve upheaval. Sent to fulfill by abolishing, to renew by unsettling, to open the enclosure whose immeasurable venality is inversely proportionate to its actual area, we get politics surrounded. We cannot represent ourselves. We can’t be represented” (20). These assertions are not simply aspirational but speak to the work of thousands of teachers, educational staff, and students throughout the education system (and those thrown out by the same system) who engage in actions that seek (and often succeed) in disrupting the *status quo.* As La paperson (2017) suggests, these actions account “for the permeability of the apparatuses of power and the fact that neocolonial systems [can] inadvertently support decolonizing agendas” (xv). These actions can include formal campaigns like those of Education Not Deportation and Education Not Incarceration, but they might also take place in less formal ways through resistance, skill-sharing, foot-dragging, protests, public shaming, and outright disruption of official processes like those currently underway at many universities that purport to be engaging in some form of “reconciliation” or “indigenization” without appropriate guidance or leadership from Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and communities.

The fragments below give examples of how actors within the carceral and colonial machine of education create opportunities to change the content, approach, and epistemologies of our pedagogies in the classroom. They also examine how these same actors move beyond promoting changes in the content of what we teach to re-imagining an altogether new academic practice. This is happening in many different ways and is being influenced by a multitude of social justice movements. However, in this chapter I focus specifically on abolitionist movements that target the carceral system in its various formations (i.e. anti-Black racism and the Prison-Industrial-Complex; xenophobia and the context of border imperialism) and decolonizing movements that assert Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence within and beyond academic institutions. When I am discussing pedagogy, I am referring to the content of what is taught in the classroom and also the techniques, approaches, policies, and cultures that we collectively create as teachers, students and staff in this pursuit. When I am discussing practice in this chapter, I am referring to the activities, techniques, opportunities, and processes by which the education system is constituted, disrupted, regenerated, and transformed on a broad social level.

**Fragment One – Education Not Deportation – Access to Education as a Principle of Abolition**

The school system serves as one specific site where the physical border of the nation-state is reproduced within the everyday lives of racialized migrants (McDonald 2009). As Walia (2013) suggests, the enactment of the border in our daily social sphere works to characterize undocumented migrants through a lens of criminalization. This process serves to reinforce the carceral logics of the education system and uphold the expansion of sites of detention, apprehension, surveillance, and containment in Canada. Despite specific language in Section 49.1 of the *Ontario Education Act* that guarantees all students under 18 years of age the right to access education regardless of their immigration status, the uneven and at times contradictory application of this law creates a situation where migrants with precarious or no immigration status in the province fear registering their children in schools, face the potential of detention and deportation if their status is revealed to the Canada Border Service Agency, and experience risks and barriers to accessing the full extent of class curriculum (Aberman et. al. 2017; Villegas 2013).

These carceral logics can be enacted in mundane and bureaucratic ways such as the refusal to process a student’s enrolment papers without proof of permanent residency or the use of forms that require citizenship information (Sidhu 2008), but they may also be enacted through the violence of state apprehension. Such was the case on Thursday, April 27, 2006 when immigration enforcement officers from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) entered Dante Alighieri Academy in Toronto and apprehended fifteen-year-old Kimberly Lizano-Sossa and her fourteen-year-old brother Gerald. These apprehensions set off a series of contentious events that wedged the struggle of undocumented migrants in Ontario’s schools into mainstream consciousness and became the foundation for the Education Not Deportation campaign in Toronto.

Following these apprehensions, a coalition of teachers, students, and clergy from Dante Alighieri Academy, members of the Latin-American community in Toronto, trade union activists and political organizers associated with No One Is Illegal-Toronto formed to support the family and attempt to free them from detention and stop their deportation. The coalition organized an email chain, multiple in-class presentations at various Toronto high schools, and a candlelight vigil that amassed roughly 150 people outside of the Rexdale Immigration Holding Centre to fight against what they characterized as a violation of the rights of the Lizano-Sossa students to education by the CBSA. These mobilizations were successful in securing the release of the two children (and eventually the entire family) and the campaign shifted to resist the Lizano-Sossa’s pending deportation and toward the eventual push to implement an “access not fear” campaign in Toronto schools. As Villegas (2017) notes, “The Coalition’s efforts became the catalyst for the development of the ‘Students Without Legal Immigration Status Policy’, also known as the Toronto District School Board’s Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy (DADT)” (1184).

The campaign was bolstered by pedagogical shifts made by many teachers in secondary and post-secondary education in Ontario that moved away from teaching about Canada as a harmonious place mediated by the principles of liberal multiculturalism and toward one that emphasized the struggles of racialized peoples within the nation-state (Walia 2013; Fortier 2013). As Abji (2018) explains in her study of feminist migrant justice advocates in Toronto, a more nuanced understanding of the limits of teaching official “multiculturalism” in schools led some teachers towards a more clearly anti-racist/anti-border politics – one that emerged in their classroom teaching.

For Villegas (2017), this pedagogical shift was nurtured and refined through the practice of the Access Without Fear campaign in Toronto schools which had a dramatic impact on how the notion of “access” was itself contested in the process of pushing for a policy that would bar immigration enforcement from apprehending students in the classroom. Villegas (2017) argues, “There is a lack of conceptual clarity in the ways policy implementation addresses the root causes of social exclusion. Specifically, research and liberal discourse regarding the ‘availability’ of social services for undocumented migrants often invoke the word ‘access.’ As a result, the conceptual boundary of access has often been limited to ‘entry’, ‘enrollment’, or the right to use a particular good” (1185-1186). Instead, members of the coalition sought to encourage both a broad understanding of what access meant for undocumented students (including economic, social, political, and safety concerns) and how access was predicated on resistance to the carceral encroachment of immigration enforcement officers in schools.

Drawing on an interview conducted with Danielle, a long-time member of No One is Illegal-Toronto, Villegas shows how members of the Education Not Deportation began to expand their notion of access towards a clear refusal of immigration enforcement in schools. Danielle explains, “it was imagined as a means to organize people locally in order to develop community power that could ostensibly grind the wheels of Immigration Canada to a halt by having people in various spaces throughout the city refuse to cooperate with immigration law. We would be able to build a long and broad movement that would be about status for all but under the guise of access for all” (Villegas 2017:1187). This disruption of the normative enforcement of immigration removals within the education system acted to both refuse state enactments apprehensions for the purposes of deportations in schools and to push back against the limited concept of “access” and its meaning in broader society.

Through these two processes, those involved in the Education Not Deportation campaign were practicing aspects of peace-building. This included connecting movements against Canada’s role in imperialist military and economic policies in places like the Middle East, Haiti, and Latin America with the precarity of undocumented students in the classrooms and the fight for legalization, what members of the group referred to as “regularization from the ground up” (Mishra & Kamal 2007). This process also developed a framework for students and teachers to reconceptualize their places of learning as sites of resistance to racist border policies and spaces of imagining new forms of relating to one another, what the group referred to as “building a sanctuary city” (McDonald 2009). This process demanded that all people should feel safe in their communities and that accessing schools is not simply about gaining entry to them, but also creating an environment where students do not fear the possibilities of detention and deportation in the very act of accessing education (Villegas 2017). Education Not Deportation has seen a number of successes over their decade-long struggle, but the process of creating a safe and welcoming environment for undocumented students to access education is ongoing, including from within post-secondary institutions. These struggles are part of a broader movement that seeks to reconceptualize access as part of an ethos of how we wish to live in our cities within, against, and beyond the laws that currently govern immigration policy.

**Fragment Two – Education Not Incarceration – Safety in Schools as a Principle of Abolition**

Education Not Incarceration (ENI) in contrast to Education Not Deportation is a project that emerged out of the experiences of teachers and students within Toronto-based high schools around a specific initiative, the Student Resource Officer program, rather than as a response to an acute event (Morgan 2017). The SRO program was introduced in Toronto in 2008 following the killing of 15-year-old Jordan Manners in his school’s hallway. As Madan (2016) explains, “in the media Manner’s death quickly became a product of his culture, of the crime-ridden community where he came from, despite the fact that levels of crime and victimization at Manners’s high school at the time were comparable to random samples from other high schools across the city” (35). It was in this climate that the proposal to install armed police officers in specific Toronto schools through the Student Resource Officer program was given clearance. Although, numerous studies and provincial reviews that proposed alternative responses to youth violence were available (Noguera 2003, Abebe & Fortier 2008, McMurtry & Curling 2008) the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Police Services Board worked quickly to implement the SRO program (Rushowy 2008; Rushowy & Henry 2008).

Police officers were concentrated in schools that the city identified as “priority areas” which include a disproportionate number of neighbourhoods that housed large concentrations of migrant and racialized residents (Chapman-Nyaho et al 2012; Madan 2016). The prioritization of these neighbourhoods was articulated through a lens of bringing peace and safety to areas where children and youth were labelled “at-risk”, which James (2011) argues is a euphemism for factors of race, gender, class, immigration status, etc. in which the city and the school boards sought to assert social control. This characterization creates a context of surveillance in these communities and the develops a narrative (using coded language) to assert that some students remain a continual threat to school safety and others require greater measures of protection. This potential threat justifies an overreliance on discipline and punishment in schools in urban areas that serve predominantly working class people of colour, what Shedd describes as the universal carceral apparatus (Shedd 2015). Thus, rather than understanding the youth in this case as vulnerable they are characterized as predatory and requiring further surveillance (Wang 2018). The SRO program in Toronto started with the express goal of improving school safety, something that a number of empirical studies showed it had not been effective in doing (Madan 2016), necessitating the Toronto Police Services to re-frame their work around improving the relationship between students and police (TPS 2009; TSP 2011). This revised goal included SROs taking on extra-curricular work that teachers no longer had the capacity to undertake.

As a political response to the SRO program and its justification mechanisms, ENI is rooted in a politics of abolition, aiming to re-imagine the schooling experiences of racialized, particularly Black, Indigenous, and undocumented youth, outside of the carceral logic that characterizes contemporary public education in North America (Meiners & Winn 2010). ENI argued that this relationship-building approach was a veiled attempt to increase surveillance and carcerality of racialized and other marginalized youth within the school system. For ENI, they saw the elimination of the SRO program as a critical disruption to the school-to-prison pipeline, and an important step forward in the direction of liberation, hope, peace, and justice in education.

The campaign engaged with the mainstream media, used social media, community education, deputations at the Toronto Police Service Board and other forms of outreach with community to push for an abolitionist vision of education that did not always fit into the narratives that might have been easiest to win (including reforms of the SRO program itself). As Madan (2016) argues, “With respect to school-based policing in Toronto, the very existence of the SRO program depends on the active maintenance of an official narrative that warns of perpetual threats to school safety” (44). For members of ENI, it became integral to re-assert a conception of safety in the school system outside of the logics of carcerality being promoted by the Toronto Police Services and some school trustees. In an effort to counter the mobilizations against the SRO program, the Toronto Police Services mobilized their media efforts around a discourse of relationship-building and pointed to their work in creating trust with youth, with police union head Mike McCormack urging, “we need to build bridges, not tear them down” (Khandaker 2017). Relationship-building is highlighted as the central objective for a number of SRO programs throughout North America. A report funded by federal research grants by Professors Linda Duxbury of the Sprott School of Business and Craig Bennell in the Department of Psychology at Carleton University observed that 100% of their interview respondents with the Peel Police noted that relationship-building was the most important part of the SRO program. The report states, “All of the Staff Sergeants we spoke to agreed that the most important activities of the SRO related to building strong positive relationships between the Peel Police and the high school communities operating within Peel Region. More specifically, all agreed that it was critically important that the SRO spend time interacting with students, liaising with staff, and acting as a mentor and a resource to students and staff in the school to which they were assigned” (Duxbury & Bennell 2018:172). The report, which the authors stated included data from 1,3000 Grade 9-10 students at five diverse public and Catholic high schools, 8 Peel police officers who work as SROs and dozens of school staff and members of the community, concluded that SROs were “overwhelmingly positive” for student well-being, reducing student stress, risks of bullying and harm, and improvements in attendance and student feelings of safety (Gordon 2017). However, parallel studies conducted by the TDSB themselves (2009, 2011) as well as other independent researchers (Na & Gottfredson 2013; Eklund et al. 2018) suggest that there was no difference between perceptions and reality of school safety or positive relationships between students and staff with or without SRO programs.

Madan (2016), argues, that the benefit of relationship-building incurred by police officers in the school is primarily in the interests of advancing their work with regards to surveillance, in particularly around racialized youth. For Madan (2016) the discourse or relationship-building was self-serving and something that members of the ENI campaign had to combat in order to articulate the experiences of racialized students with SRO officers. As Madan (2016) argues, “Though the SRO program may at first seem innocuous, well intentioned, and mutually beneficial, it has emerged from a broader community policing model that has been applied in a targeted way to racialized and low-income areas of the city through the TPS’s Toronto Anti- Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS)” (57). ENI worked aggressively to combat this rhetoric by arguing that safety should not simply be about what most students or teachers feel but should consider the unique experiences of students who are racialized, Indigenous, and undocumented. This argument also took into account the numerous first-person accounts shared to the campaign by members of the community about the ways in which the integration of the SROs with TAVIS resulted in heightened policing, increased surveillance, and more charges for minor offences. This integrated strategy was firmly tied to the practice known as carding which had targeted youth in Toronto’s Black community at a disproportionate rate (Winsa 2013) – an argument made by the ENI campaign was that youth were “greeted in the morning” by SROs and then carded at night by the very same officers.

While a majority (57%) of the 15,500 students, 1,062 staff, and 475 parents that took part in a wide-ranging survey on school safety suggested that the SROs made them feel safer, the fact that over 2,000 students said that the officers made them feel uncomfortable, intimidated or targeted spoke to a need to resist the program (Rattan 2017). This was the analytical frame that was taken up by the Education Not Incarceration campaign. For these students, teachers, parents, and supporters, the increasing criminalization of youth of colour, undocumented youth, and Indigenous youth was a result of surveillance and relationship-building that was meant not to protect them but to render them criminalizable. This was an argument that held sway with the Toronto District School Board where the Director of Education, John Malloy, in explaining why the board had come to cancel the SRO program, argued that it was not about giving voice to the majority, but affirming the experiences of those students who were most negatively impacted by the program (Rattan 2017). ENI, like END, worked to reframe liberal understandings of policing through an abolitionist lens by working with school administrators to reconceptualize the bounds of safety and relationality outside of the narrow carceral logics of the SRO program (Madan 2016).

**Fragment Three - Decolonization in a Time of Official Reconciliation**

The final fragment traces the beginnings of an Indigenization and reconciliation strategy at the University of Waterloo (UW) in the face of a growing student and community led movement for decolonization on campus. Like many university campuses across Canada, the University of Waterloo is faced with contending with the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, a number of which address post-secondary education directly (University of Waterloo 2018). As de Oliveira Andreotti et al (2015) explain, decolonization can have “multiple meanings, and the desires and investments that animate it are diverse, contested, and at times, at odds with one another” (22). This is especially so when you are dealing with an institutional process in response to grassroots and community mobilization. In the context of academic moves towards strategies of Indigenization and reconciliation, we see multiple motives and driving forces that can derail the long-term and deliberate decolonizing work led by Indigenous students, teachers, and community members.

This contradictory condition is exacerbated by the growing political context of the rights and recognition framework espoused by the federal government in response to the call for reconciliation. With university administrations picking up the call for reconciliation through strategies that they characterize as “Indigenization”, the process of decolonizing post-secondary education is temporarily hijacked from Indigenous students and teachers in the interests of reframing each individual academic institution as being at the “cutting edge” of social policy. However, as Coulthard (2014) presciently warns in his book *Red Skin, White Masks* the use of the TRC’s calls to action by agents of the state “temporarily situates the harms of settler-colonialism in the past and focuses the bulk of its reconciliatory efforts on repairing the injurious legacy left in the wake of this history” (127). As Coulthard continues, Indigenous subjects in this respect, become the primary object of repair, not the colonial relationship. These shortcomings are apparent in the current Indigenization strategy at a number of universities including at the University of Waterloo. Despite these limitations, the Indigenization strategy and the (nominal) commitment to reconciliation on behalf of administrators has at least temporarily opened up a political space for Indigenous students, faculty, and staff to support, resist, and reframe decolonizing spaces within, against, and beyond the official framework set by the UW. In this moment, these students, staff, and faculty have successfully pushed UW and its affiliated colleges to hire more Indigenous faculty, develop protocols for including land recognition statements on syllabi (and before official meetings), expand the work of the Waterloo Indigenous Students Centre, and increase Indigenous content and curriculum (including the introduction of a Mohawk language course).

Nonetheless, by bringing the process into the realm of official administrative work, many questions around what it means to decolonize or Indigenize the university are blurred. For instance, the University of Waterloo sits on the 1784 Haldimand tract and despite this fact, the University has not stipulated what Indigenization and reconciliation looks like with respect to issues of land. As Mushkegowuk Cree scholar Michelle Daigle (2019) explains through her own experience at the University of British Columbia, “questions took the shape

of requests to join new research projects that were funded under the banner of reconciliation— something which many Indigenous faculty are experiencing across Canadian university campuses” (3). While in some respects, Daigle explains, these requests have come from people who have “longstanding relationships with Indigenous communities, and who conduct respectful and reciprocal research that contributes to Indigenous efforts for self-determination,” often the requests are coming from faculty and administration who are simply jettisoning for position in an emerging and (currently) lucrative academic field. The overreliance on Indigenous peoples in the academy and the lack of recognition of the multiplicity of Indigenous practices and protocols (what Daigle explains as “no unified Indian”), creates a context where students, faculty, staff and administrators have all placed the burden of emotional, intellectual, physical, and social labour on this sparse and overworked group, instead of engaging in the labour themselves.

If peace, as Bird & Ewert argue in the introduction to this book, is in fact a process of ongoing negotiation in our various disciplines, then decolonization itself must be a process of relational labour that might take leadership from Indigenous peoples and communities but is shared and reciprocated in activities and actions that unsettle our universities. This is where evidence-based-science as a tenet of peace-making in the university may come into conflict with seeking justice within a settler colonial framework. Perhaps the best example of this conflict in peace-making is the growing campaign by the Indigenous Students Association UW to challenge the building of a telescope on the top of the sacred Hawai’ian mountain of Mauna Kea, one that is currently partially funded by the Association of Canadian Universities for Research in Astronomy (ACURA), of which the University of Waterloo is a member. In their open letter to the President of the University of Waterloo and the Director of the Waterloo Centre for Astrophysics, the students note “Our University expresses pride in the steps taken to further Indigenization on campus as well as learning and implementing steps from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada … It is important to create dialogue and as a member of [ACURA], to be a part of consulting with Native Hawaiians and halt construction until this occurs” (ISA UW, 2019). This Indigenous student-led push to actualize decolonization and reconciliation on campus might serve as a litmus test for whether or not the administration and faculties at UW are willing and committed to the process of decolonization or whether they will try to steer the university back towards an official process of reconciliation.

**Conclusion**

While this chapter is meant to provoke us to question the way in which we consciously or unconsciously maintain the carceral and colonial structures of our education system through our actions, it is also an attempt to explore the ways in which students, educators, and staff at high schools and universities are imagining our society within, against, and beyond the bounds of these structures of power. In our work for peace we must be open to and ready to engage in disruption of the *status quo*. This can create conflict, but it can also start to build the types of long-term relationships necessary to bring about the worlds we wish to see.

Through the three fragments of case studies presented above, this chapter tries to tell parts of an emerging story of how educators and students are working collaboratively in secondary and post-secondary institutions in Ontario to re-imagine not just *what we teach*, but *how we teach,* *how we structure education*, and *how we value different knowledges*, all in an effort to create a context where the school system is no longer an integral part of the carceral and colonial institutional frameworks that stabilize settler colonial states like Canada and the United States.

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1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/09/nyregion/yale-black-student-nap.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Fortier & Wong 2018; Lee & Ferrer 2014 among others on the links between the profession of social work and white supremacy/settler colonialism. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)