Senator Lynn Beyak and Anti-Indigenous Systemic Racism in Canada

"In schools and in our daily lived curriculum along the rivers [the Kitchissippi, the Rideau, and the Gatineau], and across the country," Lisa Howell and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook begin, "settler colonialism continues to exclude and make invisible the histories, contemporary issues, and perspectives of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples."[1] "Located in the eastern end of Parliament's Centre Block," they continue, "the Senate chamber is adorned in royal red, oak panels, bronze chandeliers, and showcases a marble bust of Queen Victoria," and it is "in this settler colonial institution that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian Senators meet and debate."[2] "It is also where former Conservative Senator Lynn Beyak stood up on behalf of settler colonialism to mount an abhorrent defense of the Indian Residential Schooling system on March 7, 2017."[3] In a "lengthy speech, Beyak expressed disappointment that the 'good deeds' provided by 'well-intentioned' teachers had been overlooked by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), noting that 'the remarkable works and historical tales in the residential schools go unacknowledged for the most part'."[4] From that specific speech Howell and Ng-A-Fook move to "the national narrative that Canadians are well-intentioned, harmless, and hardworking caregivers of Indigenous people," asserting that it "pervades our classrooms, its curriculum, conversations at the dinner table, social media, and, for some, the Canadian Senate."[5] "By believing that some of us are 'benevolent' settlers who 'rescued' children from 'squalor' and gave them an education, 'clean clothes,' 'little smiles,' and 'healthy meals,' we continue to uplift and endorse the intergenerational violence of settler colonialism as a charitable cause."[6] Asking "how might we confront and disrupt such settler colonialism, its violence, ongoing denial, and intergenerational harms in teacher education," Howell and Ng-A-Fook "seek to disrupt settler colonial worldviews by studying the works of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who are themselves disruptors, both inside and outside of teacher education."[7]

"Encountering our privileged positionalities as settler Canadians," Howell and Ng-A-Fook "question our privilege and positionalities as Canadian citizens," acknowledging that being "settler scholars and educators is a privilege in itself,"[8] although obviously not psychologically privileged, given the anguished and indignant tone here. Self-identification follows: "I, Nicholas, am a first-generation Hakka-Guyanese-Irish-Scottish immigrant from Guyana and Scotland, entitled to the rights of being a dual Canadian and United Kingdom transnational settler citizen."[9] "My (Lisa Howell's) family immigrated to Ontario and Saskatchewan from Northern Europe, my paternal great-grandmother being a British homechild.[10] They continue: "Subsequently, both of us experienced the francophone Catholic (Nicholas) and anglophone public

(Lisa) schooling systems that sought to ensure we would become 'good' francophone and anglophone settler Canadian citizens."[11] While their identities as settlers can't be altered, their ignorance of their complicity in colonialism can, as it is attributed, in part, to the curriculum: "In many ways the narratives put forth by Senator Beyak, Conrad Black, and the Ontario school social studies and history curriculum have taught us how to forget the violent intergenerational settler colonial state formation of a 'commonwealth' nation called Canada."[12]

Next, Howell and Ng-A-Fook "look to prominent Canadians in the recent historical past to illustrate how the perception of settler colonial benevolence is interwoven within the historical and contemporary stories of who constitutes being, or not being, a teacher or student in Canada."[13] They quote van Kessel's *Banal and Fetishized Evil: Implicating Ordinary Folk in Genocide Education*: "How might we teach about genocide with a view toward a less violent future"[14] given that "ordinary and otherwise decent people partake … in extensive evil," van Kessel also alleging (in Howell's and Ng-A-Fook's paraphrasing) that "such participation takes place … in our everyday individual and system-wide interactions, such as the Indian Residential Schooling system."[15] Apparently Van Kessel admits that "intensive evils are perpetuated by a limited number of people … [who are] like serial killers—individuals who cause intense harm."[16] Then Howell and Ng-A-Fook cite van Kessel and co-authors' "Terror Management Theory and the Educational Situation," wherein they "examine how individuals, teacher educators, and teacher candidates draw on different defensive reactions—*assimilation*, *derogation*, *annihilation*, and *accommodation*—when others' worldviews do not coincide with our own."[17]

We learn that *assimilation* "involves attempts to convert worldview-opposing others to our own system of belief," while *derogation* belittles "individuals who espouse a different worldview," *annihilation* "entails aggressive action aimed at killing or injuring members of the threatening worldview," and *accommodation* references the modification of one's "own worldview to incorporate some aspects of the threatening worldview."[18] Howell and Ng-A-Fook tell us that van Kessel and colleagues "stress that such defensive reactions promise to protect white settler Canadians in relation to intergenerational 'emotions of guilt,' and from others' worldviews."[19] There would seem to be sharp differences among the four – are they defensive only, not aggressive ever? – but their bottom-line function is the alleviation of settler "guilt," something apparently absent in Senator Lynn Beyak, whose "denialism can thus be understood as part of a conscious or unconscious strategy of selectively remembering the past to protect one's power and privilege in the present and, most importantly, to perpetuate it into the future," adding that "colonizers devise and deploy different discursive strategies to protect their position of material privilege and to prove to themselves and to others the righteousness of their existence."[20] The "Indian Residential Schooling

system itself was part of a larger network of government policies created to *assimilate* and *annihilate* Indigenous communities."[21]

Howell and Ng-A-Fook then quote from a letter sent to Beyak: "I'm no anthropologist but it seems every opportunistic culture, subsistence hunter/gatherers seek to get what they can for no effort. There is always a clash between an industrial/ organized farming culture that values effort as opposed to a culture that will sit and wait until the government gives them stuff," prompting Howell and Ng-A-Fook to write: "Such harmful anti-Indigenous stereotypes and tropes of the 'lazy Indian' who doesn't pay taxes, the 'corrupt chief who misspends federal dollars,' and the 'chronic whining of people who can't get over the past' were expressed in many of the letters," perhaps encouraging Senator Beyak to insist: 'Telling the truth is sometimes controversial but never racist."[22] In her statements, "Beyak draws on her distant proximity to a First Nations friend, in an attempt to immunize herself from being a White anti-Indigenous racist."[23] Saying, in effect, "Yes, my best friend has a friend who is First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis," the Senator was saying that "I am thus an ally, despite my proximity to settler colonial Whiteness and its respective inclusive economic privileges."[24] Howell and Ng-A-Fook comment: "Such kinds of superficial relational acknowledgements is my colonial defence," what has been depicted "as another settler move toward innocence."[25]

Such settler moves are designed to distract listeners and readers from the racism prompting them, racism resulting in stereotypes of the Indigenous as inferior; Howell and Ng-A-Fook assert that "such kinds of derogatory mythologies informed the narratives and representations put forth across the school curriculum," what "has been termed a settler Canadian social imagery," in his instance interrupted in part by settlers, as "two years after her speech, in March of 2019, Senator Beyak was found guilty of violating Senate regulations by publishing the letters on her website."[26] After the Senate had found her guilty, had issued a suspension, and directed her to undertake ethics training, Beyak issued an apology, then "resigned from the Senate on January 25, 2021," this apparently under threat of being expelled.[27] Howell and Ng-A-Fook comment: "Whether or not the former Senator will ever come to an understanding of the individual and extensive evilness of systemic settler colonialism and anti-Indigenous racism is yet to be storied."[28]

From Senator Beyak, Howell and Ng-A-Fook move to teacher education, asking: "[A]s teacher educators, how might we then create curricular spaces for students, and ourselves, to do the necessary unsettling work of unlearning, in light of the many forms of resistance that have been documented within teacher education research?"[29] Committed to "disrupting and unsettling settler colonialism in teacher education," Howell and Ng-A-Fook cite "Indigenous scholar Jan Hare, as well as non-Indigenous scholar Brooke Madden," both of whom have "critiqued current conceptualizations of 'reconciliation' in teacher education curriculum, pedagogies, and

research," Hare "stress[ing] that reconciliation in teacher education must challenge conceptions of a professional settler consciousness and move teacher candidates toward action and accountability."[30] They quote Madden's concept of a "de/colonizing theory of reconciliation' … which includes a 'consistent examination of colonial logics and productions,"[31] what Howell and Ng-A-Fook characterize as a "curricular and pedagogical approach to truth," dictating that "reconciliation, in teacher education includes both a deconstructive process that 'illuminates and creates openings to address how colonial norms of intelligibility are produced, organized, circulated, and regulated,' as well as relational processes of co-reconstructing that are "rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and community proprieties'."[32] Evidently not all teacher education need undergo "disrupting" and "unsettling," as Howell and Ng-A-Fook report that "teacher educators are creating curricular opportunities for teacher candidates to deconstruct and reconstruct conceptions of a settler historical consciousness in relation to their teacher education inquiries," teacher education that "demonstrates the various ways that a settler colonial worldview contributes toward teacher candidates' resistance to unlearning about historical truth, and then reconciliation in relation to their professional accredited responsibilities as future public servants."[33]

"In order to create the necessary relational changes [called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission], educational systems, like teacher education, need to acknowledge historical and ongoing roles in the reproduction of settler colonial worldviews and perpetration of individual, systemic, and societal harms."[34] Howell and Ng-A-Fook have determined that the "prevalence of Eurocentrism as an enlightened and endorsed capitalistic settler colonial worldview across the school curriculum in our educational experiences has excluded, and still excludes, the diverse histories, contemporary issues, perspectives, knowledges, and contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples."[35] From the curriculum to Canada itself, Howell and Ng-A-Fook allege that "the commonwealth settler colonial national myths of multiculturalism, peace-keeping, socially-progressive politics, and hard-earned prosperity [have been sedimented in settler consciousness]," [36] resulting in that "narratives of 'the benevolent peacekeepers, heroes on a quest to save the Indians' … remain deeply embedded within a Canadian settler historical consciousness."[37]

Next Howell and Ng-A-Fook undertake the "troubling [of] the discourses of decolonization in teacher education," citing the Battiste critique that "decolonizing education is not a process 'generated only for Indigenous students in the schools they attend ... but largely for the federal and provincial systems and the policy choices and inequities coming from them'," noting that "furthermore, Battiste insists that the key to meaningful systemic educational reform in Canada begins with 'confronting hidden standards of racism, colonialism, and cultural linguistic imperialism in the modern curriculum'," that along with "the return of Indigenous lands to sovereign Indigenous

peoples."[38] Howell and Ng-A-Fook quote Madden's "de/colonizing theory consisting of the four interrelated dimensions: (1) TRC's notions of education for reconciliation (2) Indigenous land-based traditions, (3) Indigenous counter-stories, and (4) 'critiques of the construction and enactment of reconciliation."[39] They comment: "The ideas that these scholars bring forth teach us that the work of disrupting, unlearning, and learning settler colonial worldviews as part of our teacher education curriculum is not simply about transforming teaching practices, embracing decolonization strategies, or committing to certain reconcilia(c)tions," as "before attempting to translate such unlearning and learning into unit and lesson plans, we must first confront and unlearn the very worldviews that some of us who identify as Canadians have been 'schooled' in prior to becoming professional public educators within a settler colonial provincial educational system."[40] That is an ambitious agenda.

Howell and Ng-A-Fook reference next Dion's concept of "perfect stranger,"[41] a "disposition" that allows "candidates—and, we would add, several teacher educators—to excuse themselves of their civic and professional responsibilities to self-examine their discomforts in relation to learning First Nations, Inuit, and Métis histories, perspectives, and contemporary issues," adding that "perfecting such dispositions of strangerness enables teacher candidates to absolve themselves, to deny the implicatedness, while remaining respectful, hardworking, and successful professional characters."[42] We read that teacher "candidates" recommend "that the 'best practices' to address 'truth,' and then 'reconciliation,' are through the non-confrontational transmission of information and facts-neutral language, and 'making it lighter'," underscoring "the importance of 'avoiding approaches that would elicit emotion—particularly shame and guilt'," teacher candidates focused on learning "what to do, rather than working toward disrupting their settler relational role perpetuated in the name of trying to enact a reconcilia(c)tion curriculum."[43] "By focusing on what to do," Howell and Ng-A-Fook continue, "rather than confronting one's settler historical consciousness, teacher candidates could remain perfect strangers, denying others' world-views, and reproducing the psychosis of relational denial," affirming, "as some of the research literature makes clear, the most crucial barriers to such ongoing relational denials, are *within* the teachers themselves."[44] Nothing less than a colonial "psychosis," such "institutional and socio-cultural perpetuation of colonial logics has trained Canadians to disregard Indigenous peoples as fellow human beings."[45] Like the teacher candidates criticized earlier, Howell and Ng-A-Fook also want to know "what to do," asking: "How might we then collectively address such blockages (psychoses) across a teacher education curriculum and in terms of our professional and personal worldviews?"[46] How, indeed?

Colonial psychosis – through an "epistemology of "ignorance, based in white normativity" [47] - functions to "maintain a settler social imaginary of Canadian citizenship." [48] The authors think that "acknowledging and deconstructing our

complicity with settler colonialism as an ongoing cultural, curricular, and pedagogical practice, one that fuels such worldviews of relational denial and/or respective defensive reactions of assimilation, derogation, annihilation, or accommodation, is vital to the work of unlearning and learning truths."[49] What they term "ethical relationality perhaps holds some of the transformative possibilities to confront familiar defensive reactions—*assimilation*, *derogation*, *annihilation*, *accommodation*—when others' worldviews do not coincide with our own," adding the concept of "care"[50] to the phrase ("ethical relations of care"), a concept that can "call on us to reimagine and renew our past, present, and future relations with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities."[51] Reviewing what they've done, Howell and Ng-A-Fook remind us that "we have suggested that settler colonialism and its psychosis of denial, as a cultural, pedagogical, and curricular practice, poses a serious challenge to the existing historical consciousness and worldviews of teacher candidates."[52]

Next the authors reference Donald, specifically his conception of "ethical relationality," what he sees as "an ethic of historical consciousness," meaning that "the past occurs simultaneously in the present and influences how we conceptualize the future," requiring us to "see ourselves as related to, and implicated in, the lives of those that have gone before us and those yet to come."[53] Such an "ethical imperative" enables us to "recognize the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences are layered and position us in relation to each other, and how our futures are similarly tied together."[54] Again referencing Tupper[55] – the "epistemology of ignorance" is her phrasing – Howell and Ng-A-Fook write that "curriculum inquiries grounded in ethical relationality appear to increase the affective engagements that enable teacher candidates to visualize themselves in relation to people and places, 'moving past the assignment of guilt to a consideration of present-day responsibility'."[56] She and a colleague "describe a noticeable increase in meaningful learning when teachers have opportunities to visit former residential school sites, meet with Elders and survivors, hear stories of Indigenous resistance and resilience, and 'overtly learn about whiteness and its restructuring forces'," making "explicit what often remains invisible."[57] Ng-A-Fook and another co-author "remind us that when teacher candidates were able to speak and listen to Elders and Indian Residential School system survivors, they became 'historical subjects during the encounters with the past lives of others... learning how to reread, rewrite, and redress a more nuanced storied account'."[58]

By themselves – here Howell and Ng-A-Fook quote Brant-Biriokov and her co-authors – Elders "do not facilitate change in teacher candidates (or in any of us)," so that "to become agents of change, we need to not only *feel* the weight of historical and contemporary injustices, we must also recognize ourselves as *implicated* in the relationships and in terms of the professional and personal responsibilities that such renewed relationships involve."[59] Howell and Ng-A-Fook feel that "encouraging

teachers to engage in ongoing reflective writing, whether it is the use of extensive digital blogging … letters to survivors after hearing testimonies …, or settler life writing …, holds possibilities for reckoning, revisiting, unlearning, and learning anew."[60] Tupper's depiction of "settler life writing as seeking to 'overtly connect my memories and experiences in the past with current colonial realities ... to revisit memories in consideration of how the experiences they encapsulate re-inscribe settler identity and frame Indigenous peoples as lives that are not grievable'," the practice - for Howell and Ng-A-Fook – "offer[ing] curricular opportunities for teacher candidates to integrate and interrogate their lived experiences as the beneficiaries of a settler colonial system in relation to, and with, Indigenous people and the land some of us call Canada."[61] Sounding almost like "doublethink," the "the process [is] not about blame, but rather about relationship building and the understanding that multiple layers of relationships can exist," somehow occurring through "unlearning," a process of "confronting settler colonialism, deconstructing and reconstructing our collective historical consciousness, and positioning ourselves in relation to both."[62]

Relationship building through such unlearning presumably "evolves as settler Canadians, including teacher candidates and educators, pause and look at things anew, realizing that we are implicated," including "in the prayer ties on the bridge and by the dust rising along the Kitchissippi River."[63] Howell and Ng-A-Fook return to Ottawa and Parliament Hill, this time to a "rainy day" in 1982, when "the constitutional relationship between the Crown and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada is recognized and affirmed in the *Constitution Act*," a "constitution [that] was smudged, and remains marked with evidence of the rain that fell that day," as it is missing any "evidence of the 'special relationship" between the Crown and Indigenous peoples?"[64] Returning to the present, the authors ask: "How we begin to unlearn and renew our past, present, and future relations will be, at a minimum, our educational responsibilities toward the TRC's *Calls to Action*, as a daily praxis of reconciliation, both inside and outside of teacher education programs."[65]

Howell and Ng-A-Fook conclude by reviewing what they done: "In this article, we have examined the various responses to Senator Lynn Beyak's anti-Indigenous racism," including van Kessel's conception of "fetishized evil" and her (with co-authors) discussion of terror management theory to examine how individuals, teacher educators, and teacher candidates draw on different defensive reactions when confronted with worldviews that are different from their own."[66] Moreover, "through unlearning and learning from existing teacher education research and the theoretical concepts put forth by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars such as, but not limited to, Suzanne Dion, Dwayne Donald, and Brooke Madden, it is clear that unsettling a settler psychosis of denial and its defensive reactions cannot be reduced merely to matters of pedagogy," as "these scholars call on us to reimagine, restory, and renew our past, present, and future relations beyond narratives of settler denial, benevolence,

and/or moves toward innocence."[67] Such an almost infinite scale of subjective and social reconstruction spans the Indigenous challenge to curriculum studies in Canada.

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ENDNOTES

[1] 2022, 3.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid. Concerning Beyak, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynn_Beyak See also: https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/beyak-retirement-1.5886435 Also: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/pov-geraldine-shingoose-lynn-beyak-residential-schools-1.5892233 Also: https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/01/28/opinion/lynn-beyak-retired-residential-school-denial-barrier-reconciliation
[4] Quoted in 2022, 3.
[5] 2022, 4.
[6] Ibid.
[7] 2022, 5.
[8] 2022, 6.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] 2022, 7.
[14] Quoted in 2022, 7.
[15] 2022, 7.
[16] Quoted in 2022, 7.
[17] 2022, 8.
[18] Quoted in 2022, 8.
[19] 2022, 8.
[20] Quoted in 2022, 8.

[21] 2022, 8.
[22] 2022, 9-10.
[23] 2022, 11.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] 2022, 11-12.
[27] 2022, 13.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] 2022, 14. Concerning Hare and Madden, see the index for relevant research briefs.
[31] Quoted in 2022, 14.
[32] 2022, 14.
[33] 2022, 14-15.
[34] 2022, 15.
[35] 2022, 16.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] 2022, 17.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Quoted in 2022, 18. See the index for other references to – and examples of – Dion's scholarship.
[42] 2022, 18.
[43] 2022, 19.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Quoted in 2022, 20.
[48] 2022, 20.
[49] Ibid.
[50] "Care" has a long history in curriculum studies; see Jung 2016, Noddings 1984.
[51] 2022, 21.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Quoted in 2022, 22. For more on Donald, see the index.
[54] Ibid.
[55] For additional references to Tupper, see the index.
[56] 2022, 22. For more from Tupper, see the index.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] 2022, 23. For more from Brant- Biriokov – while a student at UBC a member of the CSinC Project team – see the index.
[60] Ibid.
[61] 2022, 23.
[62] 2022, 24.
[63] Ibid.
[64] 2022, 25.
[65] Ibid.

[66] 2022, 26.
[67] Ibid.