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How to Decolonize a Classroom

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Abstract

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This study is gathered from personal reflections of my time and experience with the Vermont Workers' Center organization for my practicum phase. I highlight my internal and external work on projects specific to racial justice, and its use in organizing and educating members in the Southern Vermont region. The challenges as an active and involved community member of color, living and working in Brattleboro have inspired me to curate a model and theory to "decolonize" or unlearn the prevalence of white supremacist culture in our educational spaces.

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When one imagines the answer to the question how to decolonize a classroom, a myriad of thoughts and suggestions arise. What does it mean to decolonize a classroom? How would you go about doing this? Why is this necessary? I had begun to ask myself the same questions as I went from a student learning in the classroom setting to an instructor creating this setting. As a student in these educational spaces, I began to formulate questions about my surroundings as I listened to conversations amongst other students, and observed their behaviors along with the climate that contributed to their conduct. These questions then began to evolve as I moved to the position of instructor, now taking those initial questions and acting on them. I remained mindful of my student experience as I was now given the freedom to create a learning culture of my own; I felt the pressure to ensure that this environment promoted an engaging learning experience. As one ponders questions of how to cultivate a transformative learning experience within educational spaces, we must acknowledge the existing cultures that are embedded within our society, and therefore replicated within these same educational spaces. These same influences contribute to our learning environments and the outcome of students' learning experiences. We must ask ourselves what are the steps in decolonizing a classroom?

This concept of social identity and the differed realities it creates for an individual became increasingly salient in my past two years in Brattleboro Vermont. I spent the first year living on campus at SIT Graduate Institute taking courses in an atmosphere that aimed to foster the rich diverse cultures of people from around the world. In my second year in Brattleboro I moved off campus into a house settled downtown on Elliot Street. Through my practicum work as a Field Organizing Intern for the Vermont Workers' Center, I began getting involved with the community as I took on the firsthand experience of a resident of Brattleboro. Amongst community outreach efforts in surveying locals, organizing events, and speaking at fundraisers;

this opportunity came with the chance to facilitate and conduct small lessons, or "educational

shorts" which I presented a few times at the biweekly organizing committee meetings. These

two agencies are set in the same quaint, scenic, homogenous town and both are regarded as

institutions that cultivate spaces for advocacy in matters of social justice and human rights. In

their own right this notion still remains true for both institutions, although from my experiences it

appears as though the residents of the predominantly white, progressive town of Brattleboro

understand a very different version of social justice than I.

The reoccurring struggle of being a black woman in this context resounds throughout my

experience. Studying social justice in depth in the midst of the uprising of the Black Lives Matter

Movement in recent years has inspired me to reach depths in my research of Black history and

the seemingly insurmountable struggles of people of African descent in the United States.

Through this I realized how gravely important social justice was to my past, present and future;

this understanding along with my experiences in Brattleboro have guided my framing of social

justice as a means of survival as opposed to volunteer work. Social justice, as I understand it is

a type of work which allows us to critique facets of our society using our lens of ethics. I find that

social justice as a black person, which is one of my most salient of identities, is a means of a

people's absolute survival. Social justice is necessary now and has been in the past for black

people to be seen as human beings. While it is important to take into consideration that women,

the LGBTQ community, poor communities and people with disabilities are considered

populations which are rightfully in need and deserving of space in social justice. It must be

advised that the injustices that affect the people of preceding identities worsen as it applies to

communities of color. There were many experiences where segments of this realization started

ringing true but the initial inception of how deeply rooted white supremacy, a byproduct of

European colonization was in the community I resided in became a lot clearer. The course

Issues in Sustainable Development: Decolonization: Gender and Food Systems was an

authentically engaging class which offered a closer look at colonization, its effect on minoritized

communities around the world and how it has infiltrated nearly every facet of our lives. The

following learning objectives of this course were what I had aspired to encompass in this study:

Learning Objectives: After taking this course, you will have an improved ability to:

- Understand the historical roots of racialized inequalities;

- Understand your own subjectivity as a reflective practitioner;

- Appreciate the agency, accomplishments and potential of marginalized populations;

- Understand the elements of being an ally in situations of power inequality;

- Create shared work environments that model trust, inclusion, and safety;

My intention in developing this research was to focus specifically on decolonization itself as it

relates to our present setting.

The topic of colonization in this course deeply resonates with me because it affirmed

what I had already suspected but couldn't explain. The social constructs that narrate our

identities impact the ways in which we perceive the world and the ways in which the world

perceives us. I find that the acknowledgment of this reality alone is widely misunderstood and

interpreted as inaccurate or non- applicable. A most notable example of this would be the

countless experiences with racism living and working in Brattleboro as I attended my graduate

institute, but especially when I did outreach work for the Vermont Workers' Center. Encountering

hostility, fear, and ignorance in everyday interactions was normal as a result of our society's

popular, monolithic and dehumanizing narratives of black people. Because the experience of

racism is particularly unique to those who embody certain identities, it is common for those who

do not experience these events to label them invalid and ultimately disregard them. The result of

this denial serves to reinforce a monolithic standard established by colonization which we are

directly or indirectly taught to abide by. Speaking to the context of the course I believe that we

were set to understanding that very notion through the stories and experiences of minoritized

communities which have been routinely disenfranchised through the established principles of

European colonialism.

FROM EUROPEAN COLONIZATION AND EDUCATION TO THE ANTI-COLONIAL EDUCATION THEORY

Whether we realize it or not the impact of European colonization has left an unshakable

imprint in every facet of our lives. It has set forth standards and ideals for every aspect of our

society, encompassing our social norms and institutional structure. These constructed

standards and the culture of white supremacy that it produces is mirrored in nearly every facet

of our global society. In media, literature, art and science amongst other areas, the contributions

of Europe and European descendants are structured as the norm. Minoritized groups are often

presented as a "side dish" or additive which further creates a single story limiting the visibility of

the multifaceted nature we all possess as human beings. Such ideals are still emulated in

important societal structures such as education. Education is the most powerful and liberating

tool for social change; as it is set up to shape and enlighten minds, it is necessary to recognize

that education is in no way an exception to the extension of colonization. The culture created

out of this ideal is therefore named white supremacist culture. We must realize that if left

unacknowledged we can and often do perpetuate the same damaging culture in our educational

spaces.

As it relates to my personal experiences, white supremacist culture is necessary to

unlearn in order to strip away dominant and constricting narratives of people of different

identities; doing so cultivates opportunities to discover and center diverse forms of knowledge

and learning. For this study I've taken to a straightforward approach by reimaging education in

all of its forms in the image of a classroom. I've chosen a classroom as a model to clearly

examine and identify the dominant cultures' indicators to create an easier process in dismantling

said influences. This reimaging can resonate with most in the sense that a classroom setting is

a concrete place typically associated with learning. In the U.S. context in particular we have a

tendency to associate the setting of a classroom with features related to plainly colored walls,

uncomfortable metal desks, monotonous lectures and subject material most feel indifferent

about; however it's imperative to think further about what goes into the structure of it. Consider

the tools an instructor uses, the manner in which students are seated as they are prepared to

learn, and from whom curates the resources both the instructor and students use. Adding to that

keeping in mind how the instructor teaches. Is the culture of the classroom fostering an

individualistic style of learning or a collectivistic one? As I imagine the image of a classroom, I

question what the elements are that make it a place for learning? What are the influences?

What creates the culture of learning and by whom is this culture being driven by? This research

study serves to include my voice amongst the many minoritized communities whose stories

were shared in the Decolonization course. The model that I've designed serves to question

prevailing elements in higher education due to their emulative nature of European colonization.

In order to undergo the process of decolonizing, I've gathered a number of work that I've

curated into a framework to use for the unlearning process. This framework further serves as a

"lens" of sorts which connects my own experiences with white supremacy to themes of anti-

colonialism in each step of the process. In relation to anti-colonialism the compiled series of

concepts specifically recognize oppressor/oppressed dynamics, critical race theory and anti-

colonialist narratives in academia. This curated theory in accordance with its unique definition of

decolonization is used in this study as a tool to undergo the dismantling of the "traditional"

classroom structure. I've titled this compiled theory the *Anti-Colonial Education Theory*. This

theory is structured in the decolonization process as a model, or essentially a step-by-step

guide in undoing the establishment of white supremacist culture in education specifically the

classroom setting.

The decolonization process in particular consists of three steps: The first step in this process is to examine the classroom setting. In order to undergo a transformative process one must first examine the dynamics in that very space, specifically taking note to what contributes to creating a classroom setting. In this first step we ask the particular question: What are the dynamics and influences that make this setting a learning environment? Through asking these questions we are unknowingly examining the culture of this setting. We also further inquire, who establishes this culture? Whose influences are behind this established culture? Earlier in this study I had begun to discuss the preponderance of European colonization, from here I will expand on its byproduct, white supremacy as it relates to historical context.

The examination of the classroom setting provides a foundation to identify classroom dynamics, and from there apply concepts in the Anticolonial Education Theory ultimately resulting in complete transformation of its structure. There are countless questions one could ask when initiating this process, the entirety of this model differs depending on the person proceeding in this first step. As I understand the diversity in the experiences of our social identities, I anticipate that others will take this model to expand and apply their own knowledge in an effort to liberate their own learning spaces. Previously mentioned, in order to further understand white supremacy, particularly white supremacist culture and how it operates, it is best to dismantle the very definition. Firstly white supremacy as it is defined in *The Culture of White Supremacy* (Martinas, 1993) as:

> A historically based, perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and people of color by white peoples and nations of European descent; for the purpose of establishing, maintaining and defending a system of wealth power and privilege. (p. 3)

Reiterating that white supremacy is a byproduct of European colonization; it must be acknowledged that its' national, structural, societal, and institutional reach is the seat of the

matter. As it relates to this study it is specifically prevalent in our educational institutions and spaces. In sync with the creation of white supremacy, the historic sociopolitical intricacies associated with the term "white" has created a favorable reality for those who fit the definition. The aforementioned individuals who fit into the socially constructed norm of white hold most privilege and power and are therefore presented as the preferred norm. The history of the sociopolitical intricacies of whiteness are further examined in the historical interpretation of "white" stating by author Sharon Martinas (1994):

> The term white as applied to people was first used by slave-owning colonists in 17th century Maryland and Virginia to describe poor indentured servants who came from Europe. Originally, these servants had been called "Englishmen," "Irishmen" or "Christians," but the colonial ruling class began to use the term "white" to distinguish European servants from African ones, who were often called "Negro," which means "black" in Spanish. (p, 3)

Therefore a racial hierarchy was initiated, privileging the white poor and relegating blacks as members of an under caste in American society. This resulted in centuries of dehumanization for blacks and other people of color. This hierarchy does not solely exist in the U.S. but is often emulated through colorism, a similar ranking system graded by the color of a person's skin. Further narrowing this definition, I have noted that my experiences in this model dealt with the preponderance of white supremacist culture in education. Particular to the definition of culture, it is as a way of life that's passed down from generation to generation from one group to the next; which sets the written and unwritten rules for our societal institutions. (Martinas, 1994). Furthermore noting that culture helps to build societal norms, in which those social norms constitute our behaviors towards established rules that create the system we live in. (Martinas, 1994). Next is to merge the terms "white" and "culture" in complete comprehension of the definition of "white culture" (Martinas, 1994):

White culture is an artificial, historically constructed culture, which expresses, justifies

and binds together the U.S. white supremacy system. It is the cultural matrix and glue

which binds together white-controlled institutions into systems; and white-controlled

systems into a global white supremacy system. Since World War II, the white culture of

the U.S. has been the center of the global white culture. (p, 3-4).

This global influence of this culture is reworked and reinforced in nearly every facet of

our societal structure. These same structures then promote this culture of white supremacist

ideology in their socioeconomic practices and policies. This begins with the white, male leaders

of the US. I refer to a well-known poem, both by its title and the ideology behind it called, *The

White Man's Burden* by British poet Rudyard Kipling. Kipling's work was published in 1899 in

McClure's magazine, a monthly periodical later credited as starting the tradition of investigative

journalism. (McClure's, 2016). Later regarded as "the hymn to U.S. imperialism." (Kipling, 1899)

Kipling's work was later embraced by established soon-to-become leaders such as Theodore

Roosevelt prior to his presidency. (Kipling, 1899). Possibly the most damaging of Kipling's

literary work was the notion that mankind is to be "saved" from themselves framing this

domination as the "responsibility" of powerful white men. (Kipling, 1899). Now envision the idea

of our countries' leaders embracing an article of work that promoted white supremacist ideology

and the domination of the lives of people whose culture was deemed "uncivilized" from their

own. This poem served as only one of many mantras for power and control as our nation's

policies exercised this doctrine by legitimizing violence, genocide and subjugation of minoritized

communities.

Following the layout for our historical context we now move into the Anticolonial

Education Theory, the crucial tool used in helping to decolonize the classroom setting. The first

concept of the Anticolonial Education Theory is gathered through the studies of Brazilian

educator Paulo Freire, more particularly the ideologies in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

In his extensive thesis Freire identifies a critical theory to oppressor/oppressed dynamics. Freire stresses the importance of minoritized communities' identifying the conditions to their reality of oppression and marginalization. Freire (1970) extends his theory further elaborating oppressor/oppressed dynamics taking into account the destructive nature of the oppressor:

> The oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time- everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal. (p. 58).

As we acknowledge the suffered human rights atrocities creating the oppressor/oppressed dynamic we must understand that whether consciously or unconsciously the socially-constructed dominant group's imposition of minoritized communities consistently manipulates the minoritized group. The domination of the group themselves, their identity, culture, land, ideas, and creations, is then understood as a reality by the minoritized group as consistently acted upon. The matter of their existence is separated into a category of "other" and centers the dominant groups' reality as the elementary human experience. Although the oppressor/oppressed dynamics exist as the result of dehumanization, these conditions should not be identified as permanent realities. To elaborate in Freire's theory in order for the oppressed to carry out the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression, not from a hopeless world where there's no escape but as a limiting situation that they have the power to change. (Freire, 1970). The Anticolonial Education Theory derives from Freire's concept for learning in order to liberate with the betterment of the future for minoritized persons in mind. This is realized as unlearning through liberating, reconditioning, and recreating our very existence in the face of forceful constricting narratives of our humanity.

The next concept in the Anticolonial Education Theory is by writer Frank Michael Muñoz and his think piece titled *Critical Race Theory and the Landscapes of Higher Education*. Muñoz' uses the six principles of Critical Race Theory and applies them to the construction of the

physical landscape of institutes of higher education, revising each principle as he assesses its

correlation to his theory. The first being that (1) Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is

endemic to American life. (Muñoz, 2009). This approach serves to emphasize that the everyday

artifacts, ideas, values and interests serve as mechanisms for racism. This principle is then

emulated through the physical structures built in American higher education institutions. The

understanding that this principle states in which the structures students live and work within are

not racially neutral. In fact, Muñoz goes onto state that said structures actually prove to reinforce

White-normative behavior:

> CRT (Critical Race Theory) rejects claims that the inanimate structures college students
>
> live within are racially neutral. As objects of intense planning and sites of focused
>
> architectural collaboration, residence halls, classrooms, and student centers are hardly
>
> neutral sites. Instead they are locations that frequently perpetuate and regard White-
>
> normative behavior. Bolted-down seats that prevent collaboration and conversation
>
> amongst students and thin walls that prevent lively conversation are physical features of
>
> many classrooms which reinforce White-normative behavior. In these classrooms,
>
> behavior is policed not only by the gaze of the professor and students, but also by the
>
> limitations imposed by the physical space themselves. (p. 57).

The second principle states (2) Critical Race Theory expresses skepticism toward claims

of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy. (Muñoz, 2009). This rigid structure

goes on to create a disconnected and inhospitable learning environment for students. (3) Critical

Race Theory (CRT) challenges ahistorism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis.

(Muñoz, 2009). It's assessed in this third principle that historical context of the institutions matter

to the past present and future of the educational institutions. Muñoz goes onto say that campus

values originate from the history of these institutions but however are often historically

inaccurate. CRT assess the need for revisionist histories that demonstrate historical accuracy

for minoritized groups of people where the pain of oppression and exclusion are acknowledged. He elaborates further in his point through reflecting on the ideologies that individuals whom campus buildings are named after:

> One important area for revisionist history to explore is the naming of campus buildings. Campus community members may be disheartened to learn that they live or attend classes in buildings named for individuals whose recognized contributions and values are in direct conflict to their own. In one such example, the University of Virginia's Barringer Wing of the school's medical center is named after Paul B. Barringer, a proponent of scientific racism and the eugenics movement. The largely uncontested presence of this name and others on campus could be interpreted as a lack of institutional commitment to creating an inclusive campus environment. (p. 58).

Challenging an ahistorical context is important in higher education because most of what we are taught is from Eurocentric narratives of history, inherently asserting a political statement.

(4) CRT insists on the recognition of the experiences of people of color and our communities of origin. (Muñoz, 2009) The importance of seeking to know the stories and experiences of builders, and architects of color in particular in considering the structure of the higher education institution is integral, in order to gain information about perspectives of inclusion safety and comfort within these structures. Muñoz further asserts that these stories should not be hindered by "white conventions" or namely white people's interpretation or mediums of control but instead listened to in a face-to-face interaction with the aforementioned communities. It is acknowledged that oftentimes spaces that are created by and for minoritized communities are the targets of insidious racism through vandalism or other means of heinous crimes on campus. (Muñoz, 2009).

(5) CRT is interdisciplinary. (Muñoz, 2009). This principle asserts that creating "educationally purposeful" spaces that draw from diverse accounts of knowledge; are educational spaces that are most representative of the American people. These spaces are then more emulative of their realities and are more socially just. (Muñoz, 2009). Consider what changes would be brought about if marginalized groups were brought to the forefront of the conversation when considering how the structure of a space for education. (6) CRT works towards the end of eliminating racial oppression as a part of ending all forms of oppression. The guidance of CRT in accordance with higher education landscapes can create an "activist architecture" which out rightly challenges the racialization of the built environment. (Muñoz, 2009).

Muñoz' analysis of Critical Race Theory and its relation to higher education landscapes poses important principles that help to reframe and create emulative conventions that adhere to the theme of reconstruction of the Anticolonial Education Theory. (1) Race is integral to American life and therefore our educational spaces. As a result of this, the Anticolonial Education Theory asserts that the formation of its structure must be questioned. (2) We must be skeptical and challenge proclaimed neutral or objective education. This is to proclaim that we are questioning the perspectives of the professed neutral party; the Anticolonial Education Theory recognizes this because, the very absence of minoritized group's experiences should not translate to the absolute truth. (3) Insisting on a contextual/historical analysis and challenging ahistoricism is a mandatory aspect of this theory because we recognize that the traditions and values of the educational system overall depend on the "whom" in the context of that system as well as whom establishes it. (4) The Anticolonial Education Theory insists that the voices of marginalized groups are essential to building an inclusive educational environment and therefore a space of solidarity. (5) We acknowledge that education itself is interdisciplinary in nature and the Anticolonial Education Theory declares for its doctrine to possess a space of

validity in the classroom setting. Lastly Muñoz' collaborative literary piece embodies this curated theory because it encompasses the last principle (6) In CRT education should move towards ending systems of oppression. If our current higher education system is not teaching in order to liberate we must question that system and its purpose. The Anticolonial Education Theory requires the "activist architecture" Muñoz addresses because we must consider ourselves "space shapers" and "place makers" in our own space of learning.

Another contributor in the Anticolonial Education Theory is Patricia A. Monture co-author of the book *Women's Words: Power, Identity and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Monture speaks to the ways in which European colonialism has "dissected" and "othered" the identity, knowledge and understanding of indigenous people by the white narratives of academic standards. Monture cites the very structure of literature in academia and how it is often unwelcoming to those who do not ascribe to its structure of learning. Given an example of this she states that often in education institutions exclude storytelling as a custom of value. More poignantly, that if one chooses to speak their stories in order to encapsulate them in their truest form you will never be considered a literary great. (Monture, 2009). Monture further addresses the distortion of knowledge deemed "invalid" that does not conform to the Eurocentric structured standard of literature:

> A fundamental reason that traditional Native literature is not included in many programs is that looking at Native literature and literature of all minority cultures, requires a change in perspective by the reader. The absence of the familiar European form, style and content too often leads to the criticism that such literature is inferior. The possibility of different but equal merit is seldom, if at all entertained. (p. 119).

Monture goes even further to address how the very focus of Native literature is understood purely in the aspect of resistance. Which she argues centers colonization at the forefront of the indigenous person's existence when in fact this knowledge is profoundly more

diverse. She goes onto state that the identity of First Nation people functions in the idea of

collectivism in community and the connection of one belonging to their diverse and varied

communities, serving as a fundamental component of both indigenous knowledge and voices.

(Monture, 2009). Such elements of understanding and knowledge are collective and inseparable

to learning. Furthermore Monture addresses that to separate Native literature is then to de-story

the land. (Monture, 2009). I find that the most influential component in Monture's literature is her

concern on matters of gender and colonialism, she writes:

> It may appear that the promise of my title "Women's Words" has been lost in the
>
> discussion. In part this is (or perhaps was, as colonialism has left a large ugly footprint
>
> over my own people's gender knowledge) because gender is not constructed among my
>
> people in a way that is oppressive. Gender is not a hierarchical distribution of power,
>
> where men have more and women less. Gender is not binary and perhaps we should
>
> consider that there are more than two genders. (Cannon). Gender is a state that
>
> balances Haudenosaunee social systems. My understanding always comes from a
>
> woman's place, a mother's place, an auntie's place, a sister's place, and a kohkum's
>
> place. Each of these are sets of responsibilities, not roles. One of the most devastating
>
> impacts of colonialism has been directed at the women. (p. 122).

Monture's comprehension of her existence and the existence of her people, a part from

colonial narratives poses as the origin of the Anticolonial Education Theory. Her perspective

resonates with the declaration that my understanding of learning, knowledge and education

derives from who I am and the responsibility that I have as a learner who holds themselves

responsible to learning for social change. Monture's explanation of the aspect of gender was my

driving decision to pull from my collective experiences as a woman of color understanding that I

chose to put forth in this study comes from the knowledge, experience and thought of a

conscious black woman. Adding to the number of components that create the Anticolonial

Education theory, said theory aspires to emulate Monture's perspective which deconstructs her very existence in education in the lens of European colonialism. In addition to this, we assert the validity and humanity of literary contributions and knowledge of minoritized groups.

The last and most essential element of the Anticolonial Education Theory frames the "undoing" or unraveling of Eurocentric social influences and using it for a process of unlearning in order to transform. Writer Harsha Walia composes an article which creates an alternative definition to the word "decolonization," therefore redefining the very essence of the word. Walia begins by stating in particular to the context of Canada; that the uprooting of land, resources and the overall destruction of self-determination and sovereignty have been an ultimate result of the colonization of indigenous people. One of the most profound points that Walia writes, is central to undoing white supremacist culture and further builds the entire framework of this study:

> Non-natives must be able to position ourselves as active and integral participants in a decolonization movement for political liberation, social transformation, renewed cultural kinships and the development of an economic system that serves rather than threatens our collective life on this planet. Decolonization is as much a process as a goal. It requires a profound re-centering on Indigenous worldviews. Syed Hussan, a Toronto-based activist, states: "Decolonization is a dramatic reimagining of relationships with land, people and the state. Much of this requires study. It requires conversation. It is a practice; it is an unlearning. (p. 1).

In this framing Walia sees that indigenous people are usually affected most by issues relative to environment, poverty, homelessness, land displacement, and gender violence as it speaks to the context of Canada. These issues also place indigenous sovereignty at the forefront as well. As it relates to the Anticolonial Education Theory Walia's redefinition of decolonization is wholly embraced as it relates to the understanding as a process of

unlearning/undoing; building relationships amongst our environment and with one another. Walia's redefined understanding of decolonization as an unlearning process serves as the very framework of this study. This definition of decolonization is imperative to education and educational spaces because as we see knowledge as a tool to liberate and transform our minds, we must acknowledge the culture we are presently in, and move forward to ensure that in that moment, within that educational space we seek liberation and therefore transformation of our lives. Ultimately applying what we learn to our present culture, and in our everyday lives is integral to change.

The historical context of white supremacist culture, and its domination in our societal structures aid in the comprehension of the first step in the decolonization process. Examination of the classroom setting is critical in order to find then find manifestations of it to change. The key concepts from the Anticolonial Education Theory that will inform the decolonization process are Freire's concept of learning for liberation, and therefore transformation. As it pertains to the classroom and the decolonization process, we assert that learning in this particular setting should be a tool in order to liberate, recondition and recreate ourselves, transforming our present environment, and resisting white supremacist cultural narratives in the process. Secondly we assert the following concepts in the Anticolonial Education Theory (1) the composition of the classroom setting must be questioned. (2) And (3) we recognize that the absence of knowledge, experiences and resources from the voice of minoritized communities in the classroom is a political statement in itself in supporting white supremacy; white supremacist culture and narratives are then mirrored in the classroom. (4) and (5) Key concepts of the Anticolonial Education Theory include that the knowledge of marginalized groups are valid and integral to building an inclusive classroom setting and can potentially foster a relationship of solidarity. (6) The classroom setting is an activist architectural space where we should seek to end dehumanizing social constructs. We must understand ourselves as "place makers" who wield the

ability to transform our environment. Plugging in additional key concepts in this study the curated theory acknowledges that not only has Eurocentric narratives successfully undermined the knowledge, contributions and understanding of minoritized communities in the classroom. This concept moves to decolonize our full selves while asserting validity and the full humanity of minoritized groups in the process. The last most pressing key concept moving forward to the decolonization process in this study is to decolonize or unlearn the entire structure of the classroom setting. We must use the classroom to seek liberation and therefore transformation of our lives and act upon it. Applying what we learn to our present culture, in our everyday lives is the transformation at large.

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research question: what are the steps in decolonizing a classroom, as it relates to my practicum work; I specifically focused on curating research methods around decolonizing educational spaces in adult education, as it pertains to the context of Brattleboro, Vermont USA. I've used each method to develop the process of decolonization, sectioning them into three steps. As mentioned above, the first was to examine the classroom setting. The next is to identify determinants to be changed, and finally the last step is to apply the identified indicators of white supremacy in previous steps, which creates an environment that serves to unlearn them. I would like to reiterate that the Anticolonial Education Theory serves as an additive to this process, meant to build understanding of the effect of white supremacist culture and its relationship to the classroom environment.

The three step decolonization process frames three themes in the classroom setting: teaching dynamic, culture and language. These themes address questions in learning culture for students, who establishes the culture within this space and how language is used. Step one in the decolonization process is to examine the setting and questioning our observations. What's the learning dynamic between the instructor and students? How does this dynamic contribute to

classroom culture? Studying this dynamic mirrors Paulo Freire's banking system of education. In his concept, Freire discusses how students are acted upon, assumed to be empty vessels with which the instructor is expected to fill them with knowledge; this form of education assumes that the instructor is the sole decision maker, actor, speaker and knowledgeable person in the classroom. (Freire, 1970). Furthermore one of the affects that the banking system creates in this space is the assumption of a "culture-free" classroom. This asserts that the classroom starts as a place of no outside influence. A notion that negates student experiences, background, culture, language and ultimately their contributions to the learning process. (Souto-Manning, 2009).

Step two is to identify patterns in behavior that contribute to the classroom culture. Is there a good balance of engaged students in this learning process? Are students being encouraged to draw from their experiences in order to make learning applicable? As it applies to the culture of the classroom the assumption of "culture-free" education is applicable here. (Souto-Manning, 2009). The assumption that the classroom setting is a place of political neutrality is false; take into account the context that we currently reside in, the resources that we use and the cultures that both the students and the instructor bring into the space as well. All of these factors are contributors to the culture of a classroom and should therefore be acknowledged and brought out in the learning process. I believe that acknowledgement of these components create a culture of engaged pedagogy and an overall transformative learning experience.

Step three is to apply specific actions to create a decolonized classroom. In what ways is the diversity of language, used in the classroom? What does the application in the diversity of language look like in this setting? Building on the aforementioned steps in this process, this critical pedagogy entails an understanding and recognition of the context students are learning from; the validation of their experiences and the application of their previous experiences. In sum this creates a classroom culture where students recognize their part in learning and therefore become more engaged, reclaiming this environment for themselves. (hooks, 1994).

Diversity of language manifests in this recreation where students are using varied resources, authors, and mediums of knowledge to learn. The finished process promotes a culture of learning emulative of non-western philosophies which address: (1) Learning is communal: Learning is the responsibility of everyone in the classroom setting, in order to create social change outside of the classroom we must develop the transformation here and now in our own educational spaces. (2) Learning is lifelong and informal: Learning is a continuous experiential process. We practice building spaces to educate, and liberate ourselves from oppressive social structures like white supremacy. We are social architects capable of wielding the power to liberate ourselves and therefore others. Lastly (3) learning is holistic: Learning is not only cognitive, but physical, emotional and sometimes spiritual. (Kim & Sharan, 2008). The model recreates a learning culture where the dialogue, varied experiences, new information and implementation into this very setting creates a deep learning experience meant to resonate with one beyond the classroom. (Kim & Sharan).

METHODS

My practicum took place at the Vermont Workers' Center where I worked as a Field Organizing Intern for the Southern Vermont region. This study involved participants who were a part of the Vermont Workers' Center organization. These settings took place at The Root Social Justice Center in downtown Brattleboro Vermont USA, a dual office work space reserved for me to work in, and a community space where I conducted Organizing Committee meetings for my practicum. Adding to this, this space was also the site where the VWC's annual Solidarity School workshop was held for summer 2015. The Root's commitment to social justice and activism in the Brattleboro community made it a place of education and communal learning; this space served as an informal classroom.

I used three different methods in this research including participant observation for the Solidarity School workshop, and the same method for the creation of an "educational short"

about the South Carolina Charleston shooting. The last method was a survey created for a

project I had led called the Collective Liberation Committee. Collective Liberation was an

initiative started by my supervisor along with other VWC members of color in 2014 to address

issues specifically affecting members of color in the VWC. Upon taking up the project, creating

an online survey taken by 12 staff members the survey was created to assess where the

organization presently resides, and what direction it needs to take concerning work with

minoritized communities.

Data collection for the survey was analyzed by gathering answers to ten questions on an

online survey. The answers were then color coded on a graph with each of the three key colors

rated least to most knowledgeable, depending on the question. After making the graph and

consulting with my supervisor, whom is the only other person of color in the organization; we

decided to share results with the staff. This eventually led to the creation of the Collective

Liberation Proposal plan. This plan was intended to undo white supremacist culture within our

organization, along with empowering and cultivating a safe space of leadership for members of

color.

Previously mentioned, the Solidarity School workshop and the Charleston educational

short were both participant observation methods used for this study. As a Field Organizing

Intern I had the opportunity to construct and facilitate educational shorts also known as 30-45

minute lessons for biweekly organizing committee meeting. In the first few months of my

practicum experience, the topic how to decolonize a classroom was at its conceptualization

stage; I was looking for opportunities through independent projects on how to incorporate this

subject into the fabric of the VWC.

Journaling my experience of this workshop for the Reflective Practicum phase which

required monthly updates served as my form of data collection. Analysis of this event was

through personal reflection and feedback from my supervisor. The Charleston educational short

was another method where I had used the similar data procedure of journaling my experience

and also direct feedback from Organizing Committee participants. Data analysis again was

through personal reflection and one on one feedback in meetings with my supervisor. Notes of

these feedback sessions were collected in a shared folder for us to keep for future reference.

The Charleston short activity, was meant to demonstrate the importance of recognizing white

supremacist culture and dismantling it in our very spaces. The model I've produced derives from

my practicum experience working with the Vermont Workers' Center and living amongst the

Brattleboro community as an active and involved resident. The collected data has helped to

slowly inform and construct my personal insights about what it means to provide a decolonized

or inclusive learning environment especially for minoritized communities.

MY PRACTCICUM ORGANIZATION: THE VERMONT WORKERS' CENTER

The history of what is now the Vermont Workers' Center began in 1996 when a low-

income group of workers created a collective called Central Vermonters for a Livable Wage. The

first initiative for statewide organization in 1998 was their Workers' Rights Hotline. Amongst their

organizing efforts eventually this small faction started working with community members and

unions to support organizing workers across the state. The VWC began to evolve from a

workers' rights organization to a human rights organization as leaders began to realize that all

injustices are interconnected and result from human rights violations, social inequalities, and

oppression. Since its inception, the VWC has joined forces with many groups and led and

participated in various campaigns to organize for justice for Vermonters. (Vermont Workers'

Center, 2014). The VWC is a non-partisan, democratic, member-run workers' rights

organization that works towards the goals of dignified work, universal healthcare, housing,

childcare, transportation, and a healthy environment for Vermont residents. (Vermont Workers'

Center, 2014).

Their partnering method with local, state, international and out-of-state agencies involves using a human rights framework titled the Human Rights Principles. These principles help to establish accountability to the members and the agency as a whole: (1) Universality: Everyone is included and can meet their needs. (2) Equity: Everyone contributes what they can and gets what they need. (3) Accountability: The people are able to oversee and guide how government is protecting and fulfilling our rights. (4) Transparency: All information related to decision-making should be clear and accessible to all. (5) Participation: Everyone has a meaningful say in how decisions get made that impact us all. (Vermont Workers' Center, 2014). These principles are entwined to the very fabric of the VWC and also dictate how the organization chooses to collaborate or disassociate from others.

The strategic orientation in organizing for the VWC formerly called The People's Recipe, is a unique analogy to the organization's action. The People's Recipe involves essential methods or "ingredients" to building a people's movement for justice and social change. The strategy methods necessary to curate the entire movement include: (1) Base-building: emphasizing the importance of building and strengthening the organization's membership base by reaching out to community members while also developing capacities within the existing base. (2) Political education: Education and training of our political systems and the structure of oppression in order to stay informed about how best to change such systems. (3) Human rights framework: Utilizing the aforementioned principles to guide our vision for the organization and propose policies that abide by this framework. (4) Strategic communications: essential to changing the dominant narratives that shape how society frames injustice. Changing these dominant narratives is important to not only grow the movement but reframe how society views the problems faced by the oppressed. (5) Grassroots fundraising: Holding events that gather funding for the VWC by and for its members, we operate understanding that we are accountable to our communities when we are funded by our communities. (6) Capacity building: To have a

strong movement, the membership base must be vast and growing. (7) Holding decision-makers and powerholders accountable: Through direct action, meetings with elected officials, strikes, marches and other mediums we believe that the most effective means for change is through holding our policymakers accountable to abide by our human rights through collective action. (8) Solidarity and movement building: Building strong relationships with other organizations and learn from each other to build and grow from one another and developing strategies to collectively achieve the goal of a socially just world. (Vermont Workers' Center, 2014)

The Vermont Workers' Center believes the participation of community members and those most affected by injustice are crucial to building a movement for social change. According to the 2014 New Member Handbook:

Membership is "open to all regardless of union affiliation, gender, race, profession, disability, political beliefs, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or nationality" (p.1)

In order to become a member, those interested must attend a new member orientation which can be in a group or one-on-one, agree with the Vermont Workers' Center mission and strategic orientation, sign-up to pay dues, and take the solidarity action pledge. The solidarity action pledge states that, in becoming a member, one must participate five times per year in one of the following ways: (1) Standing in solidarity with workers seeking to organize. (2) Joining community members to grow a movement that serves the needs of the people and allows for dignified work and dignified lives, (3) Defending the needs of the people from exploitation by powerholders. (4) Working to end injustice and oppression. Dues are based on a sliding scale, or ability to pay, and scholarships or waivers are available for those who are unable to pay the $1 per month minimum. (Vermont Workers' Center, 2014).

The VWC works to build leaders across the state through their grassroots organizing model which involves building membership, identifying leaders, providing support and guidance, and developing authentic relationships with members. Members are encouraged to share their stories, take leadership roles, and inspire others to become leaders in their own capacities. This approach to leadership helps to build stronger bonds within the organization and empowers members to work for collective liberation and lasting change. Leadership comes in many forms and members can take leadership roles in many ways. Staff organizers work to ensure that the talents, passions, and interests of members are utilized for mutual benefit. Opportunities such as leading committee meetings, rallying people in their communities to attend events, public speaking, and developing a coordinator role.

By reaching out and asking folks to identify their own needs and their community's needs, the VWC acts as a support system for people to realize their power and collectively work toward justice. In order to dive deeper into the membership structure, it's important to first have context of the overall structure of the organization. According to the Vermont Workers Center their organizational structure and hierarchy puts the membership base at the top of the pyramid, giving lead authority to members for guiding the direction of the organization. Elections are held for direct leadership positions such as the Coordinating Committee, (COCO) at the biannual Membership Assembly; an event for members to get together, review the past year, plan for future years, discuss current issues, and celebrate all the hard work accomplished. The COCO meets monthly and is made up of eight women and three men of various sexual orientations and gender identities. (Vermont Workers Center, 2014).The Regional Organizing Committees take part in bi-weekly meetings which are organized according to staff organizer turf. A notable example of this position, is my supervisor who is responsible for organizing, the four counties in the Southern Vermont region: Windham, Windsor, Bennington, and Rutland. Each organizer

hosts the meetings in a central area in each of the counties and invites members in their turf to attend.

The structure of Organizing Committee meetings exemplifies the values of the organization. Prior to each meeting, staff organizers develop an agenda but ask for additions, deletions, or feedback from members prior to the meeting's commencement. Before each meeting begins, members are asked to commit to a set of norms or, as the organization calls, agreements. The agreement list is the standard for all meetings across the state: (1) be aware of time, (2) Step up, step back: This agreement states that if you're someone who usually speaks out allow others who are usually quiet the chance to speak. Adding to that, quiet persons are encouraged to be more involved and vocal. (3) Oppression exists: There is no denial or racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia etc. within this space, we choose to acknowledge that these systems are a part of people's experiences. (4) We all have something to teach and we all have something to learn, (5) Use "ouch", "oops", and "whoa": These terms are used in discussion, each having significance. "Ouch" when someone says something that offends you, "oops" when you misspeak and are meaning to correct yourself, and "whoa" when information is difficult to follow. (6) Unity, struggle, unity: expresses that all who join the movement either have personal struggles, or are acting in solidarity with the struggles of others, but must recognize that all struggles are interconnected and everyone must unite to make lasting change. (7) Cell phones off. (Vermont Workers' Center, 2014).

At each organizing committee, members are asked to volunteer to facilitate or take notes and all are encouraged to participate. At the end of each meeting, each member takes a moment to say something they liked about the meeting, something they would change next time, and an insight they gained. The VWC also aims to build their efforts of membership, leadership, and community in part through trainings. One core training that contributes to this power-building movement is a two-day education program called Solidarity School. These

trainings provide "baseline common framework, analysis, and skill set" for building the

movement by providing attendees with an experiential introduction to political education and

social justice. (Vermont Workers' Center, 2014). Solidarity Schools are generally attended by

every member at least once, although it is not an official requirement, in order to ensure that all

members have a basic understanding of the broken political, economic, and social systems that

contribute to the injustices faced each day by Vermonters and people across the nation.

Lastly as it relates to the VWC's campaigns, the organization launched the Put People

First Campaign (PPF) and under the guise of this large campaign are smaller campaign issues

that the VWC aims to address. Healthcare is a Human Right Campaign (HCHR) in 2008 was

initiated as a part of the PPF campaign to build a statewide movement toward shifting

healthcare from a private commodity to a universal, publicly-financed, public good. (Vermont

Workers' Center, 2014). Another issue under the guise of the PPF campaign is the Work with

Dignity campaign which encompasses many workers' rights issues, such as paid sick days,

minimum wage increases, and the right to organize/unionize. As with the HCHR and PPF

campaigns, these are on-going and continue to grow as issues arise. The VWC's campaigns

are ongoing and staff organizers are continually reaching out to community members to hear

their struggles and to connect them to the movement. Collectively the mission, strategy, history,

politics, structure and outreach efforts of this organization are weaved together in order to

provide a space meant to be inclusive and inviting to people of various groups who side with the

VWC's mission, and foster a learning environment for staff and members to grow and learn from

one another.

FINDINGS

In the first two months of my practicum I was assigned to aid in planning the annual 2015

Solidarity School workshop. Data entry, contacting attendees and spreading the word about its

forthcoming dates was the priority on my task list. At this time, I had begun to regularly attend and

facilitate organizing committee meetings and began to gain a grasp of the culture and climate of said meetings. Solidarity School and the organizing committee meetings were the first few glimpses I had of the organizations' culture and how it supported inclusive and decolonized spaces. In the first day of Solidarity School, I was instructed to only help with set up in the morning and afterwards, immerse myself in this experience and give feedback. Solidarity School was one of the organizations' biggest turnout events, boasting positive feedback from attendees. Field organizers from headquarters in Burlington came down to facilitate the two-day training, along with my supervisor being the only woman of color on staff.

During the workshop on the first day, a structured activity was set up for participants to bring an object representative of a current issue that they care about; at the end of the workshop our objects were returned to us on the last day of the workshop as we shared what we learned from the organization's training. At the beginning of the training, participants were to abide by the VWC Agreements and reminded that this is an open and inclusive space for all. Following this activity I had brought twine, symbolic of the unraveling and unending social injustices as it relates to the US and the treatment of its black citizens. I had briefly shared my admiration and support for the Black Lives Matter movement and continued on to place my object in the middle of the room. I took note that this was a predominantly white space where there were only four people of color, myself included. It didn't take long in the training to notice a shift amongst three out of the four people of color as the training progressed. I had also noticed that the three people who reacted were all black, one of them even left shortly after the second activity.

Onward after this first activity, my expectations for this workshop to be an inclusive educational space had become disillusioned. After the first exercise, facilitators went onto a PowerPoint presentation in an effort to provide context of oppressive systems in the US. Statistical information about the unequal access to resources, and maltreatment in jobs, housing, environment etc. for minoritized groups were explained, facilitators then proceeded to move forward to a broader

discussion where participants had the opportunity to speak about these injustices as it relates to their community. One of the undeterred people of color, a native of South America had begun to ask questions about racism in the U.S. attempting to gain a better understanding of it. The conversation of race became the central topic in this discussion, and as a result of the lack of historical context it was meant with objective scrutiny, denial, and "ouch" moments. The accounts of racism and the experiences of being a person of color in the U.S. from myself and another participant of color were constantly met with the same denial and criticism. Even when one of the facilitators began explaining systemic racism to the group, another member had begun to debate their findings. Again the South American participant, unfamiliar with U.S. context of racism began to debate its existence; this conversation left some participants agreeing and others unsure of what to say. This left a heavy uneasiness amongst everyone in the room and before many of the allegations, and critique were addressed, one of the facilitators had encouraged us to move onto the next activity. To an extent conversations like these are to be expected however the shift that this caused in my experience was that facilitators did not take account the uneasy feelings that began to arise amongst group members and continued on to the next activity due to time. After this conversation was cut short we were given a break and swiftly moved to the next activity. From this point on in the workshop I as well as another black woman in the training became disengaged.

Weeks after the Charleston shooting in South Carolina, where the murder of nine people at a bible study took place at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church at the hands of an armed white supremacist; I had constructed an educational short where I had provided an article explaining the complicated history of the Confederate flag. The goal of this lesson was to initiate a discussion amongst members on the issue of problematic symbols that might be around in the communities of Southern Vermont: Several members identified Confederate flags still being waved around town or on residents' attire, vehicles etc. and the controversy surrounding a racially insensitive mascot for a school district in Bennington which caused a stir of media attention. In

addition to noticing Confederate flags around their hometown. This lesson attempted to pinpoint and draw understanding of the root causes of the Charleston shooting and how the social impact behind it, is not far removed from our communities. After members read the article, they answered discussion questions on how the VWC can take part in standing up against racism and support the removal of oppressive symbols in our own communities. I encouraged members to come up with symbols around our area that we must address.

Separately OC participants took note for the need to flesh out a plan promoting more membership of people of color in the organization. Through discussions with members it became more apparent to me that white supremacist culture's footprint in the VWC often discouraged the involvement of people in minoritized groups. We are aware that inclusiveness is mandatory but realistically, managing such systems is a learning process in itself and requires time and patience. These assessments helped me to frame my decolonization model by knowing what to look for as I created it, and ideas of how to go about the imperfect process of managing it. The Collective Liberation Committee results in the survey, discussion with VWC staff, and the one-on-one meetings with my supervisor indicated that staff were mostly moderately to highly knowledgeable about systems of oppression and their effect on minoritized communities. In fact many had been involved in groups and organizations that fought for the human rights of such groups along with having a great deal of textbook knowledge of these matters. This has been analyzed through participant's comprehension of terminology, some historical background and ideas of deconstructing privilege and power in these social constructs. The survey results also show that many of us were understanding of the importance of intersectionality but unsure when applying this concept within our organization. This is similar to our decolonization model where participants may or may not be aware of white supremacy in our society. It was suggested that participants are learning from a detached position as opposed to an engaged one. The Collective Liberation proposal plan lists suggestions and recommendations that were made for staff and members to

take. Revisiting the VWC's principles and mission statement to include the recognition and work towards intersectionality in organizing efforts was a very important highlight stated in the CLC work plan. The process to this method examines the structure of the VWC to understand the cause of disconnect with most minoritized members. This later served as Step one to the decolonization process as it relates to educational spaces.

Resulting in the reflection and feedback of Solidarity School and the Charleston educational short, I found a deeper analysis in Step one and the evolution of Step two of the decolonization process. Organizing Committee members' involvement of discussing oppressive symbols in the Brattleboro community was held to examine but also identify the parallels in our social justice organization and a terrible crime done in the name of a culture that's imbedded everywhere. The Collective Liberation Committee plan and survey helped envision and identify the growth needed within the organization to address issues of racism; this plan later helped to formulate the second step in the decolonization process. These two methods in addition to the result of Solidarity School informed the last step to this model. Amidst thoughts in personal reflection and feedback I had expressed my frustration with the workshop because of the carelessness of not applying history to our current context. The importance of acknowledging how and why minoritized groups are marginalized when setting the stage for context is crucial to understanding why said groups are in compromised positions today. Step three of the process is what moves us to actively apply how to change our situations in the present time. Omission of our stories avoid the necessary questions, how did we get here are what can we do to fix our current situation? These findings helped to build the foundation of the entire model of my work.

THE PROCESS OF DECOLONIZATION

Relative to Kipling's poem earlier in this study, we recognize that this is but one literary composition amongst the various historically documented works that advocated white supremacist culture. Nonetheless the message in Kipling's poem is an embodiment of common

perceptions as it relates to education and the classroom. The very doctrine of white supremacy is so embedded that the contributions of minoritized communities are met with unfamiliarity or are challenged because of the absence of the standard European form. This perspective immediately demotes these contributions as inferior or unsuitable. (Monture, 2009). Due to this pattern of thinking, it is common that the input of minoritized communities in the classroom require a shifted or decolonized perspective by participants. It is in this step that we set the context in order to place these steps into practice. Based on my experience this model attempts to provide others in helping to build decolonized spaces as well; I encourage those who use it to reflect on their own experiences in order to craft an engaged pedagogy that serves to enlighten, inform and inspire.

STEP ONE

Teaching dynamics, culture, and language are the three themes in this model that are analyzed throughout this process. These themes are meant to build upon one another as the method progresses from a starting point of observing our setting, noting behaviors of students and finally proposing transformative practices. In the first step of this process with my envisioned classroom, I've paired it with the established culture of white supremacy and took note of the following:

Step One: Examination

  i.) Aspects examined: Teaching dynamic between the students and instructor.
       ✓ What is the established cultural context in the classroom
       ✓ Does this dynamic foster a one-way accord where the instructor is the only individual that's assumed to educate?
       ✓ Are students being encouraged to draw from their diverse experiences to make classroom learning material more applicable?
  ii.) Aspects examined: Established cultural context of the classroom

✓ To what extent are students involved in determining the learning process?

✓ Are students being encouraged to draw from their diverse experiences in making the classroom material applicable to their lives?

✓ Which group is benefiting from the dominant culture's narrative?

✓ To what effect does this have on the classroom culture?

iii.) Aspect(s) examined: language

✓ What's the effect of the language used in the classroom?

✓ Who wrote the resources that are considered staple texts in the classroom setting?

✓ Whose voices seem to be the most dominant in the classroom?

✓ What type of knowledge/experience is being validated or valued within the classroom setting?

STEP TWO

The progression of this model builds in step two where I've observed the classroom setting. In doing this I have identified specific patterns in behavior and actions in the classroom that tend to show the marginalization of the voices, contributions and therefore engagement of students of minoritized identities.

Step Two: Identifying

i.)   Identified: teaching dynamic: little to no student involvement, overreliance on lectures

✓ Established classroom culture: consider backgrounds and diversity of students.

✓ Monolithic dynamic between students and instructor: Consider physical arrangement of classroom and students within it

✓ Few student involvement exercises, in-depth questions, dialogue amongst students (alternative forms of learning)

ii.) Identified: classroom culture

- ✓ Few opportunities for students to give feedback on learning environment

- ✓ Lack of a culture of dialogue with and amongst students

- ✓ Student engagement/disengagement amongst particular demographic of students

- ✓ Only a certain demographic dominate in the learning environment

iii.) Identified: language

- ✓ Engagement of all if not most students

- ✓ Authors, directors, writers, most resource curators in the classroom are white men

- ✓ Mostly white males sharing or dominating discussion in classroom while students of minoritized identities (women, students of color etc.) are silent

- ✓ Few creative mediums used in learning: storytelling, video, art, etc. from minoritized educators. Few or no students sharing and learning from these educators or bringing in knowledge from them to the classroom setting.

STEP THREE

This final stage of the decolonization process brings us to apply actions and specific practices which expands the diversity of cultures in this space.

Step Three: Application

i.) Apply: Teaching dynamic, Utilize different forms of teaching

- ✓ Opportunities for students to share their culture, and background in learning process.

- ✓ Student seating in different arrangements in a circle for shared learning dynamic

       ✓ Alternative forms of learning used in teaching, activities, and group

          discussion/group work

  ii.) Apply: Classroom culture

       ✓ Students given the opportunity to share input in learning process

          (classroom structure) etc.

       ✓ Establish a culture of dialogue with students.

       ✓ Invite students to speak who haven't shared in classroom.

       ✓ Open discussion for alternative views

  iii.) Apply: Diversity of language

       ✓ Agreed terms of language from students

       ✓ Collect resources from people of minoritized identities

       ✓ Students of minoritized identities given opportunity to share. All students

          are encouraged to listen and observe responses

       ✓ Classroom learning process should have creative mediums in learning

          process. From using storytelling to teach, group work or observation and

          listening as a form of learning

      The process of decolonizing acknowledges the diversity in cultures and perspectives within a space of learning. As a result of creating a culture of engaged pedagogy, dialogue is broadened, diverse experiences are encouraged and participants within this environment are challenged to expand their idea of knowledge and learning (Batiste, 2013).

CONCLUSION

      The decolonization model was formulated not only out of my practicum and graduate student experience; but from the need to eliminate assumptions about contributions of people of minoritized identities. Reflecting on my experience, I had the opportunity to build on the need for inclusivity in the Vermont Workers' Center organization's framework and actively create and

lead spaces where learners were reflecting and applying their education in real time. I

constructed the Anticolonial Education Theory which reflected the understanding of white

supremacist culture's impact in education for minoritized people. The concepts woven into the

fabric of this theory reinforces transformation of self, one's present situation and overall the

world around you. Another thread adds that we also must be activist architects who are

responsible for building the change we want to see. These threads further address the need to

both unlearn and relearn certain perceptions of ourselves as well as our environment. This

process aspires to revolutionize our way of learning in order to become more collaborative;

memorable, and reinforce engaged pedagogy. As a result it forces us to realize our

complacency in oppressive social structures, and allows the educator and the learner to rethink

the boundaries constructed around knowledge. (Hooks, 1994).

In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, author and feminist bell hooks draws from the

words and philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King on the importance of embracing a "revolution of

values" in unlearning white supremacist capitalist patriarchy in the classroom. (Hooks, 1994)

When it came to putting multicultural education into practice in her own academic institutions,

she takes note that this was a challenge itself:

> Many of our colleges were reluctant participants in this change (multicultural education).
>
> Many folks found that as they tried to respect "cultural diversity" they had to confront the
>
> limitations of their training and knowledge, as well as a possible loss of "authority."
>
> Indeed, exposing certain truths and biases in the classroom often create chaos and
>
> confusion. The idea that the classroom should always be a "safe," harmonious place
>
> was challenged. It was hard for individuals to fully grasp the idea that recognition of
>
> difference might also require us a willingness to see the classroom change, to allow for
>
> shifts in relations between students. A lot of people panicked. What they saw happening
>
> was not the comforting "melting pot" idea of cultural diversity, the rainbow collation

where we would all be grouped together in our difference, but everyone wearing the

same have-a-nice-day smile. This was the stuff of colonizing fantasy, a perversion of the

progressive vision of cultural diversity. (p. 31)

Our ability to decolonize our educational spaces depends on our willingness to decenter white

supremacist culture, this is often a struggle itself due to how normalized its indoctrination is in our

society. As agents for social change we must ask ourselves, am I ready to unlearn, listen, and be

challenged in the traditional structure of the classroom setting? Am I ready to develop a true world

perspective of learning? We must find it in ourselves to have the courage to take the steps and

make the necessary changes in expanding our perspectives of learning and knowledge.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Collective Liberation 2014

<u>Goals – Ideas:</u>

Organizational

- Continue looking at how white supremacy culture affects our organization — Tools for internal work
- Being intentional about creating inclusive spaces, reflecting our principles — checklists as a way to ensure that we are doing the work
- Convene People of Color Caucus
- Develop plan to make this work consistent and proactive, not reactive when a situation arises
- Collective liberation strategy committee to focus on this work — train the trainers group, workshop attendees
- Bring proposals to the in-person retreats with Coco, Steering staff to incorporate into work plans
- Internal audit on CL
- Being intentionally about learning and going slow, thinking about not as much as our campaign work but growing our movement in a different way.

Education

- Develop concrete practices and a toolbox to bring this work to everything we do, campaign work (i.e. community mapping exercise, organizing with communities of color)
- PULL and other leaders develop position paper about Collective liberation
- Tools to evaluate policy decisions through a CL lens
- Research examples of interracial organizing in history
- Explore intersections with class
- Develop a reading list
- Next Steps with train-the-trainers and workshop

Organizational and Community Outreach

- Evaluate / listening circle session about how do we work with organizations doing anti-oppression work already
- Develop leadership or bring in leadership from other organizations to be making more connections
- Work with current partners to do CL workshops
- Exchanges with other organizations, not experts, learn more
- More intentional about reaching out to other organizations whether through exchanges or trying to really support other initiatives that are happening
- Community mapping of who are the players on a local level who are doing this work already
- Building relationship with people of color so we can learn through them, consciously
- List of resources

Conflict Resolution

- Develop a process to address situations that come up in a meeting, an event, or between members
- Reach out to trained mediators

APPENDIX B

Vermont Workers' Center Collective Liberation Plan 2016

October 14, 2015

Created and submitted by Celeste Hayes

Summary: This is a plan to improve the internal foundation of the Vermont Workers' Center organization to better incorporate and sustain Collective Liberation for intersectionality within its structure and movement. Incorporating intersectionality to VWC's structure will help improve relationships, cultural literacy, and organizing and outreach of staff and members. Initiating the Collective Liberation Plan will aim to bring about awareness and education of intersectionality in our organizing efforts and combat issues relative to systems of oppression within the organization itself.

What is intersectionality? The interchange or crossing of types of systems of oppression, discrimination and domination.

Why is it important? Intersectionality is an important element in this movement for VWC staff and members to deepen their understanding of how the issues of the Put People First Campaign affect people of different identities.

Collective Liberation Strategic Orientation:

- We must acknowledge communities of color have historically and still are the most impacted by the injustices of our society and we must explicitly form relationships to bring these communities into the forefront of our movements.
- We must believe in the strength and leadership in communities of color and will work in solidarity to take leadership from these communities to be in the forefront of our movements
- We acknowledge that we live in a white supremacist culture that plagues our communities and allows for us to be divided by race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and class, etc. As members we will dismantle the white supremacist culture that plagues our communities.
- We must educate ourselves and heighten our awareness on systems of oppression especially racism, as a predominantly white organization to build solidarity with more people of color in our outreach and organizing efforts. We realize that building a large and committed diverse base involves a foundation that is committed to dismantling systems of oppression within our movement and within ourselves.
- We must act together in ensuring that intersectionality is an element incorporated in every facet of our organization and explicitly incorporated into our work plans each year and that members help us to carry out this work.
- Each one of us must be a leader in educating ourselves about both the history of systems of oppression within the US, and how you will take action.
- We must intentionally use a human rights framework alongside Collective Liberation as an understanding of grounding ourselves in the roots of intersectionality within the movement.
- We must seek to lift up the stories of communities of color that are most impacted by the injustices that we face today by influence of mainstream media controlled by those in power.

- We understand that for a movement to be in solidarity we must be proactive about issues that affect diverse communities and willingly engage in the difficult but rewarding journey in social justice.
- We must decolonize ourselves and our spaces in order to unlearn systems of oppression and take leadership from indigenous communities.

Internal work

- Have placed in VWC mission strive to make intersectionality or Collective Liberation work a staple of the organization. Clearly state that race relations is something that the VWC strives to improve.
- Form relationships with more organizations that are or serve communities of color.
- Make advanced studies on race and racism required of all staff members.
- Join groups such as SURJ and other local organizations for external reflection of racial justice work
- Have VWC website accurately and clearly demonstrate intersectionality within organization.
- Create positions of leadership and power holder for staff members of color.

External Work

Healthcare is a Human Right:

- Explicitly reach out to current and former people who are incarcerated, queer, communities of color and migrant, immigrant, new American and Indigenous people where they live, work and play for tabling, canvassing, and surveying for healthcare.
- Provide questions or additional questions on the surveys that pertain to barriers to access, getting treatment or providing cultural competent services when trying to get health care.
- Be explicit with lifting up stories in the following areas
- women
- queer/ trans
- mental illness/addiction
- medical marijuana
- Revamp the hotline to reflect the need to address these areas of discrimination in the healthcare field
- Train staff and a diverse membership base to help out with the hotline

Work with Dignity

- Explicitly reach out to current and former people who are incarcerated, queer, communities of color and migrant, immigrant, new American and Indigenous people where they live, work and play for tabling, canvassing, and surveying for work with dignity.
- Provide Specific questions on the surveys that address discrimination in many facets. From the beginning of submitting a resume to promotion and leadership. Pull out questions around color, race, religion, and language.
- Revamp the workers' rights hotline that will take and look into allege discrimination based on color, race, religion and language. Create a network of these folks to take action
- Train staff and a diverse membership base to help out with the hotline
- Initiate a band the box campaign with leadership from the community.

Movement Building

- Explicitly reach out to current and former people who are incarcerated, queer, communities of color and migrant, immigrant, new American and Indigenous people where they live, work and play for tabling, canvassing, and surveying.
- explicitly make relationship with organizations and groups working on issues of racism
- Ask People of color to participate in the "I am Vermont Too" story photo project challenging racial micro-aggression in Vermont. Have non people of color sign on in solidarity to support the project (link with more steps to come soon)
- Intentionally organize Black and other folks for black history month.
- Have I am VT too project displayed as a gallery walk in the State house for at least the month of February.
- Have a big action on February 12, 2016, Black Lives Matter day. To include, rally, speakers/testifiers, meeting with government "giving demands) meeting with our legislators, and press conference
- Provide space in the People's convention for these communities to take leadership on the development and content, and be a presence at the event.
- Collaborate with Human Right Council and other interested parties on mass incarceration to discuss the BUDGET and its relation to sending prisoners out of state and privatization/people buying stocks in the prison system.
- Work with Migrant Justice and other groups to continue to revamp and hold our officers accountable to bias free policing

PULL

- Revisit Solidarity School curriculum to include history of race relations within the US. This is absolutely crucial when discussing movement building and bringing in more people of color. DO NOT invite people of color to this workshop without including this in curriculum.
- Develop *with POC and others in those communities* relevant educational shorts specific to race and gender.
- Develop advanced studies and a membership training about Collective Liberation.

.**Resources**

The resources below are for both staff and members of the VWC to create better understanding of intersectionality and Collective Liberation work.

1. *Power, Privilege and Difference* Allan G. Johnson
2. *The New Jim Crow* Michelle Alexander
3. *African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*- PBS Documentary series
4. *The House I Live In* Documentary on the War on Drugs, Race and the Prison Industrial Complex
5. White Like Me- Documentary by Tim Wise
6. *Decolonizing Together* article on indigenous knowledge being the key element in working in solidarity by Harsha Walia

APPENDIX C

This week's educational short:

http://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/06/22/416548613/the-complicated-political-history-of-the-confederate-flag

Please read this article and be prepared to have a decision among OC members. We will be giving folks this before the meeting and asking them to read it. If groups want we will take turns reading the article in our group and reflect.

 Below are some reflective questions that we may ask.

What are your overall feelings/thoughts? How does this relate or impact you personally?

Does the removal of the confederate flag address the root problem? What do you see as the root problem?

How does this relate to your/our local communities?

How do you think VWC and its members should be addressing this issue here in Vermont or how does this relate to other issues VWC is working on?

What are some symbols in the area in which you live or work that are oppressive that could be challenged?

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Take away:

Come with 2-3 symbols/ images you find in our community we could challenge.

Collective Liberation Survey

Purpose

This survey was an initial step in the pursuit to help the Vermont Workers' Center create an inclusive space for people of diverse identities that is proactive not reactive in our organizing efforts. Our goal is to create tools that will internally educate, empower and reflect a workers' rights organization that recognizes intersectionality as the keystone in effective and meaningful social justice work.

This survey was provided to assess where we are in our organization in understanding of systems of oppression, furthering ideas on tools to develop for how we should counter them within our organization.

Results/Summary

Collectively, our understanding of different systems of oppression is at a high level. This has been analyzed through participant's comprehension of terminology, some historical background and ideas of deconstructing privilege and power in these social constructs. The survey results also show that many of us are understanding of the importance of intersectionality but still require improvement in applying ways of how to dismantle said oppressive systems within our organization.

The basic structure of the survey responses have been outlined in a grid-style layout. "P" on the left side of the grid indicating participants along with the number of people who completed the survey. On the top of the grid "Q" indicates the question and the number next to it is the amount of questions that were asked. The "B" column members of the organization staff or Coordinating Committee are listed.

There were a total of 12 participants who had filled out the survey overall. The survey is color coded to assess participant's familiarity or knowledge. The colors red, yellow and green were used, red indicating that these were areas where the participant had no to little knowledge. Yellow indicating that participants had some or a moderate amount of knowledge and lastly green where it indicates participants had a high level of knowledge in the subject. Some areas were left blank to indicate that the participant did not answer the question. The manner in which this data was analyzed was to gain an understanding of where we are and where need to improve.

The surveys are meant to be and will continue to stay anonymous. Question 5 is meant to indicate how participants identify themselves to gain a sense of how participants view themselves and to understand what educational tools we might need to create through these diverse groups.

Lastly the last two questions were for the purpose of adding feedback and providing a voice to participants to see what direction the organization would like to take.

Survey Questions

Q1: What does collective liberation mean to you? Who/what is an racial justice role model/organization/movement for you and why?

Q2: Do you have an interest in joining the Collective Liberation Committee? Why or why not? Please be specific

Q3: How are you engaged with any communities or organizations that do collective liberation work both regionally or nationally? Please be specific

Q4: What kind of collective liberation work have you been engaged in, (racial justice, gender equality, disability rights) presently or in the past?

Q5: What communities do you personally identify with? How are your communities impacted by systemic inequality?

Q6: What knowledge do you have about race in the United States? How did you learn about race and ethnicity in the U.S.?

Q7: What knowledge, do you have about gender (sexism, gender inequality) and gender identity (heteronormativity, sexual orientation)? How have you learned about gender and gender identity?

Q8: What knowledge do you have about disabilities (visible/non-visible, disability rights, mental/emotional abilities etc.) How did you learn about disabilities?

Q9: In addition to these areas what knowledge do you have about other important matters (religion, class, etc.) that personally or organizationally impact you? How do these matters indirectly impact you?

Q10: What are your suggestions for next steps in addressing these matters? Is there anything that you wish we would've asked in this survey?

Suggestions/Recommendations

The following suggestions are proposed based off of the survey responses.

- Provide reading material that the group collectively reads outside of in-person staff meetings. When staff meetings are in session allocate time to discuss readings, have some type of reflective and implementation process put into place.
- Create caucuses for different groups e.g. Women's Caucus, LGBTQ Caucus, and People of Color Caucus etc. to discuss needed improvements in the organization and present needs in staff meetings.
- Revisit mission statement and principles to include that the VWC recognizes and works towards intersectionality in its organizing efforts.
- Create a work plan proposal for the Collective Liberation Committee to be approved by staff and begin to implement changes as soon as possible.