

Towards Decolonized Practice in Settlement Work

Alexandru (Alex) Caldararu
Pathways to Prosperity Partnership
NorQuest College
April 27, 2021

Biography: Alexandru Caldararu

- Born in Constanța, Romania in June of 1980. Immigrated to Edmonton with family four months later.
- B.A. (Criminology) and M.Ed. (Adult Community, and Higher Education) from the University of Alberta. Also completed the TESL Canada-certified post graduate ACE TESOL program through the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers.
- Currently employed full-time as an Instructor and Program Founder of the **Settlement Studies Diploma Program** at NorQuest College since **September of 2018**.
- From **August of 2014** until **August of 2018**, I worked as a full-time Instructor/Associate Chair of the College's **Community Support Worker Program**, and have previously taught/facilitated courses at the **University of Alberta** and **MacEwan University**. Currently serving as the **President** of the NorQuest College Faculty Association.
- **5 years** of front-line work experience as a Settlement Practitioner, Volunteer Coordinator, and Community Organizer. **25 years** of community volunteer experience.

Acknowledgement of Indigenous Territories

- NorQuest College is situated on Indigenous lands commonly referred to today as **Treaty Six** Territory.
- Treaty Six encompasses the traditional territories of numerous western Canadian First Nations, including the **Cree, Dene, Stoney Nakota Sioux, Saulteaux, Métis,** and **Ojibwe** nations.
- [amiskwaciwâskahikan](#) → Cree word for “Beaver Mountain House”, the pre-colonial name given to the Edmonton region by its original inhabitants.
- “Pehonan” – Rossdale Flats (Central Edmonton)
 - Translates to “Meeting Place” in Cree
 - Used as a gathering place by First Nations peoples for thousands of years.
 - A large contributing factor to the selection of the original sites of Fort Edmonton and the Provincial Legislature.

Intro Exercise: “Canadian” Values

- On your own, I invite you to take a couple of minutes to identify 3-4 values you associate with being “Canadian.” Where did you learn these values from?
- Keep those values in mind as we spend our time together in this presentation.

The Great Canadian Myth

- Alvarado (2010) contends that **meritocracy** is at the heart of the Great American Myth
 - you are chiefly responsible for your own successes and/or failures)
 - does not account systemic marginalization (ie. Poverty, racism, the feminized “glass ceiling,” etc.)
- However, Millar (2017) contends that we have our own Great Canadian Myth; that **multiculturalism** in Canada denotes an absence of **systemic racism**
 - Canada is a country built and sustained by immigrants, therefore it cannot be racist
 - Canada is multicultural, and therefore not racist

Origins of the “Great Canadian Myth”

- Thobani (2007) suggests that in popular discourse, to be “Canadian,” one must be:
 - a law-abiding,
 - enterprising,
 - caring,
 - compassionate, and
 - committed to the values of diversity and multiculturalism.
- In addition, Thobani suggests that contemporary Canadian identity was forged by the nation’s original settlers (and who supposedly overcame great adversity in founding the nation as we know it).

- European systems of governance were brought over with the original settlers, and a great importance on “rational” thought was placed in the development of the national subject.
- Other ways of thinking and being (particularly those of non-Western immigrants and Indigenous peoples) were seen as either “foreign” or “threatening.”
- These lawful, industrious, and God-fearing individuals laid the foundations for what would later become the Canadian state (and did so in a manner that was supposedly less violent than in the United States) (Thobani, 2007, p. 35).

Common Sense Colonialism in Canada

- But missing in this narrative is the construction of “which” laws were created by “whom” and for “what” purposes?
- While beyond the scope of this presentation, but the “Doctrine of Discovery” that portrays North America as a vast wilderness “tamed” by hardy Europeans completely erases Indigenous nations from Canadian history (history which is then taught to future generations as “fact” in state-sanctioned public education) (Shanahan, 2019).

Non-European Settlers

- In their quest to become “more Canadian,” immigrants and refugees have often aligned with colonial narratives for the chance to attain some benefit associated with assimilation.
- However, migrants who become citizens and successfully integrate into Canadian society are never able to fully shed their labels as immigrants or refugees. Regardless of how long they may have lived in Canada, a non-white person is far more likely to be asked where they are **from** than a white person is (Thobani, 2007, p. 155).

Dial “S” for “Settlement”

- Shields, Drolet, and Valenzuela (2016) define “settlement” as:
 - a process/continuum of activities that a newcomer goes through upon arrival in a new country.
 - It includes adjustment (getting used to the new culture, language, and environment), adaptation (learning and managing new situations with a great deal of help), and integration (actively being engaged and contributing to the new community).
- Settlement Services are therefore defined as:
 - programs and supports designed to assist immigrants to begin the settlement process and help them make the necessary adjustments for a life in their host society.

- In Canada, settlement services are often tailored to meet the specific needs and circumstances of newcomers.
- Mostly, these services are provided by various levels of government and government-funded private and/or non-profit organizations, but over the past two decades, dramatic differences have emerged in Canada's settlement sector.
- Although the economic compatibility between migrants and the Canadian economy has always been a driving factor of immigration policy, new categories of immigrants were created by the government to flag applicants who could more easily contribute to the local economy.

Learning Individualism

- Furthermore, beginning in the 1990's, most settlement service providers now operate under a neoliberalized "agency-based" model, where workers are expected to provide individualized and/or group-based services.
- Preston, George, & Silver (2013) contend that this is done at the expense of developing a broader understanding of social issues and forces. Settlement Workers to address *symptoms* instead of the *causes* of marginalization.

Unsettled Learning

- Gruner (2015) argues that an additional challenge is presented by professional discourses used in the settlement sector itself, as the provision of settlement services is highly dependent on a migrant's legal status.
- In addition, Morrice (2014) contends that learning is not only about acquiring important skills and knowledge, but a holistic process that includes the body, mind and emotions to interpret life experiences that are then integrated into an individual's autobiography and identity.
- This process of informal learning and meaning making occurs on a daily basis and is one of the primary outcomes of social interactions between human beings.

- To the migrant, *everything* about the host country is new; laws, norms, language, and social space are all foreign, and the process of trying to shift so many fundamental frames of reference can be extremely disorienting.
- Learning through the settlement process is therefore inherently self-reflective and occurs at the junction of one's current experiences and personal biography.

Unpacking “Common Sense” Knowledge

- The Great Canadian Myth has successfully permeated the values, attitudes, beliefs, and morals of society, and set the parameters for “common sense knowledge” that forms the basis for everyday life (such that it is very difficult for us to even think of what a fundamentally different world might *look* like).
- A process of moral and intellectual reform is therefore necessary. This is difficult *intellectual* labour that must be undertaken, and would require a thorough understanding of colonialism/neoliberal systems of domination that lead to human displacement and migration (Burke, 2005).

- Furthermore, Beck and Purcell (2010) suggest that by adopting a dialogic approach *with* service users, Settlement Workers can avoid the temptation to commit a cultural invasion of their clients' lives (whereby they impose their value systems onto service users, thereby replicating the very power dynamics they wish to deconstruct).
- By engaging in dialogue that is self-reflective and cognizant of the need to break down the traditional worker-service user power relationship, the service user is more likely to identify boundary situations that limit their ability to fully integrate into their host societies.

- When Settlement Workers can approach the work they do with an eye to engaging in dialogue that enables service users to identify the root causes of the boundary situations that constrain them, they are engaging in the creation of what Allman (2010) refers to a critical praxis.
- This process can lead to the creation of a culture that dismantles “common sense understandings” that reinforce systemic barriers to integration.

Towards a Pedagogy of Settlement

- Settlement service providing agencies are often the first contacts for migrants upon arrival in their host countries, and as such, their workers share important knowledge with them and play a vital role in the integration of migrants into Canadian society.
- It is thus important to identify and confront the systemic issues that continue the cycles of oppression and exploitation today. We must acknowledge that we do not live in a “post-colonial” or “post-racial” world (Gruner, 2016, p. 10).

- While it is true that Settlement Workers must work with service users to address the obstacles they face once they have already arrived in their host countries, it is incumbent on the worker to understand the root causes of their clients' displacement.
- Part of this approach must include an awareness of how traditional views of human service work have harmed Indigenous peoples (and played a key role in the ongoing colonization of traditional Indigenous territories) and the extent to which immigration law/policy has been used to systematically marginalize different groups of people at different points in time (Gruner, 2016, p. 16).
- In doing so, one begins to unravel “common sense understandings” of the Great Canadian Myth that reinforce Eurocentric understandings of the world as we know it.

Exercise #2: Knowledge of Canadian “History”

- Think about your answers to these questions, and which ones you found more difficult. Ask yourself why you found them more difficult:
 - 1(a): What are Canada’s two official languages?
 - 1(b): What is the origin of the word “Canada”?
 - 2(a): What nation shaped our understanding of *parliamentary* democracy?
 - 2(b): What nation is considered by many to be practicing the oldest *participatory* democracy?
 - 3(a): What is the importance of the War of 1812?
 - 3(b): What is the importance of the Battle of Fish Creek (1885)?
 - **NOTE:** The answers to each of these questions are readily available through a quick *Wikipedia* search

References

- Alvarado, L.A. (2010). Dispelling the Meritorcacy Myth: Lessons for Higher Education and Student Affairs Educators. *The Vermont Connection*, 31:10-20.
- Beck, D. and Purcell, R. (2010). *Popular Education Practice for Youth and Community Development Work*. Exeter, UK: Learning Matters Ltd.
- Burke, B. (2005). Antonio Gramsci, Schooling, and Education. *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*. Retrieved from <http://infed.org/mobi/antonio-gramsci-schooling-and-education/>
- Gruner, S. (2015). Bridging Theory: A Critical and Decolonizing Approach to Displacement and Trauma. In S. Pashang and S. Gruner (Eds.), *Roots and Routes of Displacement and Trauma: From Analysis to Advocacy and Policy to Practice* (pp. 1-22). Oakville, ON: Rock's Mills Press.
- Millar, N. (2017, June 30). Canada's myth of multiculturalism. *The Coast*. Retrieved from <https://www.thecoast.ca/RealityBites/archives/2017/06/30/canadas-myth-of-multiculturalism>
- Morrice, L. (2014). The learning migration nexus: towards a conceptual understanding. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*, 5(2): 149-159.
- Preston, S., George, P., & Silver, S. (2014). Field Education in Social Work: The Need for Reimagining. *Critical Social Work*, 15(1): 58-72.
- Shanahan, D. (2019, November 27). Finders keepers – The Doctrine of Discovery. *Anishinabek News*. Retrieved from <https://anishinabeknews.ca/2019/11/27/finders-keepers-the-doctrine-of-discovery/>
- Shields, J., Drolet, J., & Valenzuela, K. (2016). *Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services and the Role of Nonprofit Service Providers: A Cross-national Perspective on Trends, Issues, and Evidence* (Unpublished working paper). Ryerson University, Toronto, ON.
- St. Denis, V. & Hampton, E. (2002). *Literature Review on Racism and the Effects on Aboriginal Education*. Minster's National Working Group on Education, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Ottawa, ON.
- Thobani, S. (2007). *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.