Cross-Curricular Write #1:

Learning Does Not Happen In Isolation

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Developing connections between topics and discussions across courses has helped me throughout my university career to gain deeper understandings and new insights into course content. I have often structured semesters around certain subject areas to enhance my chances of building cross-curricular connections. One semester I took four courses connected to 20th-century history and literature; in another, I devoted my course load to diving deeper into the contemporary issues affecting Indigenous communities in Canada. Over the last few weeks, I have tried to identify key themes that span across our program course load. The most stand-out theme that has required me to pause and reflect is that people do not learn in isolation.

The idea that students do not learn in isolation first struck me as I read Chapter 1 of Jo Chrona's (2022) book, *Wayi Wah!*, which focuses on the importance of honouring context and the whole learner. At first, it may seem obvious, but I think this is a theme that I need to honour and practice more in my own life. Throughout my upbringing, I remember my father saying the same phrase time and again, "School first." He was trying to highlight the importance of putting my best effort into my education. He always encouraged me to treat school as if it were a professional, full-time job. However, I internalized this message to an extreme that at times has been to my detriment. I learned to prioritize school work over any personal matter, my emotional, physical, and mental well-being, and important social and cultural events involving my loved ones. Having recognized this pattern in myself, I deeply resonated with the message that educators should strive to honour the whole individual in their journey as a learner and refrain from compartmentalizing learning (Chrona, 2022). I know that when I devote all of my attention to my academic performance at the expense of my personal well-being,

my quality of life and my academic performance both suffer. Nonetheless, knowing that

and putting actions into practice are two different things. I am striving to grow to a place

where I give myself grace as I learn. Doing so will help me to develop into an educator

who demonstrates authentically that mistakes and growth are a part of learning.

Perfection is not a starting place. Honouring the whole learner within myself and others

will help me to practice Standards 1 and 3 (BC Teachers' Council, 2019).

Each person brings their whole self into each and every learning environment

and that means people need to feel comfortable and secure enough to risk making a

mistake. Chapter 1 of *The Nature of Learning,* an assigned reading in EDUC 390*,*

argues that learners should be encouraged to view setbacks objectively so that

mistakes and obstacles are not taken so personally that they become too difficult to

overcome (Dumont et al., 2010). I think that practice aligns with honouring the whole

self by acknowledging that it is normal and allowable to make mistakes during the

learning journey. School should not be such a high-stress, high-stakes environment that

encountering academic difficulty causes students to question their worth as individuals. I

know I have fallen into that thought pattern myself and I hope to avoid perpetuating it in

my own classroom. As Dr. Martin Brokenleg (2015) addressed, it is important to

cultivate a learning environment that encourages learners to grow into strong people

who know that they are important, capable, good, and powerful. There are many

overlaps between the basics of motivation highlighted in Western philosophies and

those highlighted by the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL). Many of the "8

Basics of Motivation" outlined in *The Nature of Learning* connect to creating a learning

environment that is in line with the FPPL. For example, Dumont et al. (2010) state that

students are more motivated to learn when they understand the link between specific

actions and achievement which aligns with the principle that learning involves linking

actions to consequences (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006/2007).

Another key part of developing the idea that no one learns in isolation came as I

reflected on which teaching philosophies currently appeal to me most as both a learner

and an emerging educator. Not only do students learn from their teachers but they also

learn from one another both in and outside the classroom. As a student, I found a great

deal of comfort and security in explicit instruction and clear expectations. Clear

expectations helped me to gauge whether I was on the right track and anticipate the

next steps. When Dr. Anita Archer (2019) explained how interactive and engaging

effective explicit instruction can be, it brightened my outlook. In our lecture on teaching

philosophies, I was drawn to many aspects of essentialism and perrenialism, but I was

reluctant to embrace them because I worried it may be difficult to incorporate

collaboration and interaction. Kirschner et al. (2006) make a strong case for the

effectiveness of explicit instruction but, the idea of little desks lined up in neat little rows

filled with children silently working alone did not inspire me. With the help of Archer's

insights and the knowledge that I do not have to strictly commit myself to one teaching

philosophy, I feel more confident embracing explicit instruction. I hope to utilize explicit

instruction more at the beginning of a unit and then move into more collaborative and

project-based approaches as students develop their skills within a given area. Despite

Kirschner et al.'s arguments, I still believe the connectedness of collaboration and

project-based learning brings some value to the classroom. We all have something to

learn from one another.

There is one aspect of the idea that learning does not happen in isolation that I am still wrestling with. Educators are supposed to appreciate that learning does not happen in a vacuum and is affected by a student's experiences outside of school. How, then, do we go about creating welcoming, understanding, culturally responsive learning environments that allow students space and time to work through their individual emotional and mental struggles while maintaining a common set of expectations? How do we keep standards high for all students while being flexible and compassionate? As I was reading and reflecting on Chapter 4 of *Wayi Wah!* for EDUC 346, I was encouraged to hear the author acknowledge that expecting lower achievement from Indigenous students is a form of racism (Chrona, 2022). This message was also echoed in a recent lecture in EDUC 393 (M. Baerg, personal communication, September 25, 2023). Figuring out how all of those elements fit together in practice in a way that leads to equity across achievement markers is something I am still working to understand.

So far, I have found that the themes discussed across courses in this program have complemented one another well. For example, in EDUC 390 and 393 the importance of classroom culture, connectedness, and trust has been discussed. Within EDUC 346, we have practiced some of those ideas by participating in sharing circles, dancing, honouring context, and practicing relaxation techniques. Identifying connections between different course materials has always been a technique that has helped me cement my learning. Going beyond course connections and reflecting on the influences within our lives that impact our academic learning has taken my appreciation for cross-curricular connections a step further. Nothing in life can be compartmentalized to remain entirely separate from the self and learning is no exception.

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