

## Numbers, measures, and metrics: Part of our ongoing decolonization journey

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In response to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC; 2015) we embarked on a path to identify and address racism and colonialism in our curriculum through consultation with students, Indigenous knowledge keepers, and stakeholders. Call to Action 18 challenged us to design learning opportunities making direct links between historically abusive, traumatizing practices and current health conditions. Calls to Action 19 through 22 identified essential areas in which students can be guided to assume advocacy roles. Call 23 highlighted the urgency of increasing the number of Indigenous professionals in occupational therapy, and Call 24 identified the need for overtly incorporating learning about how racism, colonialism, power relationships, and historical practices directly perpetuate inequity, poor health, and a lack of safety for Indigenous persons.

Conservatively, five percent of people living in Canada are First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, and the percentage is increasing (Statistics Canada, 2017). The number of occupational therapists in Canada has increased, by 9.2% between 2011 to 2016, and the number of occupational therapists with Indigenous heritage has also grown, from 150 to 230 in that

same period (Statistics Canada 2018a; Statistics Canada 2018b). However, this increased number still accounts for less than one percent of the total number of occupational therapists in Canada, a significant shortfall from the goal of five percent representation, which would more closely reflect the Indigenous population living in Canada.

Collectively, we make a concerted effort to foster genuine and respectful relationships that contribute to our students, faculty, and program moving forward on a path to reconciliation and culturally relevant occupational therapy. Our article title reflects the reality of working in the higher education system with its pervasive and, at times, oppressive, culture of metrification, measurement, and expectation of quantifiable evidence of outputs. In outcome-driven systems, providing metrics allows work to go forward, and so we compiled the following list to capture the “numbers.” Our hope is that those whose perspective privileges quantifiable measures will understand the serious determination and willingness to put in the necessary hard work that faculty members, students, and other stakeholders bring to this journey within our department.

Undertaking (September 2017 to December 2018)	Numbers, measures, and metrics
Indigenous Focus • This is a co-curricular program offering a group of students the opportunity to work to advance awareness of and cultivate skills for culturally safe and relevant occupational therapy (Moon et al., 2018).	10 participating students – 2017 12 participating students – 2018
Hand therapy • Direct service provided at the National Gathering of Elders (2017)	360+ Elders 40+ student occupational therapists 10+ faculty/staff members
Wellness mini-workshops and volunteer activities • Provided at the National Indigenous Cultural Expo (2018)	45+ student occupational therapists and 7+ faculty/staff members working with physical therapy and speech-language pathology counterparts 100s of dancers, drummers, fiddlers, hand game competitors, and others
Guest speakers • Attended meetings of the Indigenous Focus to share knowledge (September 2017 to March 2019)	9 Knowledge Keepers, cultural navigators, researchers, and community leaders
Bannock baking activity • Students made bannock, led by a Métis baker who shared her story about creating a successful catering career and about challenges around securing traditional food sources.	4 dozen biscuits and 1 jar of homemade jam!

Undertaking (September 2017 to December 2018)	Numbers, measures, and metrics
Videos screened and shared <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video recordings of Elders' teachings, knowledge holders' presentations, and documentaries were used to further learning. Making careful use of existing resources helps reduce overburdening very busy Indigenous knowledge keepers and Elders who have already generously shared their teachings in accessible digital formats. The list was into a website, Resources for Decolonizing Occupational Therapy, to launch summer 2019: <a href="https://cbotlabs.wixsite.com/decolonizing-ot">https://cbotlabs.wixsite.com/decolonizing-ot</a></li> </ul>	60+ videos
Creating a more welcoming environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To create an inviting and culturally safe environment, posters and artwork created by Indigenous artists were installed on classroom walls.</li> </ul>	14 posters (and more to come!), including the 150 Acts of Reconciliation art poster created by Crystal Fraser and Sara Komarnisky: <a href="https://150acts.weebly.com/">https://150acts.weebly.com/</a>
Fieldwork placements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With Indigenous occupational therapists and/or organizations or with occupational therapy services contracted by Indigenous nations</li> </ul>	8 placements and more to come
Faculty lunch-and-learns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sessions have involved taking a strength-based lens to more deeply understand issues such as missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, performance arts-based approaches to address youth occupational deprivation in isolated communities, and perspectives on queer sexuality and gender expression from Indigenous worldviews.</li> </ul>	12 lunch-and-learns
Co-creation of videos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted with an Indigenous client, exploring health-related issues, loss, and culture-related concerns—the case study is incorporated across the curriculum during one term</li> </ul>	40+ students have worked with the case studies on 6 assignments
Bear Witness Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hosting of a faculty-wide Bear Witness Day (held nationally every May 10) raising awareness about Jordan's Principle: <a href="https://fncaringsociety.com/BearWitness">https://fncaringsociety.com/BearWitness</a></li> </ul>	2 sites 36 bears 175 handouts 4 kilograms of gummy bear candy
Indigenous health and occupational therapy module <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An optional one-credit module focused on creating culturally reflective occupational therapy informed by Indigenous ways of knowing. The module was co-created and taught by a Métis occupational therapist and University of Alberta faculty.</li> </ul>	43 students completed (2017 to 2018)
Integration across the curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty members are working to integrate learning about the historical and ongoing impact of colonization on Indigenous persons' health into the overall program.</li> </ul>	1 example (of many!): The Outside Circle: A Graphic Novel (LaBoucane-Benson & Mellings, 2015)—required reading for all student occupational therapists

The above is a partial list of undertakings; there are many other activities in development. But a list is just a list—opportunities for critical self-reflection and genuine engagement are not captured in a list regardless of the numbers it includes. No list can capture the outward rippling impact created when students share mature, humble, and insightful reflections on racism in health care and in their own lives and talk about how they will take action. This gives us much hope for the future. Equally, no list captures the uncounted, but essential, hours of time and heartfelt goodwill from all stakeholders that go into building respectful relationships that allow for the co-creation of opportunities and experiential learning. As a faculty of predominantly white Canadians of European ancestry, we recognize we will continue to make unintentional racist and uninformed comments when we reach out to Indigenous community members. We try to overtly “own” that and leave our need to

feel in control and secure behind. Instead, we strive to put on the table a genuine invitation to have our ignorance corrected.

The process of decolonizing our curriculum can best be measured in the true metrics of relationship building: warm beverages enjoyed, laughter shared, and hearts opened.



(Image 1: Bear Witness Day/ Jordan's Principle Awareness Event, 2018)

Numbers can tell us where we are and how many people we have built reciprocal relationships with along the journey. These numbers also catalogue samples of our initiatives that can provide an example to others. But at the end of the day, numbers are not relationships, and the outcomes of journeys are not proportionate to the number of activities engaged in along the way. It is the genuine connection and “ah-ha!” moments shared among respectful collaborators that are the true measures of a meaningful shift in our profession.

## References:

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## About the authors

The authors teach and research in the Department of Occupational Therapy at the University of Alberta. Our backgrounds are diverse; we aim to act as allies in moving forward against racism and other forms of oppression in a culture that privileges the power of a few over the rights of many. To reach us, contact: [cary.brown@ualberta.ca](mailto:cary.brown@ualberta.ca)