

The Pedagogical Force of Land and Art in Graduate Social Work A/R/Tographic Research

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Abstract : As two university professors in postsecondary faculties of social work and education, we have observed that students often recognize the importance of learning facts about colonization but have difficulty grappling with how they themselves might be implicated in reconciliation or how they might respond to these facts in meaningful ways. The detachment observed between students and factual information results in the initiation of a research study centered around an approach to teaching the course. This involved transitioning its pedagogical format to embrace a/r/tographic methods of teaching, learning, and inquiry. By taking seriously the arguments of various Indigenous scholars for learning from the land and by working alongside traditional Indigenous knowledge, we chose to engage a speculative approach to course design and teaching, which actually used the land as one of the course texts. We incorporated art practices that involved connecting bodies with land as well as using land materials in various creative and aesthetic projects while being informed by Medicine Keepers, Indigenous and settler artists, and knowledge-keeper helpers. In this study, we share some of the unanticipated themes that arose when students began to allow land and artmaking, both aesthetically and intuitively, through both joy and sorrow, to affect a reimagining and repositioning of selves and relations. We found that time and engagement with land and art began to build more empathic understanding and foster personal and professional practices grounded in respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility.

Keywords : reconciliation, decolonization, artmaking, respect

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