Rekindling the Sacred:
Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy in Higher Education

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Introduction

Spirituality has been a contentious topic in education, much like a flame that gets blown in different directions. Within the academy it has sometimes been repressed to an extent where the flame is nearly invisible, yet still burns steadfastly. As Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, and Tyson (2000) contend, the silence around the topic of spirituality in the academy "is increasingly being drowned out by the emphatic chorus of those whose underlying versions of truth cry out 'We are a spiritual people!'" (p. 448). This steadfast burning flame is also apparent with the recent resurgence of spirituality discourse in the education literature. When addressed, most literature on spirituality and schooling has focused on the issues of incorporating spirituality in primary and secondary education or the issues surrounding the integration of spirituality into teacher training (see for examples Elton-Chalcraft, 2002; Holzer, 2002; Miller, 1996). Recently, issues of spirituality in the context of higher education have emerged in the literature (see Astin & Astin, 1999; Hoppe & Speck, 2005; Love, 2001; Manning, 2001; Rendon, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). However, scant literature addresses how spirituality may be integrated into teaching for anti-oppression in the context of higher education (some exceptions include: Denton & Ashton, 2004; Dillard et al., 2000; Graveline, 1998; hooks, 2003; Orr, 2002; Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003; Wane & Waterfall, 2005). As Tisdell (2007) argues, "there has been a paucity of attention to the explicit connection of spirituality…to dealing with diversity issues

in higher education" (p. 532). This article will contribute to this latter body of literature, in an effort to further explore how we may teach about equity and social justice issues within an anti-oppression framework.

We also believe that the discussion around spirituality in the academy is central to a politics/act of decolonization.[1] Hence, our goal in this article is to explore the following questions: **(**1) what are the challenges or tensions of evoking spirituality as an academic discourse and practice? and (2) what strategies may be useful in integrating spirituality into teaching in higher education?

Rather than conforming to traditional academic practices, we have chosen to present our theorizing in the form of an interactive dialogue, to explicate the process through which our thinking has developed. We intend this to be "part of the countercurrent of resistance to dominant hegemonic forces in the world" (Graveline, 1998, p. 35). We have deliberately chosen to actively resist the traditional Eurocentric format of an essay for this article. Instead, we have chosen to display our theorization "outside hegemonic norms for reporting, gesturing toward an alternative that is itself embedded in a spiritual worldview" (Dillard et al., 2000, p. 452). To this end, we offer our dialogue as Graveline (1998) has suggested, as "a narrative of emancipation and enlightenment. In its strongest form, it is a narrative of integration, not separation" (p. 35). Furthermore, this dialogue format provides us with an opportunity "to borrow voices from each other" (Mayuzumi, Motobyashi, Nagayama & Takeuchi, 2007, p. 584)

To begin, however, we offer a working definition of what we mean by the term 'spirituality.' For our discussion, we borrow a broad conceptualization of spirituality from Tisdell (2007) who states:

> [S]pirituality…is about: (1) a connection to what is discussed as the Life-force, God, a higher power or purpose, Great Mystery; (2) ultimate meaning-making and a sense of wholeness, healing, and the interconnectedness of all things; (3) the ongoing development of one's identity (including one's cultural identity) moving toward…greater "authenticity;" (4) how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes…, manifested in image, symbol, music, and other expressions of creativity which are often cultural; (5) in addition, spirituality is not the same as religion, though for some people who are religious, there are elements in spirituality that overlap with religion; (6) spirituality is always present though often unacknowledged in the learning environment. (p. 535)

Hence, we believe that a plurality of conceptions of religion and spirituality exist and whether the two are conceived as separate entities is largely culturally based (Tisdell, 2003).

To begin our analysis, we will reflect on our own social locations and our spiritual missions in the context of integrating spirituality in teaching in higher education. We then outline the epistemological framework of this paper, before presenting our dialogue. Finally, we conclude by discussing the implications of a decolonizing pedagogy that centers spirituality in the context of a transformative teaching project in higher education.

Reclaiming the Spirit within: Reconnecting to Our Centers

I (*Riyad*) am a South Asian Canadian Muslim, heterosexual, able bodied male who grew up in different parts of the world. Born in the United Kingdom, I grew up in Kuwait with my parents of Bangladesh origin. I have taken an active role in bringing spirituality into the academy by collaborating with others to develop courses on spirituality and education, organize social events within the academy that honour our inner spirits, centering spirituality in my own scholarly writings and opening up other spaces where spirituality can be discussed and embodied within the higher education context.

I (*Anne*) am a Euro-Canadian able bodied, privileged woman, who has had the experience of having her reality and life experiences largely affirmed throughout my educational career. Quickly, we learn that to be accepted as a legitimate scholar, there are issues which are not appropriate as topics of academic investigation or to be included in one's pedagogical practices. Such unwritten dictates, however, are in perpetual tension with my commitment to feminist and antiracism practices which compel me to value life experiences and embodied understandings as valuable sources for knowledge production. Lest my teaching and theorizing become a disembodied intellectual exercise, I strive to remain grounded in my spirituality and incorporate this into my academic work.

I (*Njoki*) am guided by a spiritual practice informed by African Indigenous Spirituality—a spirituality that pays attentions to the four elements: Fire, Water, Earth, and Wind. I was raised in the rural areas of Embu, Kenya, where spirituality was not spoken about; it was an everyday practice. My spiritual ways of being originate, therefore, in my rural upbringing. This upbringing forms the foundation of my professional sense of self. Despite the inherent tension due to the fact that spirituality is regarded as a soft subject, one which that lacks rigor, I have chosen to make it a pivotal component of my work.

Decolonizing Teaching in Higher Education:
Toward an Anti-Colonial Discursive Framework

We use a critical anti-colonial discursive framework (Dei & Asghazadesh, 2001) to situate our discussion on spirituality and teaching in higher education. It is our belief that no anti-colonial work would be complete without attending to the spirit, the broken spirit, the spirit that the colonizers managed to convince the colonized subject was poor and in need of salvaging (see Pearce, 1998; Mazama, 2002). Wane (2006) argues that when missionaries met Indigenous people of the world, the first thing they claimed to notice was the spiritual poverty of the people. The missionaries embarked upon a project of decolonization by continually eroding and destroying all vestiges of the indigenous people's spirituality (see Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Some, 1994). Adopting an anti-colonial discursive theory, it is critical to place issues of spirituality of the colonized people at the center of our discussion (Shahjahan, 2005a). This framework provides the basis from which to challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege and the power configurations embedded in ideas, cultures, and histories of knowledge production (see Dei, 2000).

By embracing anti-colonial thought, we acknowledge spiritual practices which have survived the colonial and neo-colonial powers. We view these acts of survival as forms of resistance that need to be acknowledged and legitimated in the academy. Anti-colonial theorizing rises out of alternative, oppositional paradigms, which are in turn based on indigenous concepts and analytical systems and cultural frames of reference (Dei, 2000). It recognizes the displacement of spirituality and other non-dominant ways of knowing the world by Western knowledge systems as significant (Graveline, 1998; Smith, 2001). Hence, as Zine (2004) has written about using an anti-colonial framework to understand issues of spirituality: "addressing the erasures of spiritual knowledge in academic and discursive contexts is part of an anti-colonial politics of knowledge construction, reclamation, and inclusion" (p. 5). Furthermore, the anti-colonial discursive framework provides a political ontology which serves to decolonize academic knowledge and pedagogical practices, by valuing and employing spiritual ways of knowing (Magnusson, 2004). Indigenous knowledges are central in the process of decolonization and an important entry point for theorizing issues of spirituality (see Graveline, 1998). Within indigenous cultures, narrative and storytelling are primarily pedagogical tools. In considering how such practices may contribute to the project of decolonizing the academy, Iseke-Barnes (2003) contends that:

> Through story telling we can highlight how knowledge production in the academy reinforces colonial and neo-colonial relations and the considerable implications of these struggles over knowledge for claims of Indigenousness, agency, and resistance in community activities and academic pursuits focused on cultural vitalization and self-determination. (p. 218)

Building on this understanding, we offer the following narrative, a tapestry of dialogical insights into our theorizing of how spirituality may be incorporated into teaching in higher education. This narrative developed as a result of an interactive presentation entitled "Evoking Spirituality in the Academy: A Tool for Decolonization and Transformation for Global Citizens" presented at an International Transformative Learning Conference, May 2003.

Embodying the Spirit within Pedagogy: A River of Tales[2]

Njoki: This conversation has caused me to reflect on my own experiences of evoking my spiritual self in my teaching. Words that swim to the surface of my consciousness are: discomfort, disconnection, not rigorous, "soft" discourse, contradictions, religion, emotional investment etc. Spirituality in the academy is like mixing water and oil—one element will float—there is a separation—but this should not be. We cannot divorce the intellect from our invisible being—that is who we are. I strongly believe there needs to be a major shift of consciousness on the various modes of relationships. As educators, we have to address both the structural aspects of our everyday living experiences (that is, the physical) as well as the spirit—the injured spirit (Dei, 2002a). Of course, this type of work is often referred to as 'not academic enough,' or 'lacking rigor'; however, if we do not pay attention, if we separate the spirit from the self, the self that gets disconnected by the education system—how can we expect things to change? I anticipate that some students may not see the relevance of what I am talking about, given their schooling in hegemonic discourse/normative understandings. The academic structure functions to reinforce the notion of a meritocracy, and any deviation from the norm is challenged as not being rigorous or academic enough (Rendon, 2005). What is not obvious to many scholars is the fact that the academic discourse deals with abstract knowledge that appeals to the cognitive faculties of the brain. Consequently, there is no acknowledgement that in order to function as a normal human being, we need to develop all aspects of ourselves—which includes the invisible us—which some people refer to as spiritual self. In fact, in

most academic institutions, this is not encouraged and therefore, it becomes very difficult to talk of spirituality in the academy. As an educator coming from an African worldview, there is one thing of which I must perpetually remain conscious—all humans have one thing in common, their spirit. If, as an educator, I can pay attention to my students' spirit, I would re-ground their lives not on something that is outside of them, but inside—the self. Anne and Riyad, what do you think of all these issues?

Anne: I think talking about spirituality, in general, is not as difficult as when we think of incorporating it into our teaching. First, we must consider the context. We must critically analyze the impact of Eurocentric educational institutions which contribute to the indoctrination of students into a Western system of thought, as this is primarily what is valued in academia (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Churchill, 1995; Shahjahan, 2005b). Consequently, although spirituality is not engaged with expressly, vestiges of Christian beliefs permeate the academy (Clark et al, 2002). This is the insidiousness of the privilege of the dominant—such ongoing connections are not remarked upon. Hence, if we are to proceed in an ethical manner, we must interrogate the implications of an educational system which reinforces Eurocentric systems of thought, and a particular method of generating knowledge (Wong, 2004).

When considering the issues associated with incorporating spirituality in education, it is helpful to consider the notion of embodied learning. Do we, for instance, expect students to enter the academy as blank slates or empty vessels, concepts which Paulo Freire (1992) has critiqued, waiting for us to fill them with knowledge? Alternately, are we prepared to accept them as individuals with life experiences which are salient to our processes of knowledge production? Nancy Potter (1995) has written about the severed head, arguing that students' embodied understandings are not valued in the class. Although writing in the context of incest survivors, her point is also useful for our discussion of spirituality. According to Potter (1995),

> Members of oppressed groups may find that their sense of themselves as knowers and participants in an educational community is undermined; neglecting the existential reality of [such] students fosters a hegemonic classroom and perpetuates systems of oppression….racism and other systematic oppressions remain fairly entrenched in pedagogical methods. (p. 70)

In this way, Potter argues that "we perpetuate silences and marginality in an already oppressed and harmed student population" (p. 73). Although her argument is situated in the context of students who are survivors of violence, who must split off their experiential knowledge of abuse,

so must students disengage from their spiritual ways of understanding and knowing the world, as this epistemological framework is not broadly accepted within academia. This results in epistemological dissonance. In fact, I would argue that creative dissociation is a skill developed by many students, to allow them to survive the academic experience and continue on to complete their degrees. As such, students are prevented from theorizing their lived experience, as this facet of their reality is not considered legitimate within the realm of academia (Rendon, 2005).

Riyad: Yes, it is critical that we explore the impact of issues of marginalization and silencing of spirituality on students. For instance, Awaikta (1997), a Cherokee author states:

> I was centered and happy in my heritage until I went to college and began Western education in earnest. Everywhere I turned I found a "squared world," a society so compartmentalized that life, including my own, had no room to move around to breathe. For twenty years I struggled against the Square World, but I unwittingly internalized it, tore my life web and stuffed the broken strands into the 'boxes.' (cited in Walker, 2001, p. 20)

Hence Awaikta's narrative resonates with what Anne remarked about epistemological dissonance. The objectivist paradigm and over-emphasis on rationality continues to be a major obstacle to the inclusion of a spiritual ontology (Palmer, 2000). The misconception which equates any discourse of spirituality with religious dogmatism is yet another barrier (Scott, 1998). Finally, institutional culture and peer pressure function to silence any discussion of spirituality within the halls of academe (hooks, 2003; Dillard et al, 2000). The institutional culture presents an ongoing challenge, especially in the context of research universities, where there is a pervasive and exclusive emphasis on "meritocracy" and productivity (Rendon, 2005; Shahjahan, 2005a). Hence, we feel that we do not have time to talk about the "why" issues of life (Why am I here? What is the purpose of life?), instead, focusing on the "how' issues of life, (How am I going to publish more articles? How am I going to fund my research projects?) (Shahjahan, 2005a). Such pragmatism is a reflection of the way in which different forms of knowledge production are valued in the academy. Similarly students are assimilated into a meritocratic environment of marks and competition where they "are pitted against each other" (Rendon, 2005, p. 88). Hence, we continue to live a life of fragmentation, rather than connectedness. As a result, we become assimilated into the meritocratic, or what I call the neo-colonial academy, where institutional goals and ideologies become internalized as our own, both for faculty and students. Yet how might we counteract these

entrenched challenges? I believe it is critical to address inclusiveness in terms of factors such as curricula, bodies, language, pedagogical styles and other considerations.

Njoki: Yes, this is of central importance. In some of my classes, for example, I start with meditation—this is not structured meditation with chanting and humming—but a moment that I give students to feel their presence. I ask them to take a moment and think of nothing. Initially this is very difficult, because some students feel that I am imposing a pedagogy that is not related to their academic endeavor. However, this initial resistance does not last for long, as the students soon realize the importance of taking time to reflect and to bring their thoughts together before the class begins. Sometimes, I facilitate this exercise by lighting a candle or reading from an inspirational book or starting with an af-firming statement such as, "I believe," or "I know," or "I wish," or "every person," etc. Another strategy that I use involves inviting participants to bring nutritional food to class, as a means of bringing us together, thereby transforming the classroom into a gathering place, a space where people share both their experiences and their learning. When I introduce these forms of pedagogical tools, I always expect some form of resistance. However, when these occur, I address them in class—and introduce an open dialogue with students. I usually invite students to share the source of their discomfort with the rest of the class. However, if they do not want to share their feelings, they have the option to pass. But I agree with Dillard (2006) that most students are hungry for the opportunity to engage in such non-mainstream approaches to learning and are open to multiple ways of knowing in the classroom.

Riyad: I, too, work to invoke the spirit in my teaching. For instance, one sunny day I facilitated the class of 25 outdoors. Surrounded with trees, birds, people walking by and so on, we addressed the day's topic, which was violence against women and women's shelters. I asked the students to first observe the trees for about five minutes and to evoke lessons from the trees about the issues we were discussing. The tree became our interpretive paradigm. The responses were fascinating. Some students compared the tree to a women's shelter, describing what would happen if the tree was chopped down and the resulting impact on the animals that it nurtures. They likened the chopping of the tree to the public funding cutbacks in social assistance programs in Ontario and the effect that this has had on women who have experienced violence. Others formed metaphors of the tree as old and wise, and reflective of the ways in which women have been oppressed and silenced, their voices and knowledge marginalized. During this class, we were able to use parts

of creation to help us theorize issues of oppression and the inequities surrounding us. The use of such symbolic and natural language helped the students to connect with nature, other beings and beyond the materiality of daily life. Further, it enabled them engage with the reading material at a different level of consciousness (Shahjahan, 2004). It was not just rational anymore! They were actually applying the framework of a decolonizing way of knowing the world that acknowledges multiple ways of knowing.

Anne: Although the two of you are offering very powerful examples of how spirituality may be incorporated into teaching, in my experience such practices are unique and rare. Although increasingly we are hearing about issues of equity and social justice, I would suggest that these terms have become taken for granted buzz words. The way in which these concepts are enacted in the classroom, however, varies widely. The dilemma becomes, how can we ensure that we are addressing these concepts in a meaningful way? How can we suggest that we are behaving in an equitable or inclusive manner, when we routinely ignore such a cardinal aspect of people's fundamental reality as their spirituality? On a practical level, I have been struggling to imagine how meaningful changes could be implemented. After all, what we are discussing here today is a fundamental re-visioning of academic practices.

Njoki: To create an inclusive environment is crucial for any transformative learning to take place. We can create such environments in a number of ways, such as selecting reading material that evokes the spirits of the students or participants in the learning environment and encouraging the participants to honour each others' spirit and to explore their spiritual creativity (Shahjahan, 2004; Tisdell, 2003; Wane & Waterfall, 2005). Such strategies encourage the sharing of personal and collective experiences of understanding and dealing with the self. However, within the framework of spiritual knowing, it is important for us, as academics and students, to acknowledge our own limitations, as well as the possibilities. As Dei (2002b) cautions, one limitation may be "the intellectual arrogance of thinking that we know it all" (p. 131). In other words, humility and the negation of the ego are keys to a decolonizing pedagogy (Gandhi, 2002). The notions of uncertainty and instability are also very important (Selby, 2002). Further, the idea of humility and uncertainty acts as a counter discourse to the academy's near obsession with *control* (Shahjahan, 2005a).

Anne: It is also significant to consider how non-traditional approaches to teaching may impact learners. Such teaching can be expected to gener-

ate some unique classroom dynamics, as students are challenged to think outside the narrow confines of traditional academic borders. In classes which explicitly address antiracism, as noted by many educators in the field (see for example: hooks, 1989; Boler & Zembylas, 2003), learning occurs at an unusually deep level, as students are engaged at both a cognitive and affective level. Consequently, I begin my classes with a lengthy discussion about the *process* of learning, encouraging students to brainstorm what basic expectations need to be met in order to enable them to become part of a community of learners, at least during the time we spend together. Throughout these discussions, we explicitly address the fact that the classroom will not always be a safe, settled space, however, despite periods of tension and heightened emotions, we all agree to remain committed to the learning process and will work to remain engaged (Wong, 2004).

What ends up being more significant than the actual agreements resulting from the process, is the opportunity to teach students about conflict resolution and open up a dialogue regarding the forms of knowledge which are considered appropriate to the project of academic theorizing. In particular, this enables us to begin exploring the ways in which our diverse forms of spirituality affect the ways in which we understand and interact with the world. Such conversations enable us to rupture the pervasive silence and begin to collectively consider the ways in which our spiritual ways of knowing may quietly and unobtrusively impact the ways in which we engage with course materials, as well as issues beyond the classroom. I offer this as one small example of a way in which we can bridge the divide between academic and spiritual understandings.

Riyad: It is fascinating what both of you are saying because spirituality is fundamentally about uncertainty. It is not something that can be planned for in the classroom (Tisdell, 2003). As you stated earlier, Anne, anti-oppression work can be very emotionally and spiritually draining, as it leads to discussing very painful issues. I believe that in a decolonizing pedagogy, discussions of healing have to be included alongside explorations of issues of oppression (Graveline, 1998; Mayuzumi, 2006). Further, spirituality is necessary for "notions of purpose and destiny as these are juxtaposed against an unhealthy nihilism that continually invades and chips at the psyche of many" *minoritized* students (Dantley, 2005, p. 657). Learning is not necessarily comfortable, but centering spirituality, allowing certain exercises of meditation, symbolic natures of knowledge production through art and poetry, allows for that tension to dissipate and continue what some may call opening the "contempla-

tive mind" in the classroom (Hart, 2004). Further, spirituality has long been a tool used by many marginalized people to heal from internalized oppression and deal with multiple identities (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). What is needed is some visionary work, as well as activities which help people heal from their pains and be inspired (Shahjahan, 2004). Some people call it therapy. And no, it is not therapy but it is allowing people to be authentic to whom they are and their experiences.

Njoki: Cajete (1994) has suggested that the ultimate goal of indigenous education is to have full knowledge of one's innate spirituality. A decolonizing pedagogy would highlight both the inward and outward journeys in teaching and learning. Often, we highlight the outward journey (the world separated from us) and forget that there is an inner dimension to all these processes (Selby, 2002). A place for the 'heart', the 'spirit' or the 'soul' in teaching and learning is negated if we do not acknowledge this inward component (Fitznor, 2003). However, it is important to acknowledge that the outward and inward journeys are interconnected, a point demonstrated by many activist scholars (Fernandes, 2003).

Riyad: Njoki, some people may argue that the focus of this inward spiritual journey will lead to a sense of "spiritual narcissism" without any consideration for the misery and social injustices that happen around the globe (Maxwell, 2002). However, many social activists have shown us in their lives that change happens when there is internal transformation first (Dantley, 2005; Fernandes, 2003). Yet, it is the question of spirituality that is missing in liberatory pedagogy. For instance, Magnusson (2004) states:

> "[B]oth the classical liberatory politics originating in class struggle, as well as the reactionary politics of the new right, have colonizing features, protect vested interests, and result in a political oppression. The colonizing effect is particularly profound within the context of leftist praxis in that exclusion of, or active subjugation of, spirituality within its political ontology can have the effect of culturally subjugating indigenous standpoints within what is supposed to be a liberatory project. (p. 8)

Using spirituality, you can then be a subject of change rather than an object of change. While the use of categories such as race, class and gender may be important for understanding material oppression and social transformation in the short term, we also need to understand the world in terms of our interconnections, in order to bring about *true* social transformation in the long run (Fernandes, 2003). We need to move beyond the identity politics and as Satish Kumar, a peace activist has suggested, we must "recognize the unity and the intrinsic value of life"

(Kumar, 2002, p. 103). Hence, we need social theories that talk of our interconnections and interdependence (Fernandes, 2003).

Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy: Implications for Transformation in Higher Education

Although some may object to our discussion in this article, raising questions such as: does spirituality really belong in the academy? If we allow spirituality would we not pave the way for religious dogmatism, which in turn may lead to prejudice? Is the university not about rationality? What about those people whose spirituality is not faith-based or based on an indigenous tradition but are more secular? We acknowledge that these are critical questions to consider. Accommodating a spiritual ontology is an initial step towards promoting inclusiveness, rather than exclusiveness, in the academy. Spiritual practices introduce the possibility of foregrounding the issue of the equity of knowledges within the academy (Wane, Shahjahan, & Wagner, 2004). Moreover, by evoking the spiritual standpoint within teaching and learning, we validate and affirm the expressions of diverse bodies that are part of the academy and the world (see Rendon, 2005; Tisdell, 2007).

Simply allowing the individualized expression of spirituality through the diverse bodies that make up the academy is not an effective solution to integrating spirituality within academia. To benefit from the richness of diverse spirituality in the world, we need to express our own spiritual worldviews, by centering these perspectives in teaching and learning, rather than just maintaining it as an individualistic practice. Only by claiming and expressing the legitimacy of our spirituality within sites of higher education, will we be able to coexist in partnership with other secular and materialist worldviews. However, many questions remain unanswered. What are the various sites of contradictions and contestation for incorporating spirituality within the academy? How do we develop the sites where spirituality can be affirmed in the process of teaching and learning? How do we incorporate all the subjectivities and identities associated with spirituality in the academy? And the questions continue...

As our narrative indicates, spirituality is not an easy topic to raise within higher education. But it is an important one. We need to understand how spirituality can be an essential tool for both teachers and students to engage in learning that is meaningful and that incorporates the authenticity of both bodies. A decolonizing pedagogy provides us with the following tools for transformative education:

◆ To emphasize in our teaching the importance of self, subjectivity and interdependence with others who form our community.

◆ To create a learning environment that begins by nurturing the inner self, the inner connections and allows space for personal development.

◆ To understand the challenges of bringing spirituality into the academy.

◆ To acknowledge and accept that there are multiple ways of knowing and theorizing equity issues, and to use these methods to make an inclusive curriculum and pedagogy.

◆ To allow for alternative epistemological viewpoints to be expressed and legitimized within the classroom.

◆ To promote a sense of compassion, respect, and understanding among all participants.

◆ To acknowledge humility in teaching and learning and accept the uncertainty and discomfort that arises within the classroom.

◆ To promote a language and embodiment of healing among students in anti-oppressive pedagogy.

◆ To recover a sense of sacredness in knowing, teaching, and learning.

Leela Fernandes (2003) sums up the situation well, suggesting that "[U]topias are inconvenient because they necessitate deep-seated changes in ourselves and in the ways in which we live our lives. The irony here is that such "theoretical" utopias require *labor*" (p. 19). For some of our readers, a decolonizing pedagogy remains only a theoretical utopia, although we hope this is not the case. Instead, we wish that instead, this paper evokes the spirit within our readers to *labor* and make the necessary changes within and outside themselves to center spirituality in the academy, to further the process of social transformation. Some of us have already begun the process. We invite others to join us.

Notes

[1] By the term decolonization we refer to the process of challenging the colonizing project which was initiated by the early settlers and continues in a modified form to this day. Specifically, we are referring to the structures of our educational institutions, the pedagogical practices we engage in and the normative practices through which we continue to instill dominant norms and values in students. Evidence of this position is supported by the growing literature which documents the disproportionate rates of educational disengagement and

alienation of students from traditionally marginalized groups (see Dantley, 2005; Rendon, 2005).

² We have modified our original dialogue for the purpose of publication. Hence we have incorporated citations and quotes of references from which our ideas were derived.

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