Dear Classroom: A speculative look into
post-secondary classroom design

by

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1 ABSTRACT

Historically, classrooms have been a space of rigidity and unchanging order. From the very desks we were assigned as 'our space' within the learning space, to the abuse of Indigenous peoples in Indian Residential Schools, to the frequent use of corporal punishment by teachers to maintain order. Over the past decade there have been numerous changes and strides for creating more inclusive and desirable experiences for students within the education system. As an example, the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD U) located in Toronto, has been a prime example of a historical institution taking action at 145 years old – with cluster hires of Indigenous and Black faculty and the introduction of more classes and curriculum with a decolonized approach. While the work is being done, there remains a gap in decolonizing education when thinking about the physical aspects of the post-secondary classroom. This MDes thesis explores how Speculative Design might act as a tool in creating decolonial discourse around the design of classrooms leading to more inclusive and desirable futures for students. The thesis attempts to (1) introduce and share concepts of Speculative Design and futuring of educational models in decolonizing the classroom at the post-secondary level; (2) to engage in participatory action research that offers interactive cases (positioned as 'classroom mysteries') for facilitating dialogue and responses, and (3) to consciously remove the 'expert-non-expert' power dynamics in gathering research data, and creative outcomes. The intersection of Speculative Design (imagination) and Action Research (action) methodologies allows for a more inclusive data collection approach that centralizes open dialogue and imagination confirming that the use of Speculative Design as part of the research process can be a successful tool in imagining and creating more desirable and inclusive spaces for students; and can create a space where critical dialogue around decolonizing post-secondary classrooms can occur.

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my unborn daughter. You are expected to arrive in this world God

willing on October 22, 2021. I hope that one day when you are ready to begin your educational

journey that you may do so without feeling like you do not belong...

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5 INTRODUCTION

Classrooms hold a 'material culture' – a history of social norms and attitudes embedded in physical objects and practices, and in the spaces that support them. If one were to ask the average person to describe what happens in a classroom and/or what objects you might find inside a classroom it would be almost unquestionable that the responses would be immensely similar. In one scenario, one might mention actual objects such as desks, chairs, chalkboards, whiteboards, technology, writing supplies, books, etc. as objects you might find inside a classroom. In another scenario, one might mention more conceptual and/or intangible things such as learning, grades, evaluation, lecture, discussion, etc. as things that occur within a classroom.

Oxford Languages defines 'classroom' as "a room, typically in a school, in which a class of students is taught" and Merriam Webster defines it as "a place where classes meet." Theorists such as Paulo Friere would describe a traditional classroom as one in which the relationship between teacher and student is governed by power and knowledge. Specifically, an expectation that the teacher has all the power and knowledge, and the student has none. This 'banking model' approach to education operates from a bankrupt system for learning where it is assumed the teacher holds all knowledge and the student holds none until the teacher shares it. Friere believed this model ultimately leads students to further acceptance and adaptation to the oppressive world rather than critically examining and challenging it (71-75). Given these multiple definitions, at the most basic level one could define and link the word 'classroom' to a place/space for learning. At a more complex level, one could define and link the word 'classroom' to a place intended for learning while simultaneously influencing social change for better or for worse. This MDes thesis explores how in the context of emerging pedagogies informed by decolonization and new socio-cultural and political realities, the application of

Speculative Design including the physical environment, for post-secondary classrooms can create more inclusive futures for the next generation of students.

As a Black and Indigenous Nova Scotian woman navigating through the education system, I have had more than my fair share of trauma, oppression, displacement, racism, and all sorts of other negative experiences throughout my learning journey. I pursued graduate studies with the hope that things would be different, and I naively believed that at this level I would feel more like I belonged. While this proved to be true with the small community of friends and close colleagues, I developed relationships with, the post-secondary classroom remained a foreign and unwelcoming place where I just could not seem to find belonging. During my second semester, I had a traumatizing experience that left me questioning why I was even subjecting myself to a system that did not really allow me to exist. I sat with those thoughts for a few months, enrolled in a summer course at OCAD U called 'Thinking Through Making' in the hopes that I would get some sort of breakthrough and get out of the 'traditional' classroom setting. In the first few weeks of the class, I was introduced to Speculative Design, let us just say, it blew my mind that I could be a 'designer' but in a way that did not assume I had all the power and knowledge. That, combined with my experience in the previous semester led me to what you are about to read.

In applying Speculative Design as critical design futuring including exploration of alternative visions for the design of the classroom, *what does it mean to delink the classroom?* According to the criterion set out by Walter Mignolo (452-459), any preconceived notions of material culture and everything else that comes with the term 'post-secondary classroom' are no longer linked and as a result, allows 'room' for a fresh new way of being and knowing within the space. How has the material culture of the classroom contributed to creating ideological construction of *otherness*? How might speculative design act as a tool in creating decolonial

discourse around the design of classrooms and lead to more inclusive and desirable futures for students?

These questions are important to ask and allows one to approach the future of classroom design and hence, a redevelopment of the future of the learning experience that ensures a more inclusive way of being within the space. The study completed as part of this thesis was grounded in participatory action research methods and interpretive, inductive, and qualitative approaches. The process/method for collecting the primary data acts as a test/case study for introducing Speculative Design into the process of rethinking the classroom. The goal is that hopefully this process can be adopted by architects, professors, and schools to delink and redesign their spaces within their institutions and in extra institutional partnerships.

This thesis is not meant to stand as a guide to what "inclusive and desirable" post-secondary classroom spaces will look like, but instead to bring to the forefront how adding a speculative lens for decolonizing the post-secondary classroom design process and thinking might lead to that. Given the nature of the timeframe in which this thesis was completed and the realities of in-person participation and access due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all workshops were designed to be completed virtually. As a result, both sample size was limited, and co-design/action research activities were not able to go through full cycles of back-and-forth iterations as they normally would. The data captured was not meant to generalize but rather act as an example of how this process might work and what sort of outcomes might arise.

This thesis begins with an in-depth look at ideological construction of otherness in the classroom based on Homi Bhabha's concept of 'fixity' and 'colonial discourses' dependency on the concept (66). The thesis illustrates how classrooms have historically aided in this concept of 'fixity' in a sense where the space promotes rigidity and an unchanging order amongst

individuals within the space. It delves into what speculative design is and how in being a design process centred around creating discussion rather than problem solving, one might frame it as a decolonial discourse. Speculative Design, for the purpose of this thesis can be defined similarly to what Dunne & Raby theorize as a design methodology that prioritizes prompting dialogue around alternative futures (a more decolonial feeling approach) instead of most design methodologies that focus on solving a predefined problem (a more colonial feeling approach) (2).

For the purpose of this thesis, framing Speculative Design as a decolonial discourse will highlight the ways in which we might be able to use the methodology as a tool for both decolonizing and delinking the classroom. This methodological approach includes but is not limited to, refining the material culture associated with post-secondary classrooms and further bringing to the forefront the need to redefine the space versus simply renaming it as Walter Mignolo would describe as the last step of the delinking process. The primary data collected with participants was used as a case study to showcase the extent to which using Speculative Design could lead to more desirable futures for the classroom space.

6 LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1 ADDING A DECOLONIZING LENS TO MY DESIGN PRACTICE

    While this thesis focuses on a select few theories, it is important to acknowledge the many books, writings and individuals who contributed to shifting my thinking specifically when it comes to my role as a designer. Many of their stories and words allowed me to critically evaluate how the way in which I participate in the expert/non-expert dynamic between designers and individuals of society. I was formally trained to be a designer using 'banking models' of education and as a result up until this point, I've placed value on the power and knowledge dynamic where it is assumed that designers are the experts and hold all the knowledge and power when it comes to designing the world. Being introduced to Dunne and Raby's *Speculative everything: Design, fiction, and social dreaming.* was the first major influence I had in taking a step back and critically exploring a design methodology that tried to remove that expert/non-expert power and knowledge dynamic.

    Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, allowed me to further ground my approach to research in a way that was decolonizing. It specifically brought to my attention, research from the context of the 'other' and being defined as an encounter between the West and the 'other'(8). Smith set the tone for my research journey equipping me with the tools to identify 'red flags' in the way in which I carried out research activities, specifically being wary of words such as imperialism, history, writing & theory (27). Smith also provided understanding around what decolonizing methodologies means and avoiding the assumption that it means a rejection of everything else, but instead a method where the assumption is not that western ideas about fundamental things are all we have (58).

While Dunne and Raby are in western institutions, the concept of Speculative Design itself still seems to operate differently from most western design concepts. Amber Hickey and Ana Tuazon's work in *Decolonizing and Diversifying Are Two Different Things: A Workshop Case Study* further provided insight around the way in which decolonization is to be understood for the purpose of my research and this document. Decolonization is about a complete reconfiguration of dominant relations to land and life rather than about diversifying representation (Hickey and Tuazons). Speculative Design is often positioned as an alternative design method that is meant to add to the pre-existing list of design methodologies. Similarly, to Smith's stance in decolonizing research methodologies, I think decolonizing design involves this very idea of not positioning more historic and Western design methodologies as the only way of knowing (in this case designing).

The design of the classroom for example, uses assumptions from Western Colonial views for gaining knowledge including methodologies for education and teaching. The use and application of a speculative lens/process seems to make room for more of a dialogue giving us the opportunity to decolonize the classroom rather than simply diversify it.

6.2 IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF OTHERNESS IN THE CLASSROOM

Historically

Historically in Canadian Education, the classroom has been used for discipline, moral regulation and enforcing colonial-based ways of learning and being within the space. Amongst objects such as signage, desks, the strap, the lunch box, flags, and maps, objects most often positioned at the center of order and control in the classroom is the desk (Mascio 8). The design

of the Toronto public school system is informed by the ideas of Egerton Ryerson who founded

Toronto Normal School in 1947 (Flack). Ryerson was also responsible for building the Indian

Residential School System – a system, that stripped children from their families, abused,

experimented, assimilated, and brutalized Indigenous people.

Figure 1. Model Kindergarten, Toronto Normal School and Model Schools, ca. 1898 from

"Archives of Ontario, RG 2-257, Acc. 13522."

Figure 2. Students at St. Anne's residential school in Fort Albany, Ont., in the 1940s. from "Algoma University/Edmund Metatabwin collection"

Environments for Indigenous people inside classrooms at Residential Schools (see figure. 2) were significantly different from many that were modelled after the Toronto Normal School which Egerton positioned as the 'standard' for education in Upper Canada (Flack). The 'standard' classroom for white students of European descent (see figure. 1) involved a much more pleasant, forgiving, and caring experience for students along their learning journey. The current 5000 plus bodies of Indigenous children that have been found buried in unmarked graves at these Residential Schools across Canada are a prime example of how classrooms and schools were used for discipline, moral regulation and enforcing colonial-based ways of learning and being.

Residential schools were a beast of their own. The common idea of ownership of space within a space/place and the design of the enclosed structure itself was centered around

maintaining a sense of order and control in the classroom (Mascio 12). The material culture of

the desk (see figure. 3) was specifically rooted in a place where teachers were able to control the

classroom by assigning students to their 'own' space.

Figure 3. Wooden School Desk from Ottawa School Board dating back to the 1860's. from

"Canadian Museum of History, 2010.145.447, IMG2011-0076-0001-Dm"
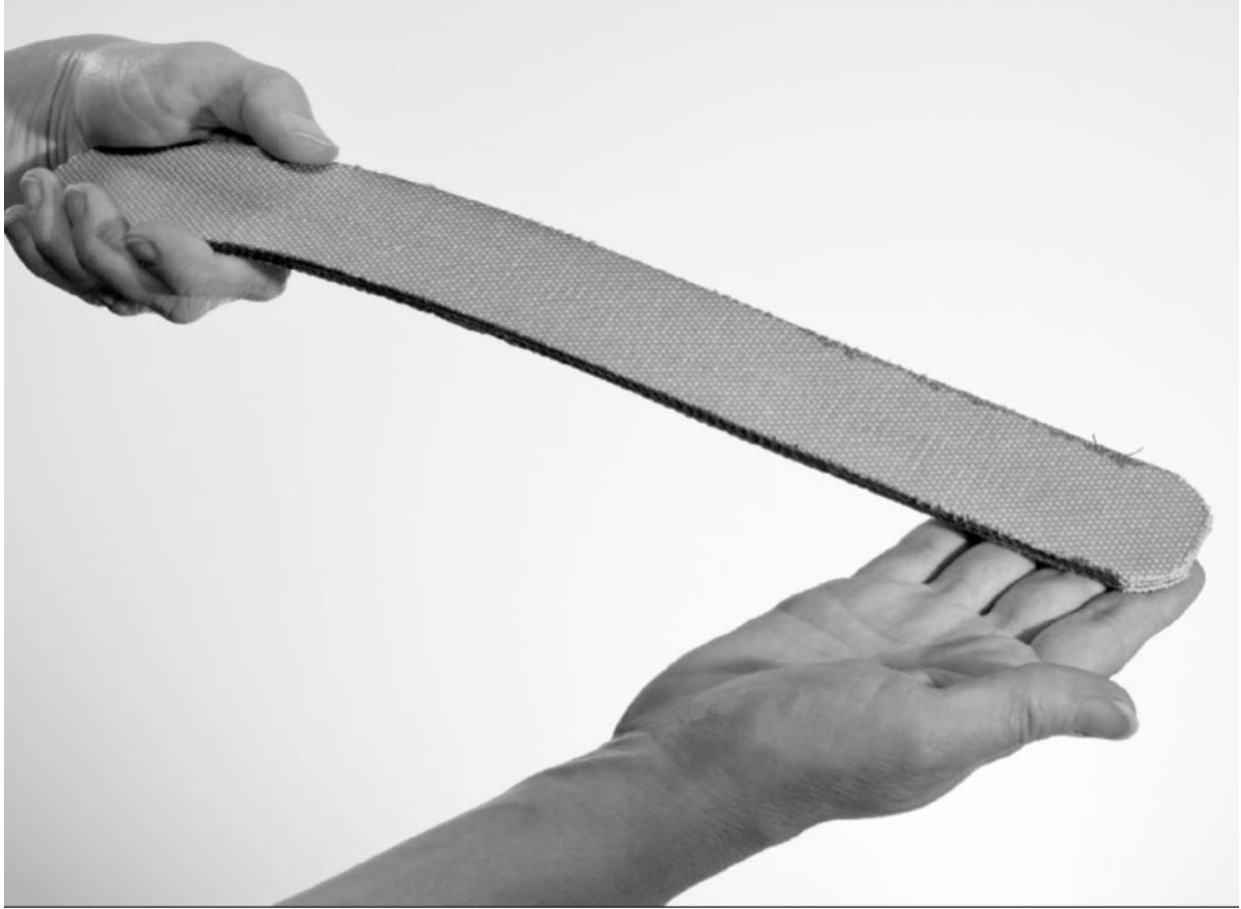
Figure 4. Disciplinary Strap. Ca.1950. from "Canadian Museum of Civilization, IMG2011-0076-00-04-Dm."

> "An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition." (Bhabha 66)

As Homi Bhabha suggests one could argue that the classroom itself was based on the concept of 'fixity'. Ideas of what a good student looked like, how they acted, how they learned,

and using that as a fixed process for everyone else. Physical objects such as signage, desks, the strap, the lunch box, flags, and maps in the classroom helped to maintain this unchanging order, disorder, degeneracy and repetition as Bhabha suggests.

Classrooms, while a place of learning, have also been spaces that enforce the status quo, stereotypes, and classifications of society; from the actual segregation of Black pupils from all-white schools to the placement of Indigenous people in Indian Residential Schools, to unequal distribution of school funding based on geographical location, to discrimination and stereotyping of individuals based on cultural/historical/racial differences. In my personal experience as a Black and Indigenous woman navigating classroom spaces, I've experienced these ideological constructions of otherness through interactions with peers and teachers. I've watched fellow Black peers in elementary and secondary school be streamlined into programs meant to just push them through school without getting the same education as their white peers. The programs were disguised as "special needs programs" and "individual learning programs" when in reality, they were used as ways to funnel them through the school system as quickly as possible. It became the norm that Black people from the community just began to accept, which led to a never-ending cycle and an automatic exclusion from further post-secondary education.

"…it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning waiting for me."
(Fanon 134)

The existence of the Black student inside the classroom came with a predetermined meaning of inadequacy in comparison to other white students in the space. This predetermined meaning was promoted by white teachers, peers, and other white individuals within education

institutions. A meaning as Fanon suggests that was already prescribed no matter the individual suggesting that they were less knowledgeable and bound to perform slower academically. The design of the general education system was based on one type of student – the white student – and how and what they required to learn in a classroom space. The omission of the black student combined with predetermined inadequacy generally resulted in their placement in these programs.

> "Fanon uses the fact of blackness, of belatedness, to destroy the binary structure of power and identity: the imperative that 'the Black man must be Black; he must be Black in relation to the white man'. (Bhabha 237)

In instances where Black students (such as myself) performed well in academics and/or acted outside of the stereotype they had created for them; they were still seen as inadequate and non-existent in comparison to others (their white peers). I experienced all these things throughout elementary and secondary school and have still experienced this in more subtle ways during my post-secondary and graduate journey.

Currently

Canadian Education in the 19th and 20th centuries differed vastly from what we have come to accept our current (21st.) century. How could it not? At the most basic, there is no longer a tolerance for physical punishment from teachers towards students. In 1971, the Toronto Board of Education banned the use of 'the strap' in city schools (Lind). However, on the other hand, it was not until recently, in 2004 that the Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the

law successfully got the Supreme Court of Canada to legally outlaw all bodily punishment in public and private schools (Canadian Foundation for Children…). One might also say there are many strides in progress towards the direction of more inclusive and desirable spaces for students of all ancestries, but development is slow often requiring legal intervention to implement changes expected of a contemporary and progressive country.

During my studies at Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD U) I have seen many changes to curricula with decolonizing focused courses, and program planning. However, I have seen little to no change to physical space, at least within the graduate building, in which over 90 percent of my courses took place. Again, I'm not here to say that *nothing* is changing, and I acknowledge the good intentions and work that is being done. The OCAD U Academic plan along with the Indigenous and Black cluster hires are an example of how that plan is being put into action. The focus on including the physical post-secondary classroom space however, just seems to not be a topic alongside these other things. What I am curious about however, is if these strides have met the task of delinking that Mignolo and many others have argued for. I further wonder how Speculative Design can play a role (if any) in the project of delinking.

6.3 SPECULATIVE DESIGN AS A DECOLONIAL DISCOURSE

As mentioned previously, Speculative design for the purpose of this thesis and research can be defined as a design process that is different from most, in which its process is not centered around solving a defined problem using an expert/non-expert power dynamic. Instead, Speculative Design is used as a tool to prompt dialogue and discussion around alternative futures we may want. The idea of using an artefact in a way that fiddles with the ideas inside our head rather than the ideas already in the world (Dunne and Raby 2). For example, instead of

redesigning chairs, tables, and other objects within the space we take a step back and think about why we need those objects in the first place and if they're things we want to use in the classroom at all.

This research focused on the use of Speculative Design as a tool for decolonizing post-secondary classroom design. Specifically exploring the physical objects and material culture of the post-secondary classroom and how there is a need to consider the physical space and not just the curriculum, policies, governance, and administration. While it has been important to rethink the non-physical aspects of the classroom, one must not forget about the role that the physical has to play in learning, and how both the non-physical and physical must work in tandem.

There is not much decolonial discourse on considering the physical aspects of space/environments at an equivalent level of importance to curriculum, and more specifically in using Speculative Design as a tool to achieve more inclusive and desirable spaces for actual bodies to exist in while learning. Literature such as Staley's *Alternative universities: Speculative design for innovation in higher education* and Palfrey's *Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces: Diversity and free expression in education* are examples of where the focus is placed more so on the content, curriculum, etc. However, they exclude and/or minimize the physical/material aspects and objects of the space from the conversation.

The introduction of Speculative Design as a tool for designing post-secondary classrooms in education creates decolonial discourse between the term 'post-secondary classroom' and the physical objects and structural elements that are part of its material culture. However, in redesigning curriculum, policies, governance, administration, along with rethinking the physical/material culture of the space through Speculative Design it would still appear to not quite meet the criterion of delinking as Mignolo would suggest.

Even in restructuring the non-physical through a decolonial discourse, one would still be using the same term 'classroom' to describe the experience of learning. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Mignolo would say this is not delinking us from that previous colonial experience. This is not truly delinking and because of our dependence on the physical space we're still only dealing with the contents and not the term itself. While I agree that a final step of creating a new name for the space may complete the delinking process in that it removes preconceived notions of material culture and everything else that comes with the term 'classroom' and as a result, allowing room for a fresh new way of being and knowing within the space.

I am cautious that the need to rename the space and classify it as something new seems to be a repetitive action rooted in colonialism and rooted within a colonial praxis. There are many moving parts in language(s), and many moving parts within how we name/rename and classify that are mostly rooted in colonialism. I wonder how one could rename without repeating this colonial process and further adding to the classification of classroom types and school types. This ultimately leads me to question if renaming terms is required to delink after all as Mignolo would suggest.

6.4 THE INTERSECTION OF ACTION AND IMAGINATION

Richard Sagor defines action research as "… a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the "actor" in improving and/or refining his or her actions." (3) In educational action research for example, the researcher can be a teacher, group of colleagues or an entire school or faculty. The key however, is that they are all completing the research with the intention that it will directly

affect their work (Sagor 3). Sagar suggests that there are 7 steps to Educational Action Research. (1) Selecting a focus; (2) clarifying theories; (3) identifying research questions; (4) collecting data; (5) analyzing data; (6) reporting results, and (7) Taking informed action (4).

Elliot uses a complex three-cycle model in describing action research and its steps (see figure. 5). The model consists of a repetition of monitoring, revising and re-implementing action steps based on continual evaluation of effects.
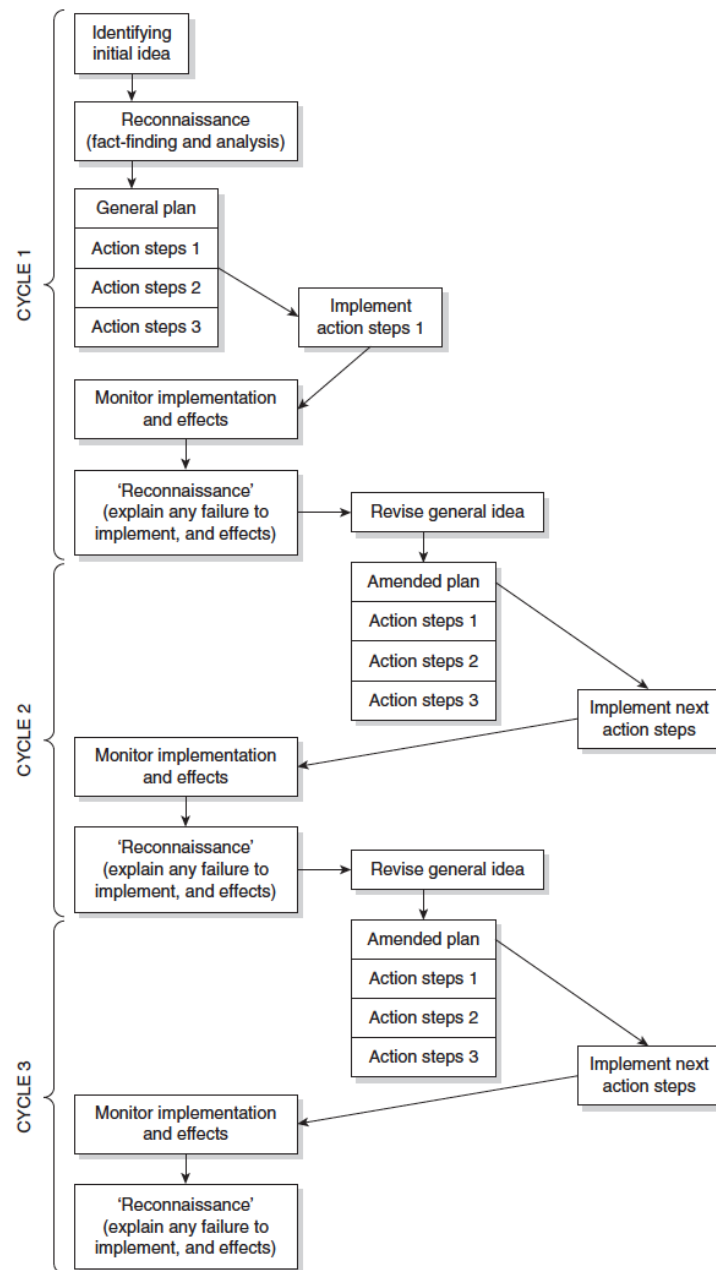
Figure 5. Elliot's Action Research Model (A Revised version of Lewin's interpretation)

From "Ellliot, J. Action Research for Educational Change, p.71 © 1991. Reproduced with the

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Kemmis & McTaggart use a spiral model in describing action research (see figure. 6), they describe it as involving "a spiral of self-reflexive cycles of planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, reflecting on these processes and consequences and then replanning, acting and observing and reflecting." (Koshy 5)
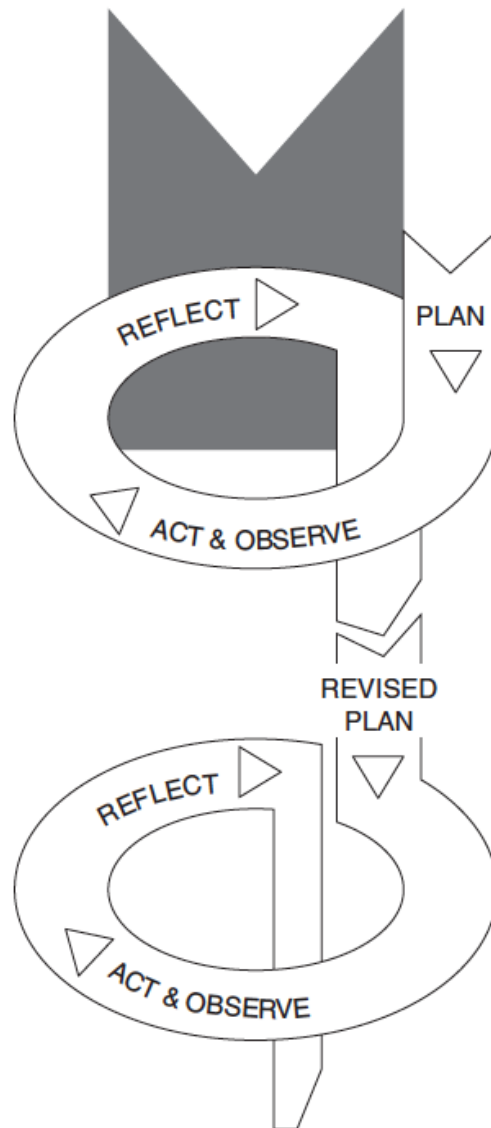
Figure 6. Kemmis and McTaggart's action research spiral from " Koshy. "What Is Action Research?" *36584_01_Koshy_et_al_Ch_01*. SAGE Publications Inc. Web.

In O'Leary's model (see figure. 7), it is suggested that there is a more iterative process between four steps – observe, reflect, act, and plan (Koshy 6).
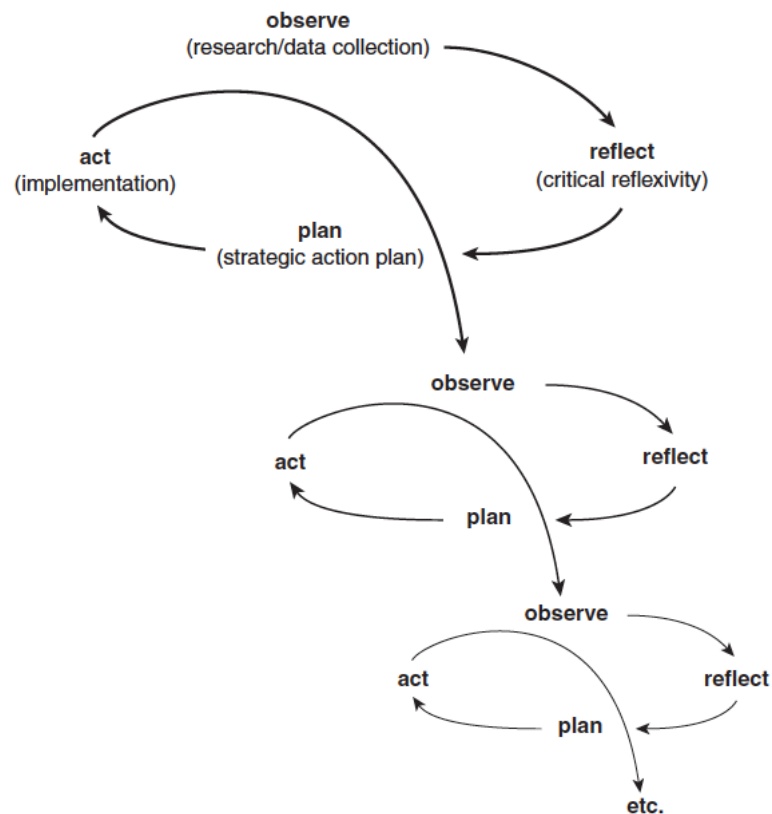
Figure 7. O'Leary's Action Research Model from " Koshy. "What Is Action Research?" *36584_01_Koshy_et_al_Ch_01*. SAGE Publications Inc. Web.

Essentially all the models are similar, they all specifically have some sort of observational stage, which in this case is where using Speculative Design comes into play. Speculative Design is sometimes perceived as being too imaginative in that it is concerned mostly with creating dialogue without defining a specific problem first. In intersecting the two, participatory action research helps balance things out and bring action into the process.

Introducing Speculative Design to the observational stages of each model as the method of collecting data allows one to critically engage in dialogue around classroom design, but then allows one to move to further stages of reflection, planning, and action. The intersection of Speculative Design (imagination) and Action Research (action) is a powerful dynamic duo.

7 METHODOLOGY & METHODS

7.1 REDEFINING VERSUS RENAMING – DELINKING AS A METHODOLOGY

Imagine that you have collectively engaged in a decolonial discourse around the design of the classroom that prioritized Speculative Design methodologies. Imagine your speculative artefact is this weird box-like object that is being used specifically to rethink the physicality of the classroom. Imagine you walk into a classroom and see an empty room with only objects you are unfamiliar with. Imagine your classmates, and your professor, are all sitting/standing in a circle or scattered in various positions across the room and all activating this irregular object in a non-conforming and inconsistent way. Rather than observe this scenario through the lens of an expert proposing a solution to classroom design, instead observe it as a springboard for a larger discussion about decolonial futures and how you want your learning spaces to transform.

Now, imagine you go through this process with peers and discuss what a more inclusive and desirable future for the post-secondary classroom looks like. Imagine you all come up with a tangible plan to make all the moving parts happen including both physical and non-physical aspects of the learning space. Imagine the space you all create consisted of a space that was shaped in a circle/oval instead of the typical boxed enclosure. Imagine you decided on no tables and no chairs, and no other physical objects associated with the traditional classroom space. Imagine the entire curriculum of the class was dependent on self-created evaluation methods and assignments co-designed by each student and the professor.

From a content perspective you have delinked the material culture often associated with a 'classroom' and have now given shape to a completely different learning space. This is a space that is more inclusive and desirable by all the participants. However, according to Mignolo you'd

need to go one step further in renaming the space as he mentions in the final criterion for delinking. The question, however in this example, is at this stage, what significant effect would changing the term 'classroom' have on the individuals interacting within the space? And indeed, in a similar fashion, what re-imagined terminology for "teacher" might free up associations with systemic and institutionalized harm?

If you didn't rename the space, the space would still operate differently and perhaps still produce different outcomes in terms of construction of otherness within the space. It would be a space that does not focus on 'fixity' and an unchanging order, and instead would allow for different ways of learning and being within a space simultaneously. You might still call it a classroom but now based on experience in the space you might gradually start to delink from this typical material culture and come to understand the classroom as a space to learn in whatever shape or form that may be. The idea of keeping the name classroom but shifting your understanding of the multiple ways it can look, feel, function, etc. seems like the more decolonized approach in delinking the material culture associated with the word 'classroom' that leads to ideological constructions of otherness.

If you did rename the space, I fear that you might then unknowingly take part in the classification system by creating further sub-classifications or categories of a type of classroom. Montessori schools for example could be said to be an effort of delinking from traditional school models in their efforts to focus on individualized learning and a more intimate collaboration between teacher and student. Mignolo would probably agree that Montessori schools are a good example of successful delinking, they redefined and redesigned spaces and the way in which students learn using a more individualized approach instead of the generalized approach traditional education systems use and renamed the new set of contents.

While the renaming helped in identifying and delinking the style of learning an environment provided by the school, it also added to the classification of different types of schools (i.e. Montessori, Waldorf, Faith-based, etc.). With that of course, comes issues of access in terms of where these alternative schools are located and who and what type of people can attend. Would this still be the case if the school was not renamed and instead the alternative ways of creating classroom environments and prioritizing individualized learning was incorporated in pre-existing schools? Hence, redefining our understanding of the term instead of simply renaming it and adding yet another category to school types seems to be more ideal.

7.2 RECRUITMENT OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Participants recruited for this study were screened based on three characteristics (1) a current or recently graduated high school student; (2) a current or graduated post-secondary student; (3) a current or past post-secondary staff or faculty member. To be eligible, participants had to be at minimum 18 years of age and located within the Greater Toronto Area. During the screening process, participants were asked to share their ethnic background – this was a crucial part of the selection process as it was specifically important to hear perspectives of all ancestries. In total, 13 individuals expressed interest via the screening questionnaire. Of those 13 individuals, 3 indicated they were a current or past post-secondary staff or faculty member and all 13 indicated they were a current or graduated post-secondary student. 54% indicated they were BIPOC, 46% indicated they were white and 23% indicated they belonged to a group that was not listed.

Of the 13 participants who initially expressed interest, only 4 participants successfully moved past the consent stage and completed participation in the study. Of those participants, 2

identified as white, 1 identified as a person of colour and 1 identified as Latinx. While the final sample population was split 50/50 between white and persons of colour, the study was not successful in specifically hearing from Black and Indigenous individuals which are both identities tied to my own. Ideally it would have been better to get the full 13 participants to complete the study so that the data and stories heard were more diverse however given that the study was meant to test out a methodology versus making generalizations, the small sample size was still appropriate.

7.3 THE SPECULATIVE ARTEFACT AS A METHOD FOR DATA COLLECTION

Participants took part in a virtual workshop where they explored and gave their perspective on a post-secondary classroom scenario using speculative artefact as part design processes. Both workshops happened within a 2-week span. The data collected from these workshops was grounded in Participatory Action Research methodologies and analyzed using qualitative methods. More specifically, this data was analyzed through content analysis of the artefacts collected and co-created during the workshop and throughout the study as perception-based outcomes.

Participants were asked to attend a single 45-minute virtual workshop with up to 4 other participants, and myself. During the workshop participants watched a short narrative video (see figure. 8) where they were led through a game-like narrative prompting them to imagine themselves within a fictional crime drama positioned as a crime against 'inclusive education'. The video starts with a 911 call from a student who appears to have a friend in distress at the OCAD U Graduate Studies building at 205 Richmond St. West. The student describes to the operator the details of the situation and specifically mentions feeling of displacement and

inclusion because of events that happened within the space. The operator sends out an officer to help the two individuals, who arrives and is greeted by the two students in an empty classroom with no humans in sight. The two students still in distress explain to the officer that the perpetrator (s) who have caused their distress is still in the space. Confused, since there are only classroom objects remaining, the officer takes an inventory of all the objects in the room, photographs them and escorts the two students out of the building and back to the station for further investigation. Refer to Appendix A for a full script of the video and a link to view it directly.
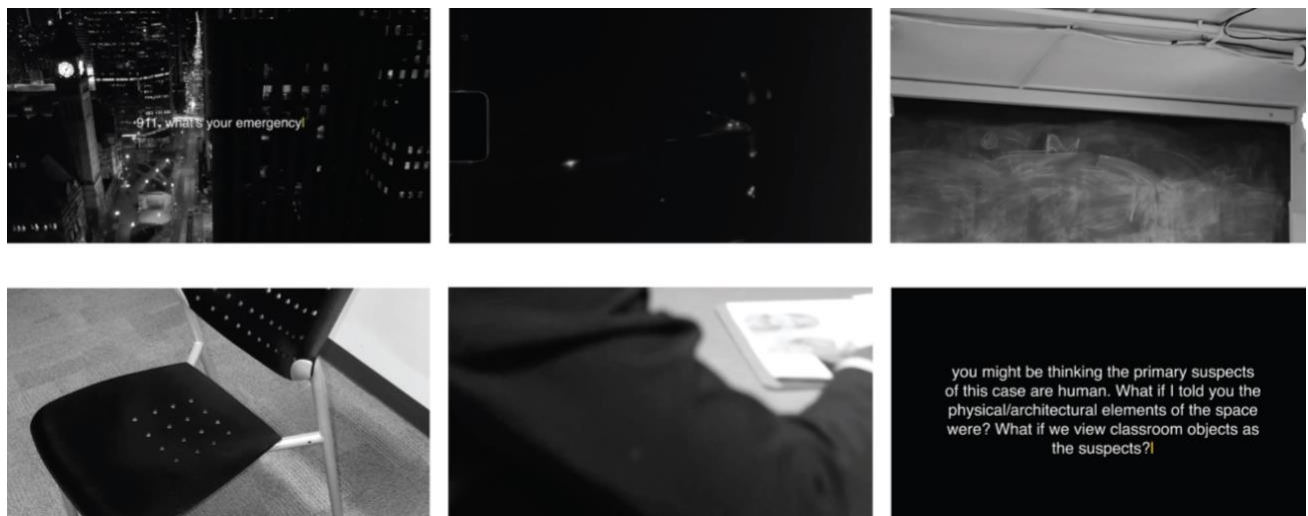
Figure 8. Screen captures of video participants watched during workshop

The speculative artefact being used in this case is the video created, showcased a classroom inventory containing photographs depicting objects found in a physical post-secondary classroom. During the workshop after watching the video, these objects were depicted as fictional characters who were given the role of 'suspects' involved in the investigation (see figure. 9). After watching the video, participants adopted a temporary role of being part of the

officer's investigation team and were invited to share their thoughts and discuss their perceptions in regard to the ways in which each 'suspect' might have contributed to the crime against 'inclusive education'.

Figure 9. Fictional Investigation Boards shown to workshop participants

They were asked to select their primary "suspects' or in other words select the classroom objects they thought contributed most to the crime (see figure. 10). In presenting the objects in an evidence-like crime scenario participants were able to evaluate the objects at both a macro-level and their relationship to the classroom, but also at a micro-level that forced them to think of the objects individually. A more basic way of being able to disassociate the objects from the

classroom for a moment and reflect on what their thoughts were in terms of functionality, necessity, etc.

Figure 10. In-Depth look at different possible suspects shown to workshop participants

Lastly, participants were prompted to take part in co-designing and contributing to naming alternative scenarios they think might be implemented to prevent the crime from repeating itself. Each telling their own narrative and presenting yet another speculative tool for reimagining our post-secondary classrooms. One workshop's alternative focused on the idea of a space with multiple purposes and events being able to happen simultaneously while another workshop's alternative focused on the idea of seeing the classroom as a space for doing rather than simply consuming. More detail about both alternatives in the workshop can be found in the upcoming outcomes section. The co-designed alternatives from each workshop were woven together to create the final portion of my body of work.

7.4 FINAL BODY OF WORK AND EXHIBITION

My final body of artwork consists of three parts (1) The original video that was shown to participants during the multiple workshops with photographs (see figure. 11) of the objects inside the original classroom; (2) A miniature scaled classroom scenario (see figure. 12) based on an interpretation of the alternative ideas shared from participants during the workshop; and (3) An audio narrative guiding viewers through a similar experience participants completed during the workshop.

Figure 11. Suspect Photographs to be used in final exhibition

Figure 12. Alternative Classroom Scenario to be used in final exhibition

During the exhibition viewers will be guided through an experience where they encounter an initial station where they view the video and are able to interact with the suspect photographs (see figure. 11) and think through how the objects contributed to the crime for themselves. At the next station they'll view the Alternative Classroom Scenario (see figure. 12) and listen to an audio recording that prompts them to think about how their alternative scenario might look as well as imagining the ways this scenario might be successful in not repeating the previous crime again classroom inclusion that they witness in the video.

7.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There were potential minor risks where participants might have experienced triggers related to past experiences within post-secondary classrooms, particularly as the study involved prompts about power and social dynamics within traditional learning environments. This risk was necessary in creating an authentic dialogue and capturing participant's lived experiences.

Measures taken to mitigate risks during the study included on-hand resources for psychologists, counselling centres and help lines, creation of safer/brave space statement as part of consent to participate; periodic check-in/prompts built into the workshop including touching base with participants as they undertook the various activities/exercises; ensuring a clear statement on ability to withdraw from study at any point without consequences, and to have any and all of their contribution removed if desired without penalty or consequence.

Participant's identity was kept anonymous using a code name selected by the participant during the consent process. This ensured participants were not identifiable by peers and that their contributions remained confidential. Any reference to the workshops and/or participants

throughout this thesis has been summarized and/or coded using their assigned name or

participant label. Approval was obtained from OCAD U's Research Ethics Board for all

activities and processes involving humans for this study.

8 WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

The primary data collected via the 2 virtual workshops confirmed the existence of material culture expectations when thinking about a classroom. The sessions specifically confirmed how objects found within the classroom provide accessible barriers to students and their ability to physically access the space and/or properly navigate or maneuver within the space. They also confirmed that the object itself and how it is used is one thing, however the classroom layout as a whole and how the objects are placed, interact, and communicate also play an important role in how inhabitants might feel within the space. The key objects participants identified as culprits to these things were the chair, desk, doors, and lights. They explained these objects as the most inaccessible from an accessibility standpoint and most influential from a layout standpoint.

"Specifically speaking to spaces in OCAD who had issues with a wheelchair in Richmond, lots of tables and chairs. Thinking about the unique way classroom are laid out, facing each other's, two chairs to a desk. There are both issues in terms of the objects themselves but also how they are being used." (Workshop Participant B)

Participants specifically mentioned that in viewing the objects isolated in form of an inventory, without previous knowledge these were objects from a classroom, that they would have never known. One participant even went as far to say that the objects could have come from an interrogation room.

"It does not look like a friendly/warm environment. Elements look as if they could be in an interrogation room. Looks unfriendly when you break down the elements. Window investigates wall, walls are grey, etc. We are spending 2-3 hours with these elements, when thinking about outside elements there has been more effort to make things more welcoming. No sense of comfort for the person inhabiting the space. More focus on the functional aspects. It just looks odd." (Workshop Participant C)

Both workshops offered a different approach in terms of solutions and/or alternative classroom designs based on the speculative artefact. Participants in the 1st workshop imagined an alternative classroom that was an extremely large space with multi-use nests, pods & stations. A space where a lecture/course could take place simultaneously with someone working independently, lounging with a fellow peer, etc. They imagined a colourful space that fostered community. In the Alternative Classroom Scenario (see figure. 12) this was illustrated by the multiple entrance points into the structure, the transparent walls, the open space and the multipurpose structures place outside of the main structure. Participants in the 2nd workshop proposed that maybe a static approach to the classroom was not the solution at all. Instead, a space more of hybrid and fluid nature where the physical space itself was meant for doing rather than consuming. Imagining an approach to the classroom that meant more than one place/space simultaneously borrowing from some of what we've currently experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Alternative Classroom Scenario (see figure. 12) this was illustrated by the multiple areas and the potential of doing both inside and outside of the main structure.

Both alternatives, the participants helped to co-design an alternative space using Speculative Design methodologies in the data collection stage of Participatory Action Research.

The workshops allowed participants to discuss and participate in critical dialogue around the effects of objects found within a specific post-secondary classroom as well as take a step back and think critically of the concept of a 'post-secondary classroom' itself. More specific, summarized notes from each workshop can be found in Appendix B and C.

9 CONCLUSIONS

9.1 SUMMARY

Historically, classrooms have been a space that promote rigidity and an unchanging order amongst the individuals who inhabit the space. This thesis has specifically taken an in-depth look at how Speculative Design can act as a tool for decolonizing classroom design both as a physical and social space, ultimately leading to more desirable and inclusive futures for students engaged in education. It was most important to me that my methodology and methods throughout this study were based first and foremostly in foundations of diversity and inclusion. It was also crucial that as a researcher and facilitator I was able to provide a truly imaginative space to foster discussion and ideas about the post-secondary classroom from many perspectives and uninterrupted by the pressures of the expert/non- expert power dynamic that many design processes centralize. Speaking as a Black and Indigenous woman, it was non-negotiable that this method includes in its entirety a space for perceptions, stories and voices of BIPOC and White individuals simultaneously.

The intersection of speculative design methodologies and action research can allow designers, architects, faculty, students and staff to approach designing and redesigning their spaces in a way that has a foundation in critical dialogue rather than an expert/non-expert power-based dynamic. The structure of this process can be easily replicated by almost anyone, which further empowers them to be able to take their own action.

The workshops for this study revealed stories and perspectives that made it clear that the material culture and more specifically the actual objects found in classrooms in the Graduate building at OCAD University are in dire need of a re-design. The workshops revealed that not

only do they need a physical re-design but a more in-depth critical review of the purpose of the post-secondary classroom in general and what we intend to do in the space and/or space(s).

Delinking the post-secondary classroom requires looking at both the contents and the terminology of the conversations within the post-secondary classroom. In looking at both however, we must not default and make renaming the terms of the conversation as Mignolo and others suggest a steadfast requirement. Evaluating whether renaming or redefining the terminology must be evaluated in order to ensure one is not repeating colonial practices of further classifications and categorizations. It is my hope that one day we may live in a world where the term 'classroom' is delinked from its unchanging order and rigidity and instead be understood and defined as something more plural and fluid. We don't need to add more terms into the mix, we need to revisit and reconstruct the ones that already exist.

Based on these ideas, it is clear that speculative design can be a tool for decolonizing classroom design. A tool for creating spaces that work more in tandem with shifts towards decolonizing education such as incorporating teaching Indigenous knowledge and the inclusion of Indigenous scholars and faculty that have been implemented in post-secondary institutions across Canada. An intersection of imagination and action, in a way that will allow us to create more desirable and inclusive spaces for the next generation of students.

At this point in time, the findings from this research study have identified a current gap in decolonizing education and more specifically in relation to the physical post-secondary classroom space. The findings have provoked further thinking about it in tandem with the non-physical aspects of the space, however there is much more work to be done in terms of further testing the use this methodology to gain a more concrete understanding of its actual impact.

9.2 LEARNINGS

This research has transformed my entire identity as a designer. It has allowed me to challenge my reflexivity and bring a decolonial lease to the forefront allowing me to operate in a way that serves my soul.

I've already brought speculative design methodologies into my workplace at Ryerson University and have also incorporated this thinking into other design projects and work outside of my regular in-class work.

I've learned that in doing so, it not only leads to solutions that are more desired by its intended users, but also provides a more warm and welcoming space for collaboration and truly co-building solutions.

I think the outcome in terms of the breadth of the data collected could have been much stronger if there weren't added pressures of COVID-19 and limitations to further saturating the digital space. I also think original ideas of actual hands-on workshops where participants could have interacted with the space and elements would have been much more effective.

One thing I might have done differently, is create an animated video instead of the one I used and further develop the workshop as a more game-like experience. I think given the structure of the video and by way of delivering it via Zoom, participants had trouble grasping the concept and taking a step back, to really think of how these objects influence their ways of being in the space.

I also acknowledge that the shortfalls of this type of research, specifically for individuals such as myself, may be regarded as less credible. Specifically, the imaginative nature of speculative design, and it being too abstract and not practical enough for actual use. I also acknowledge that given my position in the university as a student, I have the privilege of

exploring this type of research where I can take more risk. I understand that the reality for some might be that higher level pressures may not see this methodology and/or research as one that is worth it.

I think even in its shortfalls however, that the methodology is one worth trying whether on a small or large scale. Regardless, it is crucial that we keep having critical conversations about post-secondary classroom design and our ways of being.

If I have achieved anything in this research, I hope you might understand the importance of considering our physical classroom spaces in the same way you might consider curriculum, teacher selection, policies, etc. The physical space is more powerful than you think. I hope that the work I have started might eventually stand alongside the work of researchers such as Marie Battiste, Eve Tuck, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Bell Hooks, to name a few who are already out there considering and reconsidering the classroom space and education with a decolonial lens.

9.3 NEXT STEPS

The first thing I hope to do is further perfect the video specifically into either a fully animated production or as an actual short film with real life characters and custom footage accompanied by a physical card-like game that can be used in classrooms as an actual activity with students, professors, etc. as a tool to critically think of their classroom space. With research activities being virtual, I did not get to experience how this methodology might work in a more physically engaging setting or an actual classroom space that participants might be able to interact with in real-time. I think, this is an area I am most curious of pursuing next.

On a larger scale I hope to develop a set of alternative classroom scenarios that can be used as speculative artifacts in an exhibition series. These scenarios will be life-sized where

viewer can experience the space for what it is. I don't have any immediate intentions of pursuing

further education at this point, as I am more focused on exploring the methodology in different

ways however, I am definitely open and welcoming whatever opportunities and new adventures

that might arise and allow me to continue this work.

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11 APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Workshop Video Script & YouTube Link

Dear Classroom: a speculative look into post-secondary classroom design

[video starts]

[phone rings]

Scene 1: Witness places 911 Call

    Operator: "911 what's your emergency?"

    Tobi: Hi my name is Tobi Lari and I'm a student at OCAD University. I need help, my friend is feeling displaced and like she doesn't belong in this classroom. She shouldn't feel like this, please send someone to help her.

    Operator: Is there anyone else there with you Tobi?

    Tobi: No, I'm here alone now with my friend, the professor and my classmates have all gone home.

    Operator: Where exactly are you located?

Tobi: I'm at 205 Richmond St. W in classroom 514

Operator: Does your friend have any life threatening injuries Tobi?

Tobi: Ummm I'm not too sure how to answer that question. It sure feels like it's life threatening, but she's not bleeding or anything.

Operator: Okay, stay there we're sending help.

Operator: Tobi, what is your friends name?

Tobi: Nadia Coleman is her name

Operator: Tobi, are you able to describe the potential suspects? Who has caused this harm?

Tobi: I'm not sure how to describe them, but they're still here with us in the space.

Operator: Okay hang tight Tobi, we're sending help.

[police sirens and speeding vehicle sounds]

Scene 2: Detective arrives at the crime scene

[show an empty room]

Tobi: Hello officer, we're in here, they're still here

Detective: Where are the perpetrators?

Tobi: You're looking at them, they're here with us

[show an empty room again]

Detective: Are you sure?

Tobi: YES! Don't you see them?

Detective: Uhmmm sure, let me grab my camera and take some photos to bring back to the precinct

[multiple photo flashes]

[images fade in and out]

Detective: Okay, there's a car downstairs that is going to take you both to the hospital to be monitored and to examine any injuries

Tobi & Nadia: thank you officer

[sounds of leaving the building and getting into a car]

Scene 3: The Detective arrives back at the precinct

[detective sighs]

[door slams]

[Detective sorts through gathered evidence and creates an investigation board]

[show hands moving photographs]

[show final board]

[door opens sound]

Detective: Chief! Come see this

Detective: There seems to be something weird going on here with the possible suspects, I've never seen anything like this in my 10 plus years of police work. Take a look!

[chief huffs and puffs]

Scene 4: Chief instructs the detective to gather a team to help them with the case

Chief: Interesting...gather the team, we need all hands-on deck to solve this case

[whistle sound]

Detective: It's go-time, let go team!

[sound of feet]

Detective: We have a big case on our hands, let' get started folks

[video ends]

APPENDIX B: Workshop 1 Notes

- Participant A: Tables and chairs, foldable tables can be a barrier to accessibility. Based on specific experience at OCAD with them being broken, heavy, hard to maneuver. The state of the table, not necessarily where it was placed (the deterioration).

- Participant B: Specifically speaking to spaces in OCAD who had issues with a wheelchair in Richmond, lots of tables and chairs. Thinking about the unique way classroom are laid out, facing each other's, two chairs to a desk. There are both issues in terms of the objects themselves but also how they are being used.

- Participant C: Could not understand first bit of the video. Takes objection to the chair, someone has decided the way we are supposed to sit for 2-3 hours. Ergonomic issues, leaning more towards the chair as the primary suspect

- Participant B: Commented on how harsh florescent lighting is.

- Participant A: Also commented on the Florescent light, linked back to in the video. In a room with extraordinarily little florescent light. Some projectors do not work, or you are sitting too far away that they do not work.

- Participant C: Commented that seeing the objects without the whole context they would not know it was a classroom. It does not look like a friendly/warm environment. Elements look as if they could be in an interrogation room. Looks unfriendly when you break down the elements. Window investigates wall, walls are grey, etc. We are spending 2-3 hours with these elements, when thinking about outside elements there has been more effort to make things more welcoming. No sense of comfort for the person inhabiting the space. More focus on the functional aspects. It just looks odd.

- Participant A: Commented on how heavy the doors are, for even an individual considered to be able bodied. Doors are a massive issue.

- Participant C: Commented it on how good breaking it up was because they never look at the individual elements. Mentioned that in some classrooms there are changes being made.

- Blueprint/Alternative: Bringing the thinking of brainstorm and breakout sessions room, little nests, or pods or spaces. There is a lot of focus on colour and design with OCAD add in some of that. A large space with different areas (I.e., a kitchen, a couch, a storage space, a large table, 20 computers facing a projector, tables) - it was more open concept.)

A large classroom made a better sense of community, there were classes going on and people to work.

APPENDIX C: Workshop 2 Notes

- Participant D: Tables and chairs, the chair and table can work for certain people but not everyone. Specifically, people with disabilities. Also, the fact that there is a chair in the way makes it hard to navigation through the classroom. Tables tend to be a guide of where you feel more comfortable. Generates certain silos between students, etc. Sometimes it is a struggle to find where to sit. Chair is more static and not meant for if you want individuals to move around and get involved. Both effects how invited we felt, there is a configuration that has already been set out for you. Pressure to pick a social circle.

- Participant D: Something about light and the types that work well. Prefers brighter spaces to stay focused, etc. Likes to see natural light, without it can feel very weird when there is no natural light at all. Florescent lights are unstable, flickering, inconsistent brightness, not really a reliable system. Also pointed out that not everyone likes the same lighting so it can be challenging, sometimes people prefer brighter spaces and other times they prefer warmer spaces. Not everyone will feel comfortable under the same conditions.

- Participant D: Thinking about the chair again and how they are limited to a certain sized person. Usually, things are made for the average person, but the question is also how they calculate the 'average' person. Commented on the carpet in terms of dust, allergens, etc.

- Participant D: Kept going back to the trash bins, taking up space, and a lot that is not designed properly, etc. Blue is supposed to be recyclables, but sometimes you will see

other things. Smells they can produce. Commented that if he saw these objects without knowing they were in a classroom. Commented that everything feels old. The projector perhaps and the door might signal to it but everything else could be any sort of room.

- Blueprint/Alternative: Talked about virtual learning, how do we move away from and take some of the advantages virtual education has and bring them back to the physical world. A redesigned classroom might look like designing individualized changes that are modular depending on the needs of the classroom. Can be moved around and be reconfigured to be differently setup. No carpet. Why are we still trying to push content in one way to students? Learning vs. Education. Maybe classrooms are not even the solution, maybe it's having modular content that can be consumed in different ways. The classroom is more of the actual space for doing rather than consuming (listening to lectures, etc.). Something that is not a static one thing, digital extension, physical extension, etc. Talked a lot about how we've currently just mimicked the physical classroom which is unrealistic. Break learning into smaller pieces rather than a specific place and time.