

# David Lam Chair in Multicultural Education 2022 Report

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First endowed in [1991](#), the David Lam Chair in Multicultural Education was established to support increased interest, programming, and research in multicultural and anti-racist education in order to assist schools in fostering multiculturalism. Since 1991, complexity has grown exponentially globally and the conceptualization and practices of what was understood as multiculturalism in 1991 have been re-examined and re-thought, especially in light of calls for decolonization and Indigenization, as well as critiques of the co-optation of multicultural discourse as a means of sustaining rather than interrupting the white settler colonial status quo.

It has been an honour to hold the David Lam Chair in Multiculturalism (referred to in this document as DL Chair) in 2022. I was originally selected as DL Chair for a term of three years, however, since I accepted an appointment as the new Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria in July 2023, I agreed to resign from the DL Chair on December 31, 2022.

My original 3-year proposed program focused on re-imagining multiculturalism in relation to three main themes:

1. Indigenous engagement and decolonization
2. Generational differences in the understanding of equity and inclusion
3. The climate and nature emergency

My 1-year revised program focused mainly on the first thematic area with a couple of activities/events addressing the other two. The activities of the DL Chair program in 2022 included:

- the design, development and delivery of the course “Multiculturalism in time, place and space: Addressing cultural and historical dissonances in education” (EDST578 2022/W1) in collaboration with Tom Scholte (scholar of Systems Theatre in the UBC Department of Theatre and Film) and Dani Pigeau (Stó:lō school teacher and knowledge keeper) to 19 graduate students (8 of whom were school teachers) in Winter 1, 2022;
- a series of three workshops titled “Racialization and settler complicity: The complicated interface of migration, colonization, and Indigeneity in Canada” for a group of 30 participants, including leaders from organizations in the immigration and settlement services, offered in collaboration with the Centre for Migration Studies at UBC and Dr. Cash Ahenakew, CRC in Indigenous Peoples’ Wellbeing in the UBC Department of Educational Studies;
- two residencies for Black and POC educators that engaged and adapted the theories and methodologies of depth education (more info below) to approach difficult questions at the interface of multiculturalism and settler colonialism in the contexts of Canada and the US. The first residency took place in October 2022, but due to travel constraints in the first half of 2022, one of the residencies had to be postponed to February 2023;

- mentorship and support for an artistic collaboration between Black literary artist and playwright Willow Cioppa and Stó:lō school teacher and knowledge keeper Dani Pigeau around a BC Human Rights Tribunal complaint that illustrates the paradoxes and complexities at the interface of multiculturalism and settler-colonialism (this was originally envisaged as a systems theatre play, but was changed to a literary collaboration due to unanticipated external legal factors pertaining to the Human Rights Tribunal process);
- the ongoing collaborative design of a board game with the aim of visibilizing the struggles, risks, costs and burdens of Indigenous, Black and People of Color (IBPOC) navigating academia;
- a lecture by educational philosopher Dr. Sharon Todd on educational challenges related to climate grief and multiculturalism, titled “The Touch of the Present: Educational Encounters, Aesthetics and the Politics of the Senses” on November 2, 2022, at UBC;
- a recorded masterclass developed for an IBPOC audience offering a new social cartography of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) that emerged from events and collaborations in 2022 that aims to articulate the stacked difficulties of navigating spaces where, despite EDI promises and policies, the naturalization and normalization of white supremacy, racism, and colonialism remain uninterrupted.

In terms of pedagogical advancements, the DL Chair partly contributed to the development and piloting of an educational modality that I am provisionally calling “Depth Education”, which is grounded on a complexity approach to decolonization and multiculturalism. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak’s call for an education that non-coercively re-arranges desires towards responsibility “before will”, depth education combines ontological critiques of modernity/coloniality, complexity/systems literacies and a non-Western mode of psychoanalysis that attempts to interrupt the colonization of cognitive, affective and relational inner- and outer-scapes. This pedagogy was piloted in the EDST578 course, the workshop series in collaboration with the Centre for Migration Studies, and the Black caucus residency in October 2022.

In 2022, I delivered 8 keynote presentations related to multiculturalism and depth education, including a high-profile keynote at the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA), the Europe-wide EPAL conference, and keynotes in prestigious conferences outside of education, including the conference of the International Society of the Systems Sciences and the Futures Anticipation conference. I was also invited to present a seminar at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University on January 30, 2023. In terms of scholarly outputs, I started writing a book provisionally titled “Depth Education: coloniality, complexity and the unconscious” and I am approaching the final stages of submission of a co-authored article (provisionally) titled “Equity washing: uninterrupted naturalization of white supremacy despite policies and promises of EDI”.

In sum, throughout my term as DL Chair, I have sought to invite deeper and more accountable engagements with the complexities and complicities involved in seeking to interrupt naturalized structures of racism, colonialism, and whiteness in ways that go beyond increasingly common patterns of EDI that are grounded not in the interruption of ongoing racial and colonial harm, but practices of tokenistic inclusion, simplistic solutions, and affirmations of (white) innocence.

Since some of the outputs of the DL Chair program are still being finalized, such as the literary collaboration, the boardgame and the second caucus residency, in the remainder of this report I will focus on the evaluations of the course and the seminar series. This report will be revised in 2023 once all activities are completed.

## **DL Chair course (EDST578 offered in W12022)**

The course “Multiculturalism in Time, Space and Place: Addressing cultural and historical dissonances in education” aimed to support educators to expand professional and personal dispositions to more effectively address questions, complexities and paradoxes related to cultural and historical dissonance in education. The course offered basic tools to equip participants to:

- engage with some of the history, paradoxes, complexities and limitations of multiculturalism in Canada;
- identify points of common experiences and tensions at the interface between the multicultural project in Canada, Indigenous struggles, and calls for decolonization;
- articulate some of the complexities of approaching multiculturalism, decolonization and Indigenization in education in Canada;
- expand their capacity and resilience for working in complex educational environments.

Co-delivered with Dr. Tom Scholtes and Dani Pigeau, the course combined online lectures, exercises and discussions and an in-person systems theatre practice. The online component of this course addressed multiculturalism in three different dimensions: across generations (time), in its relationship with Indigenous struggles and the call for decolonization (place), and in relation to complexities and paradoxes of educational policies and practices (space). A systems and complexity approach was used to invite participants to expand their capacity to hold space for the many moving layers of complexity associated with different perspectives on, practices of and challenges to multiculturalism. The systems theatre component engaged participants not only with the intellectual dimension of learning, but also affective and relational dimensions, emphasizing dispositions that are necessary for navigating VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) in the broad area of historical, systemic and on-going racial inequalities in Canada. The complete course syllabus (with readings list) can be found [here](#).

This course used depth pedagogy as a modality of education that prioritizes the following questions in discussions about teaching and learning:

What is the role of education in:

- building our collective capacity to tackle the wicked problems of our time, including unprecedented complex dilemmas and also disasters of our own making that we will have to face together?
- equipping people to do the kindest and most responsible thing to each other, to other species and to the land at all times, especially in times of crises and social polarisation?
- developing dispositions that will lead people to choose sobriety, maturity, discernment and responsibility in a culture (of late modernity) that often promotes and rewards the opposite?

Students were explicitly told that this was not a course that would tell them what to think or what to do in their context, but support them to build capacity and stamina to engage with the multiple moving layers of complexity of academic debates and educational policies and practices related to multiculturalism. By developing these capacities and stamina, students will be better prepared to make informed and more accountable decisions in their own contexts of professional practice. Participants were also informed that they would be exposed to knowledge considered

difficult and painful, and would be offered tools that could help them navigate uncomfortable topics without feeling overwhelmed, immobilized, or demanding quick fixes. Nineteen students (including 8 BC teachers) completed the course.

Anticipating that the official course evaluation would not have been released by the time of submission of this report, I asked students to volunteer to share their views of the course anonymously on Canvas (wiki feature) specifically for this report:

This course has been unlike anything I have taken in my whole formal education path. Before taking it I thought there was a 'right' way to engage with racial justice or multiculturalism. I thought answers were fixed and stable, and that it was a matter of arriving at them. Now I understand that this is not the case. Fixed answers towards issues of justice are not only incongruent in liquid modernity, they are also dangerous. What I have been able to move with this course is to start to map my desires for such fixed answers and to start feeling more comfortable with the complexity and the uncertainty that it all brings. It also allowed me to feel in my body issues that before I was compartmentalizing in the mind.

I have enjoyed every moment of this course. I have never experienced a class such as this in my educational journey, and my learning and personal growth throughout this semester has grown substantially. Vanessa has been a wonderful guide on this journey and has helped us push beyond our comfort zones and traditional notions of education, multiculturalism, and decolonization.

This has been an extraordinary course which helped step outside strict and removed measurements of Canadian multiculturalism in policy and practice and toward an ongoing affective engagement that does the double service of confronting my own complicit relationship to the complexity of multiculturalism, while engaging with many of the difficulties that a generative response to learning and unlearning, may entail.

This course provided us with a unique experience to traverse the murky waters of multiculturalism as 'the other'. To understand 'the other' requires more than intellectual stamina, more than being open to learning - it requires the ability to place our whole selves into different positions on the grid. Embodied exercises and the use of theatre engaged our senses, interrupting our normal states of 'calm, to hold the uncertainties and paradoxes of these controversial topics. We became 'the other', while also holding space for ourselves. We felt 'othering', we felt what it was like to 'other', and what it was like to be 'othered'. These sensations made the readings and the intellectual parts of the course come to life, and this moved us from simply being, to BEING PRESENT. I've never experienced such a profound period of transformation, through discomfort and collective compassion. Loved it!

This course showed me what deep and meaningful education in the 21st Century can look like. Rather than providing a prescription for how and what to think, we were given tools to help us consider complex experiences, histories, and perspectives from many angles. As a result, I am coming away from this course with a much deeper and complex understanding of multiculturalism, colonialism, and Indigenous struggles in addition to having a greater ability

to consider my own positionality and the responsibilities I have to learn and unlearn different ways of knowing and being.

Vanessa, Tom, and Dani offered something unlike anything I have experienced in my 12 year post-secondary student career. This course, and Facing Human Wrongs, invite a guided cracking open of the self and its distinct positionality, privileges, and pitfalls. The scope and concepts were profound, arguably akin to an acute ego death, but we were intricately supported and scaffolded throughout. Both online and on-campus sessions allowed us to connect with our peers and build trust and rapport, a beautifully curated reading list pushed our existing grasps of related theory and discourses, and “offline” weeks alongside (un)learning journals gave us space, time, and privacy to chew, swallow, and/or spit everything we were grappling with. Humbling, expanding, challenging. There is no one answer or fix, but I venture to state that courses like this demonstrate a more meaningful and productive future for the post-secondary institution (and education itself). Can’t express my gratitude enough for this opportunity — I will never (allow myself to) forget these teachings.

This course provided a learning environment where I was able to gradually connect a) my own personal experience and reflections around the blocks and potholes to cultivating unconditional regard and b) some of the themes that emerged from the last few readings and discussions around complexity and multiculturalism. One of the common threads throughout the texts and course content was the necessity of disrupting settler futurities by refusing to make ourselves serviceable to settler colonialism. Many of the readings in the course articulated this from different positions and vernaculars and all more or less rigorously, but all of them also (in different ways) reproduced elements of the 5e’s and shirked complexity in favour of more solutionist or therapeutic conversations—conversations that reward certain habits of consumption and prevent us from sitting with the painful, difficult, or complex realities of these subjects.

This prompted me to reflect about the ways these conversations, in their construction of certain kinds of critiques or limited narratives, might broadcast, center or hail the voices of more immature “bus passengers”—letting them steer and direct the narrative in question—foreclosing what other relational, affective, and cognitive depth or presence might be possible. I witnessed this reaction in myself with the passenger check exercise, where my more immature passenger wanted to immediately render these characteristics as frustrating externalities rather than embodied/internal entities—and how this response inhibits holding the gaze of complexity in favour of more comforting or ‘therapeutic’ vantage points. The irony being, I cannot begin to hold regard for the external complexity of these issues without becoming intimate with my own internal landscape.

I wonder how sitting deeply within, and with unconditional regard for, my own embodied position (its ancestral lineage, experiences, memory; its good, bad and ugly), might support the calibration of sobriety, maturity, discernment, and responsibility with regards to how I choose to engage or intervene upon or create different possible containers for critical conversations about multiculturalism, decolonization and indigenization as they present themselves in my workplace and everyday environments. How doing so can help me accept where both myself and other people are at and cultivate deeper regard for this—as well as

become better attune to how to hold space in these settings without burnout, resentment, or defaulting into the characteristics I am looking to de-pattern.

This course demonstrated that if I do not accept the uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, and inevitable volatility of navigating these conversations within the world—or if I step into these spaces in fear of the discomfort of making mistakes, being wrong, and seeking someone else to validate my worth, value or belonging—it will be very difficult to lean into this kind of (un)learning and relational disposition, it will be very difficult to develop the kind of internal compass necessary to respond, to take the next most responsible step. This is all to say, I am thinking a lot about/it's becoming clearer to me how order to be more fully in-service to the unknown, the not yet intelligible, and the beyond of settler futurities, how and why unconditional regard is central to this.

### **Workshop series - Racialization and settler complicity: The complicated interface of migration, colonization, and Indigeneity in Canada**

The workshop series “Racialization and settler complicity: The complicated interface of migration, colonization, and Indigeneity in Canada” was delivered in collaboration with the Centre for Migration Studies at UBC and the CRC in Indigenous Peoples’ Wellbeing (Dr. Cash Ahenakew). The series was designed to articulate the tensions, paradoxes, and multiple and moving layers of complexity that exist at the interface of Indigeneity and migration in what is known as Canada, where settlers (especially settlers of colour) can be both subject to and complicit in the violence of different forms of colonialism through day-to-day actions. The workshop series invited and equipped participants (racialized and non-racialized) to expand their capacity for difficult conversations about settler-Indigenous-land relationships, where racialization confers different tensions, roles and accountabilities. The workshops were held using depth inquiry as a mode of conversation that creates an educational space where people can learn and unlearn through experiences of psychological dissonance, or “difficult knowledge”.

The workshops were in person and upon registration participants had to make a commitment to participate in the three connected sessions. 30 participants from higher education, migration and settlement sectors registered for the workshop series, which took place at UBC on September 23, October 21 and November 18, 2022. 14 participants had responded the evaluation survey, which is publicly available [here](#). (password: davidlamchair)

Participants’ anonymous comments:

I looked forward to these sessions as my own journey towards recognition of complicity and living in truth about colonial realities from a white settler has been important for me to undertake these last 5 years. as a white settler who now works in immigration services, I have a lot of questions about how and why we do certain things, what unlearning and being willing to re-think how we approach immigration and settlement work has been shifting for me. But I was the only person in my org to attend and I do not hear conversations around racialization taking place here (doesn't mean these conversations are not happening, I am just not hearing them). So meeting with this group gave me space and people who are asking these questions

and grappling with these issues. I would like to connect with other participants...if there were others who would like to carry on these conversations. Thank you for a deeply challenging series of gatherings. It meant a lot to be part of this.

When I came to this workshop, I thought that already we had all of the answers of what we needed to do, we just didn't have the will or the power to implement them. Now I can see that there are a lot more complexities than I had initially realized, and there is a lot of work that I still need to do on myself and in my organization to be able to hold these complexities and commit to moving forward carefully, in ways that do not repeat the same harmful patterns. On the one hand, this was a difficult learning, and I definitely resisted it at points; but I can also see the it a necessary one and I am grateful to the organizers and facilitators for their work.

Thank you to Vanessa and the Centre for Migration Studies for hosting these sessions. It was a challenging learning experience but I'm glad I did it. I thought the caucusing approach was really interesting. And the use of the "bus" metaphor gave me a new language for processing difficult feelings. It was really hard not to look for certainties or answers, but I could also understand why this doesn't work. I would like to know more about how to continue this process of learning and unlearning in relation to racism and colonialism.

The 3 sessions were critically engaging, hearing about the experiences and challenging that BIPOC and white settlers encounter in societies were fascinating, as was experiencing how those stories could be connected with me and family. It seemed like it was a good strategy to have breakout groups between BIPOC and other settler participants. I was part of the BIPOC group and that strategy seemed to help people feel more comfortable with going deeper into the complexity of theirs as well as Indigenous experiences. Overall, from what I could tell, most everyone learnt much about Indigenous historical and contemporary conditions. As well as a few good ways to relate with Indigenous communities and organizations.

This course is a must for humanity but it should be a foundation for any future educational setting.

These workshop series were the most meaningful and transformative events I've attended in an academic setting. They've deeply transformed my sense of belonging to this country (to be more specific: the politics, passion, and kindness I found in the way these sessions was organized and held offered me a space to feel more belong in this country/institution where i feel constantly marginalized. At the same time, these workshops have made me realize my own positionality, complicity, and responsibility - as an immigrant settler- in the ongoing settler colonialism. That said, I consider this realization only a beginning, and am committed to continually learning (and unlearning) the historical and ongoing violences, and trying to 'do good' in my relations with the land, water, nature, and people.

I continue to use the bus analogy in other situations. It was a moment of learning by doing that I appreciated. I feel more empowered to check in with others about how they are doing before 'telling them'. I can't say that I always remember to 'ask before telling' or even to ask if

suggestions for solutions are desired before offering, but I think I have improved my self-awareness.

As a POC settler participant, the large group discussions including white people were less fruitful than the smaller BIPOC discussions. For the approach of this workshop and the small number of sessions (3), the overall group size felt too large for really meaningful engagement and sharing. If all of the workshops had been with a small group of BIPOC participants, I believe this would have been an experience allowing for deeper and more vulnerable engagement -- in particular, for BIPOC participants to share about the paradoxes of settler complicity.

The sessions helped me and I believe others as well to sit with the fact that there are no simple answers, that the issues are really complex and that people have very different ideas about the way forward, including racialized and Indigenous peoples. It is interesting that, although we may know already that these discussions are multifaceted and changing all the time, there is still a desire for a stable formula that could work to heal racial relations across contexts. But once we start to really acknowledge the complexities, instead of feeling immobilized by the lack of certainty, it actually felt like a burden had been lifted - I felt hopeful that we can find a different way to be together in these difficult contexts and conversations, even if there is no consensus or predetermined arrival point.

the workshops make me understand the situation is a complicated one, no easy solution, but we need to do something to start. these sessions make me reconsider the roles I played in the promised land as an immigrant, what I can do and how I can do better. All my relations!