Walls to Bridges: Evolving Our Work Within Carceral Spaces by Rupturing Racism and Oppression Through a Participatory Process

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the collaborative process undertaken by Walls to Bridges (W2B) collective members and facilitators in planning and hosting the *Evolving Our Work* symposium as part of the W2B's 10th Anniversary virtual celebrations, as well as provides reflections on the collaborative planning of the event. Given our visioning process moving forward in the next chapter of W2B, we build on an already established pedagogical body of work that has provided a guiding blueprint for visioning, collaborating, and organizing social justice frameworks for those inside and outside carceral spaces. As part of the planning process for this event, group members asked guiding questions that sought queries into where we see this work going in the future and potential challenges for evolving this work. Our effort to frame these questions was guided by working through decolonial frameworks that centered the critical importance of Indigenous resurgence, Land Back organizing, and the Black Lives Matter movement as pedagogical practice for informing solidarity between these two movements, as well as examining tensions. A key focus of this article queries the importance of self-reflection as an ontological teaching and learning decolonizing practice in creating W2B courses and informing race relations with other racialized groups inside and outside carceral spaces.

INTRODUCTION

In a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a much larger intent (Ngati Awa & Ngati Porou – cited in Smith, 1999, p. 224).

i was made to believe
we who write also dance
yet no dancer writes
(the way we write)
no writer ever dances

(the way they dance)
while writing we bend
and bend over
stoop sit and squat
and can neither stand erect
nor lie flat on our back
whoever pretend to feed
walk skip run while writing
must be flying free
as free as a caged-bird
seeing not lines as lines
bars as bars
nor any prison-yard

– Minh-ha, 1989, page 5

Critical pedagogy, as noted by Paulo Freire (1970), is the cornerstone of collaborative social justice praxis. This work, however, requires not only a commitment to transformative justice, but also a conceptual and methodological mapping that lays the foundation for how this work can be done. As Walls to Bridges (W2B) collective members and facilitators planning and hosting the W2B *Evolving Our Work* symposium in February 2022, we envisioned this process as evolutionary and collaborative, and we sought to ask seminal and challenging questions that confronted the reality of white supremacy as a dynamic force driving anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism. Given that carceral spaces magnify the indignities of racism and oppression, we wanted to query this dynamic by bringing to the forefront a discussion that challenged the lack of attention paid to racial dynamics within W2B classrooms.

To that end, our collaborative process in planning the symposium began by asking how facilitators can decentre whiteness in the classroom particularly when whiteness has historically been normalized as an educational frame of reference. Next, we recognized the importance of people with lived experience being leaders in the classroom and we wanted to explore what ways these voices are legitimized and/or invisibilized in decision-making processes in W2B classrooms. Central to this query was how silencing about racial discord relates to colonialism and the creation of new iterations of oppression for incarcerated people, especially Indigenous and Black people. Third, we focused our attention on what needs to happen

to increase anti-racist decolonization in W2B classrooms; namely how can we ensure that W2B facilitators are addressing racism in the classroom when it shows up among inside and outside students, and how might this form of oppression be linked to criminalization and incarceration? As we sought to integrate these themes, our commitment to transformative education provided the methodological and theoretical blueprint for how we collaborated in this process.

The contributors in this article have reflected on how we have "made meaning" (see Absolon, 2011) of our collaborative process. As a group consisting of four Black women and one Indigenous man, our reflections here are part of a larger project "to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice" (Smith, 1999, p. 4). Three of the authors are alumni of W2B courses (Lorraine, Melissa, and Denise) taken at Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ontario, while the other two authors (Hayden and Rai) are professors who have been trained in the W2B pedagogy through a five-day intensive training held at the prison.

Rai Reece begins the paper by providing context for the authors' collaboration in the symposium presentation and this article. Lorraine Pinnock then offers reflections on how a process-driven pedagogy for transformative change challenged us to create guiding themes accompanied by critically engaged prompts as a roadmap for thinking about the inception and the evolution of W2B. Next, Melissa Alexander's deeply personal reflection about the critical importance of Indigenous and Black solidarities illuminates how the process of planning the symposium directly related to the broader issue of white supremacist structural racism that affects Indigenous and Black communities. Denise Edwards follows with a reflection that positions the importance of Indigenous circle learning as critical pedagogical praxis for individual growth and collective visioning. Her writing asks us to think about community wealth as knowledge, rather than capitalist enterprise. Rai Reece, then, reflects on the process of naming and structural oppression as a way to collaboratively rupture, disrupt, and dismantle racism in the classroom. Finally, Hayden King concludes the paper by pointing out the ties that bind the carceral and educational institutions go deeper than procedural and structural similarities. So deeply are these interwoven into institutions, they unknowingly seep into systems such as W2B, prompting periodical re-evaluation.

DECOLONIZATION, ANTI-RACISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP BY CRIMINALIZED PEOPLE: INSIGHTS FROM LORRAINE PINNOCK

The vision was to engage participants' critical thinking to foresee changes in ways that were clear, bold, and unequivocal, by deep diving into those uncomfortable discussions that insist we learn to sit in the fire. If we are saying that we are a collective that is committed to continuously upholding our mission's basic principles, then one critical insight is that knowledge comes in many forms, and people with lived experiences of criminalization and incarceration should be given leadership opportunities, especially since attention to power imbalances and social inequities influence learning relations. The move to evolve and reposition the future of our work within W2B is process-driven work that began with us examining anti-racism and de-colonization processes in W2B Collectives and classroom settings.

The planning for the symposium provided a microcosmic maquette for what this work might look like on a wider scale. First, as planning began, everyone had impactful themes they wanted brought forward, and we discussed the way in which our social location and identities impacted what we brought to the planning process. I thought about how gender and racial dynamics opened space for querying how we can promote safety for marginalized Indigenous and Black men, both as people who are incarcerated and as facilitators. In asking this question, we reflected on the gendered and racial demographic of the outside students in previous W2B trainings. We questioned if the lack of gender parity (very few male-identified people apply for the instructor trainings) changed social dynamics within the training and among participants, and further what this meant for how we addressed stereotypical racial tropes of Black masculinities when they show up in W2B classroom spaces. We also questioned how the impact of security processes specifically targeting Black men and women outside students, along with facilitators entering carceral spaces furthered reified racism and white supremacy.

Central to our planning process was a critical lens directed towards transformative justice as social praxis. Our aim was to provide discussants with an opportunity to retreat to spaces of bravery where they could hopefully unpack and discuss the evolution of W2B and how to work through the contentious destabilizing frenzy of racial violence in classroom spaces. We

created three main themes with guiding prompts as a segue into break-out room discussions. The first theme was central to decolonizing processes and invoked participants to think about how, despite attempts to avoid racism and discrimination in W2B spaces, these dynamics can still be present and in a variety of ways. Guiding prompts queried how and why issues of whiteness and white supremacy have been sidelined in W2B? Why do we need to decentre whiteness and how do we do this? How do we address issues of safety and welcoming for outside students who are impacted by race, class, gender, and ability? And lastly, how do we hold each other accountable when harm happens during W2B sessions? In asking these questions, we thought about how we can teach and learn to transgress in our quest to imbue education as the practice of freedom (hooks, 1994), and how we can envision this praxis as active in highly confined and securitized inhumane spaces.

Given that a central pedagogical foundation in the W2B model is predicated upon equity, our next theme queried how the W2B model attempts to create "equity" as a firm pedagogical practice, but racial and class hierarchies are often maintained when facilitators who have completed the W2B training avoid examining the ethical obligations they have towards students. I thought about whether the demographic of students in W2B classrooms reflected the pedagogical premise of the training. I questioned – who is left out of this process and what is the response to that exclusion, especially when racism and discrimination show up in classrooms inside and outside prison walls? My asking of these questions reflected my deep thinking about how facilitators can become more active in their teaching and learning; for example, how can they involve post-incarcerated students with projects and/or support the creation of W2B collectives?

Over the past 10 years, W2B has had much to celebrate. I reflected on the final theme guiding our collaborative process which queries what the vision for the next 10 years of W2B could look like. This question prompted me to think about who we bring into the classroom, and how the pedagogical decisions that we make are umbilically tied to our social histories. I thought about how distinct histories of colonialism for Indigenous Peoples and slavery for Black Peoples impact teaching and learning, and how Indigenous resurgence and Land Back inform Indigenous futurities. In thinking about solidarity, I also thought about how the movement-building of Black Lives Matter informs this work. This work and collaboration are not without challenges and even discontent, but we choose to embrace the challenges

as foundational learnings for transformative social justice change. Where we see this work going in the future is also connected to strengthening and informing race relations with other racialized and marginalized groups.

The discussions in the breakout rooms were intense, and this process entailed me taking a step back to reflect on the impact of white supremacy on my childhood to adulthood. From the conversations I facilitated in the breakout room, it was evident I was not the only one engaging in this line of critical self-examination, and it was a reminder that if these conversations come up here, what might they look like for incarcerated people and for facilitators teaching W2B course in the community.

Although we created a workshop outline to guide our process, we realized that much of the conversations might organically unfold and we might end the symposium with more questions than answers. We were comfortable with this realization and tried to use it as a guide to bring about impactful conversations about the future of W2B. We were mindful that this was also a space that encouraged embodied learning and that sometimes the most compelling, pivotal learning occurs when we go off the agenda.

To deep dive further into this discussion, we look at how the materiality of our collaborative process is reflected via the interplay of personal experience and collective movement-building. This ontological and perhaps even investigative expression highlights how the evolution of W2B is relational to Indigenous and Black solidarities on a personal, national, and global scale.

MY THOUGHTS: INSIGHTS FROM MELISSA ALEXANDER

I have been part of Walls to Bridges for almost eight years. My connection with the program began while I was incarcerated in 2014, and I took my first course with Dr. Shoshana Pollack as part of a Master's of Social Work class called Diversity, Marginalization and Oppression*. From there, I ended up completing three more courses facilitated by instructors from Wilfrid Laurier University (Philosophy, Sociology and another Social Work Master's course called* Indigenous Women: Knowing, Seeing and Being*). I was able to take part of the alumni group (called the GVI Collective, who also have a piece in this issue of the Journal of Prisoners on Prison) where I*

not only helped to create something that would change the education system inside, but a program that I felt was needed. When I was released from Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVI) in 2017, I continued with the W2B Ontario Community-Based Collective.

Participating in the 10-year anniversary symposium for a program that changed my life was an immense honour. I often think back to where my journey with this program began and wonder if this was even real given the confinement and mental stress that incarceration causes. I am proud of myself for completing university courses inside prison walls, without prior university education. Here I am, eight years later doing decent work, co-facilitating workshops in different universities, and talking about the importance of post-secondary education in prisons and jails.

Collaborating and co-facilitating the 10th anniversary symposium was a great experience, but also a nerve-racking one because we were experiencing and continue to live through an unprecedented health pandemic that brought the world to a standstill. Although not deemed an essential worker, given that I am in the trades and am a peer-support worker, I worked through that chaotic period. The advent of Zoom technology allowed us to engage in the 10th anniversary planning process in a manner that furnished our creative process in an equitable way where we were still able to share our ideas collaboratively, even though we were working remotely. I was proud to be part of this process, especially the creation of the last session where we grappled with the current racial reckoning that seemed to wake the world up to anti-Black racism. I wanted to bring up a question without offending our audience. I remember it like it was yesterday because, while many folks in the United States were mourning the murder of George Floyd who was killed by a white police officer and the Black Lives Matter movement was galvanized, members of Indigenous communities in Canada felt the Canadian government had not fulfilled many of the recommendations outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There was a question as to whether we should discuss this tension as part of the symposium, but I spoke up and said that "It needed to happen, it's time", since I felt there was too much stigma, misunderstanding and unspoken racism fueled by white supremacy among Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities.

Some incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people may not have thought of going to college or university because they felt we were not intelligent

enough, and the system of incarceration is designed to disempower and break the human spirit. I have witnessed women inside GVI who are Indigenous, Black, and racialized who do not think they have the brain power to participate in higher education. To be honest, I was one of them. I remember going to college and I could not focus because I had this mindset that I am not good enough. As much as it is a very sensitive subject, I want my peers to know that it is not easy to just get up and get an education. There are financial issues that can be roadblocks to starting a program; there are mental, emotional, and spiritual challenges that can be present; and, in comparison to white people, there is not much support for Black people who are incarcerated. I am happy I was able to participate in this planning process, and that as a team we collaborated to come up with a workshop that brought critical issues to the table, and that we could create a space where other often marginalized voices could share their thoughts as well.

Now that the 10th anniversary symposium has ended, what are the next steps moving forward? I honestly hope that this dialogue continues and that there will be many more discussions focusing on what I have discussed here, and that W2B will play a key role in addressing some of the challenges that we discussed in the symposium, including the root of carceral systems of control.

Carceral systems of control (Salah-Hanna, 2008) are steeped in paternalism and work to produce othered docile bodies (Foucault, 1977). The evolution of W2B can challenge the euro-educational status quo and the commodification of knower and *knowledge keeper*. To that end, we are reminded that lived experience *is* transformative knowledge.

PART OF THE ROUND: INSIGHTS FROM DENISE EDWARDS

As a member of W2B for many years, at times I am a bit hesitant to speak about the risks and benefits of the lasting effects of 'traditional' education on marginalized people, namely, women. Black and Indigenous people are overrepresented in carceral spaces, and given that this is a systemic issue, it is not by accident that Indigenous, Black, and racialized people experience a life of precariousness. As a Black woman, not only am I a member of the W2B Ontario Community-Based Collective, my myriad experiences and intersecting identities include years of carceral confinement.

Three themes personally struck me as key factors in the process of planning and organizing this specific workshop. These themes remained with me from the beginning through to the finished product, and they proved pivotal to my reflection of the synchronicity of conceptualizing the concepts of we and me. The workshop confirmed the need for: 1) community wealth; 2) collectivity and individualism operating together for the common good; and 3) the removal of oppressive systematic structures focused on Anglo-Euro, patriarchal, and gendered dynamics of categorical groupings of 'othering'.

The group worked in unison, which produced the bedrock of community wealth. Prior to confirming the audience participants, I anticipated people would come from different backgrounds and phenotypes, and we would be vigilant to the socially constructed power dynamics that are often a significant factor in planning processes. In order to begin thinking about how to share and hold space for this conversation, I pre-planned that I wanted to address the viscerally heavy topic of incarceration, rather than sidestep or superficially minimize the issue. When pondering deeply about the upcoming workshop, I wanted to make certain my personal experience was heard by letting people know there is no glorification in carceral spaces. For outsiders not privy to a lived-experience (or what Correctional Service of Canada refers to as 'prosocial' citizens), I wanted to articulate that each life, in every space, is integral and positively essential to the whole process.

When the planning began, I found myself connected with a group of eclectic and open-minded, critical yet practical, individuals willing to share themselves with the implicit purpose of collectivity and individuality. This was very important because as we introduced ourselves, though most of us had already interacted in some capacity or the other, there was an instant revealing and accepting of each member's individual contribution. Space was given for each person to be their true selves without judgement and, in doing so, colonial hegemonic stratification did not play a factor in our planning. As I was given the opportunity to be a part of the group planning the workshop, I experienced feelings of anxiety and exhilaration because of the learning, unlearning, and relearning that pedagogically prepared me to focus on my own agency within the assemblage. It was a given that each member was the holder of authentic knowledge and eager to contribute to the whole process. In the end, coming together and pursuing meaningful engagement on a variety of issues unified different perspectives for the purpose of what we originally set out to collectively complete.

The heart of completing such a project is evident by showing how, when going counter clockwise to colonial systemic constructions, more is brought to the table. The thinking processes which came out of the project were done in such a way where the targeted audience is included in the process, ushering in a theoretically grounded and practical sense of inclusion. This is done using modes of operation that do not model European, patriarchal notions of identifying a teacher as expert and so-called student as receiver. In this space, we modeled both student and teacher as reciprocal teachers and learners. We modeled the project to mirror Indigenous teachings that demonstrate circle learning as pivotal to equitable processes of inclusion where every voice wishing to come to the round is valid. We used the circle and experiential method of pedagogy to pay respect to Indigenous learnings and to underscore the pathway of inclusivity, diversity, and equity as a cornerstone of the way we see the work of W2B evolving.

The final outcome of Indigenous circle learning teachings that we harboured was fluid in its delivery with very progressive views, which brought me to ponder: how can community wealth be attained organically rather than structurally? Further, to question when, or if, the West will envision a world balanced by uniting the collective and individual concurrently? And finally, when will the powerful hegemonic order employ, or at least consider, that another world is possible with the instruction of non-traditional educational methodology that relies less on the on the banking model of education that Freire (1970) talked about and more on fostering learning, unlearning, and relearning in a holistic manner?

Developing and presenting workshop content allows me to deeply and personally unpack self-reflective layers that I would normally keep to myself. Writing this personal reflection underscored the importance of building connections and roles to communities, along with increasing our level of commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and solidarity. In the case of W2B at this significant juncture, during my early days as a collective member, I questioned the level of my personal commitment and how it impacted the collective. When I embarked on my own work of self-reflection, it was revealed to me that I lacked a degree of articulating my concerns. I had ambitions and pursuits for W2B that included curating the writings and artwork of women who were incarcerated, while also working to find a way to disseminate those authentic voices either by print or video.

While on parole, I entered one of Canada's most prestigious universities and earned an undergraduate degree in Caribbean, African, and Equity Studies. This achievement of learning, unlearning, relearning, and engaging with so many different people impacted my sense of self and the contributions that I brought to the symposium planning process. During the final planning session, I remembered how courageous I had been to begin and successfully complete my university degree, and I thought about how the system of incarceration – designed to break and dehumanize souls – would never have bet on me to succeed. In this planning process, I threw caution to my community comrades and bore a tiny piece of my individual soul. The interplay of my personal journey and this collective planning process highlighted for me a critical question: when will W2B accelerate pedagogical praxis where the best of the least-likely of society's invisible population hold space with the challenging opportunity to bring our missing pieces of the puzzle to that roundtable, and who will take up the challenge?

In Solidarity.

BLACK FUTURITIES – THE CLASSROOM AS AN ANTI-COLONIAL HEALING SPACE: INSIGHTS FROM RAI REECE

*On September 15th, 2021, the first day of one of my virtual Zoom classes, I was called a "fucking n***er" – twice. At that moment, my immediate thought was for my students. There are Black, Indigenous, and racialized students in my class. How do I protect them? How do I continue to cultivate care in the face of such grotesque violence? I swallowed my pain in that moment not because I wanted to, but rather because I had to. For the 16-plus years (including four as a teaching assistant during graduate school) that I have been in post-secondary classrooms, this was the first time I had experienced this level of vitriol in an academic space. It is never a matter of 'if' racism will show up, rather it is a matter of 'when' it will show up and in what form. On that day, I was bruised, but not broken. However, this act of violence was a sobering reminder that every single time a Black, Indigenous, or racialized faculty member or student enters a classroom – whether virtual or in-person – there is a risk. When other intersecting identities are evident, every time a sick, disabled or crippled, trans or queer body enters a*

classroom there is a risk, and when that body is raced, the risk is magnified. There are no spaces where the dynamics of racial configurations, grounded in historical colonial racist tropes, are never not *emphasized in our contemporary social environment including academic spaces. As a Black woman, I am keenly aware of the way in which misogynoir is always present. My melanated skin is marked by historical stereotypical racist tropes that label me an "angry Black woman", "difficult" or "aggressive". When acts of anti-Black racism happen in classroom spaces, these are not isolated, one-off occurrences. These acts are not innocuous and disconnected from our wider society that continues to bear the markings and makings of structural racism and oppression. We continue to witness the manifestation of white supremacy weaponized against bodies like mine that are devalued and deemed inferior and threatening. Remember, I am not even supposed to be here. My Blackness was not supposed to move in and through academic spaces, because historically these spaces were not created or designed for people that look like me.*

This painful experience was a sobering reminder that when challenged by the resistance of Indigenous, Black, and racialized folx who continue to mobilize and organize against anti-Black racism, we cannot guarantee a safe space in the classroom. Rather we must work to cultivate brave spaces where students and faculty are protected, and where the destruction of white supremacy is institutionally named and actioned against in a way that does not put the burden of protection on those who have been victimized.

For years, my academic work studying the phenomenon of racism has theoretically and methodologically grounded me in an intellectual understanding of the manifestations and iterations of racial oppression. Although there is no singular Black woman's story, Black Canadian feminist thinkers – namely Njoki Nathani Wane, Notisha Massaquoi, Charmaine C. Williams, and Roberta K. Timothy – and Black American feminist thinkers such as Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, and Dorothy Roberts, have articulated the advantageous position that Black women occupy in society because our marginality allows us a particular lens through which to criticize structural oppression bolstered by dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony, as well as to envision and create counter-hegemonies (hooks, 1984, p. 16). It is within the creation of these counter-hegemonies that there is a call for anti-racist and anti-colonial pedagogy in classrooms to be a centred ontological practice, and this practice must be active, not just

in theory alone. In collaborating on the planning of the symposium with Lorraine, Melissa, Denise, and Hayden, I drew on the painful memory of the racial violence that I had experienced a few months prior. More specifically, as a Black woman collaborating with other Black women on brainstorming and developing ideas for this symposium, although our social histories were different, there was a sense of camaraderie when discussing the issue of racism. We were able to speak freely and poignantly about racial dynamics inside and outside of prison walls without the looming white gaze that sometimes curtails or seeks to manage our voices. Where I had to manage my pain on that day, in this space I did not have to do that.

Although Lorraine, Melissa, and Denise, shared a history of incarceration, there was still noted difference in their experiences. That was an important factor when we discussed how to debunk the myth that there is one singular understanding of Blackness or Black women's narrative, and how an anti-colonial framework can provide the blueprint for examining nuances of Blackness and Black identity inside carceral classroom spaces and, in turn, how that gets taken up by W2B inside and outside participants.

As educators we must model that which we want to see exemplified in our students, but as racialized educators there is no safety net protecting us from racial violence in the classroom. In collaborating with Lorraine, Melissa, and Denise, we asked this latter question – how do we enter into conversations about critical pedagogy that are transformative and liberatory in an effort to having challenging conversations about inter/intra-racial dynamics, white privilege, and white supremacy? If we are to create liberatory classrooms both inside and outside of carceral spaces, we must create room for the most marginal and disenfranchised to speak and teach (by their own definition), and for folx to listen and learn, and then listen some more. White people both inside and outside of carceral spaces must do the work of divesting from unearned racial privilege, even within prison walls where there is a presumption that all *women are equally oppressed due to state confinement. I know this not to be true given the racial dynamics and occurrences of racism that Black women who are incarcerated speak about, and this has been an issue present in W2B classrooms inside prison walls, where Black women have felt silenced and invisibilized. Having taken the W2B instructor course, I have witnessed the erasure of an opportunity to have discussions about the way in which racism shows up in W2B trainings. It shows up*

among white outside participants who, when pressed about white privilege, are uncomfortable having the conversation, perhaps thinking that the construction of 'race' has no place in a training where the premise is that all are equal learners – but equal learners does not mean that inequitable processes cannot be present. It also shows up among inside participants who employ the W2B teachings in the W2B classroom, but not in their inter-relations with each other when in the general prison – a complexity bolstered by a system of oppression designed to pit others against each other, and by a lack of anti-racism, anti-colonial education both inside and outside prison walls.

To have conversations that recognize the many ways in which racial dynamics are magnified in spaces of confinement, we have to enter into a willingness to have conversations that are uncomfortable and self-reflective. We have to be mindful of whose bodies – Indigenous, Black, and racialized – are the most vulnerable in classroom spaces, whose jobs are the most precarious, and whose lives are most at risk.

My teaching pedagogy is grounded in the belief that education can serve as a catalyzing agent for dismantling the insidious nature of racism and the ways in which it permeates our environments. As such, a new philosophy of education is imperative. This new philosophy ought to be one in which multiply-marginalized groups engage as critical teachers, learners, and healers by centering their stories as critical pedagogical practice. The guiding theory for this work is our lived experience; it need not be legitimized by the academic canon to be relevant. Having taken the W2B five-day intensive training inside the only federal prison for women in Ontario, my evolution as a learner and educator has been strengthened by a deep appreciation for the multiple ways in which transformative liberatory education can be an activist endeavour.

As noted in our planning sessions for the symposium, "people bring their areas of knowledge to W2B". As a racialized woman, I continually strive to overcome blatant and covert instances of racism, classism, and gender oppression. Conversely, as a member of the academy, I experience the 'negotiated-privilege' of post-secondary education. Class and ability variables converge when as an academic I can relatively easily obtain access to knowledge, and I have some semblance of 'academic freedom', yet the intersectional oppression of race and gender make this access and 'academic freedom' sometimes contested and fearful. When collaborating

with racialized women with lived experience of incarceration and alumni of W2B classes, the planning of this symposium gave rise to questions about various dimensions of power, class, and the ways in which knowledge can be prioritized and legitimated. Spaces are always contested. Therefore, although I shared a commonality regarding racialization with Lorraine, Melissa, and Denise, our experiences of racialization varied, given our social histories and the respective spaces we occupy in our everyday lives. My previous activist work with the Prisoner's Justice Action Committee (a community-based activist group that operated from 2003 to 2006), my past experience working frontline with HIV+ incarcerated women, and my dissertation research where I conducted interviews with federally sentenced Black women had acclimatized me to some of the salient issues that abound when working with racialized, gendered, and marginalized populations. Both Hayden and I were viscerally aware that this was a collaborative planning process and even though as an honorary W2B Collective Member, I have known all three of these women for years, I was still mindfully aware of the importance of privileging their voices as leaders in the planning of the symposium. Even in the initial writing of this piece, Hayden and I discussed the importance of foregrounding their voices and having ours take up less space.

When I position myself as a racialized educator and learner, I see the significance and importance of working within and across differences – I note the risk that I may experience, and sometimes I even feel the risk, but I choose to push forward in an effort to foster liberatory education for myself and my students. I also note the risk for those who have been marginalized through gender and racial oppression. For Lorraine, Melissa, and Denise, there is risk for them as well. The courage to speak your truth amidst the continual social stigma of being previously incarcerated and being a Black woman comes at a risk for them too. This awareness not only speaks to the complexity of collaborating with formerly incarcerated folx but it calls for a racially-gendered analysis when engaging in participatory collaborative work. Further, this awareness also informs the pedagogical and epistemological ways in which I strive to be self-reflective and critically mindful of the components of my teaching that can provide a container for a capacity-building framework for collaborative learning.

As an honorary W2B Collective Member, I think about how to support collaborative coalition-building in classroom spaces whether inside or

outside prison walls. I want to dream big bountiful Black futurities that ask difficult questions with love and hold space for working through tensions with care. I am always mindful of the presence of white supremacy in classrooms because the continuum of structural racial, gender, sexual, classist, and ableist oppression never disappears, it just shows up in different, sometimes covert, iterations. I want us to remember that homophobia, transphobia, and Islamophobia can also be individually and collectively internalized, and that white adjacency is a colonial elixir that has been carefully crafted and weaponized against racialized communities pitting us against each other. We see evidence of this when other racialized groups participate in anti-Black racism, and by gratuitous acts of violence that targeted Asian communities at the onset of the COVID-19 and the continued racial pandemic within this health pandemic.

Lastly, visioning Black futurities is one of the ways in which W2B can continue to evolve our work. Black futurities motivate my pedagogy regarding anti-carcerality and abolition because it creates a space for me to teach and research about punishment processes in relation to anti-Black racism, class, gender, sexuality, critical Mad, Deaf and Disabled studies, and other intersecting identities. It allows me to examine the historical resonance of how white supremacy informs contemporary carceral logics, and particularly how the "shadow carceral state" – state agencies such as child welfare, and immigration and detention – use carceral logics in the surveillance of Black mothers, and the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous and Black people.

Both inside and outside classroom spaces, evolving our work begins from the premise of meeting people where they are at. It means being able to sit with others in their pain and acknowledge racial trauma that you may have inflicted (intentionally or not), and to be accountable for that pain. Evolving our work means grappling with the tensions, discomforts, erasures, and invisibilizing that often happens when "race talk" gets centered. And evolving our work means that what we say is just as important as what we do not say – silence about racism, is racial violence. Let us journey and dream Black futurities, with the simultaneous recognition that much of the work that Black folx both inside and outside of the academy have been doing amidst social and actual constraints, is revolutionary and liberatory – and this is the evolution of our work.

CONCLUSION

Following the W2B's *Evolving Our Work* symposium, the five of us were asked to write about the experience and share our collaborative approach and learnings. We have done that to a great extent here (though we have spared the mundane details of Zoom calls, email coordination, and document management). But in the process of sharing, something else emerged in this article – reflections on entanglements with incarceration and education more generally. Interestingly, these reflections amid the two seemingly monolithic institutions (featured in each of our lives to varying degrees) bore similarities, in particular the themes of racism and hierarchies of power.

W2B has much to celebrate after ten years, as Lorraine points out in the beginning of this article. From the fraught relationship building with prisons and jails, the expansion of training and recruitment of facilitators, the establishment of W2B supportive collectives, mentorship and leadership opportunities, and the equity focused participatory pedagogy – these are accomplishments that can and should continue to be built on as W2B evolves our work. And, yet, there are those lingering challenges. Facilitators tend to be overwhelmingly white, and since they are in positions of power, the reproduction of a brand of white supremacy potentially looms. Indeed, despite the W2B pedagogy, there is still a clear binary present in many classrooms between facilitator and student, resulting in teaching and learning in one-way directional processes. Finally, as Denise alludes to, there is a tendency to "glorify" carceral spaces, which can further imbue saviour elements in the classroom. This all must be discussed and accounted for among the future cohorts of facilitators. As Melissa writes about the need for this conversation, "it's time".

All of this appears in our article, as it did in preparation for the symposium itself (with no lack of anxiety about how our comments and questions would be received by participants). We asked how the representation of students is reflected in the pedagogy, what are the ethical obligations of facilitators, and how does racism and discrimination show up in classrooms, inside and outside? We hoped to challenge symposium participants to address concerns that have lingered among W2B collectives and individuals for years. While we did not intend to answer these and other questions definitively, we sought to open these conversations and keep

them open. And as we begin addressing these issues of power, it is our hope that movement leads to answering questions that lingered with us all following the symposium. For example, how do we model Indigenous and Black solidarity beyond the superficial? We have tried to do some of that work ourselves throughout this collaborative process, to push us beyond re-producing the variety of oppressions that appear in W2B spaces – to the extent that is possible – and towards abolition of those structures, attitudes, and institutions. Transformative justice, then, becomes the cornerstone of evolving our work and moving towards a tangible liberation within and, more importantly, outside of the classroom.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Melissa Alexander was incarcerated at Grand Valley Institution for Women from 2011 to 2017. While incarcerated, she took four W2B classes and was a member of the GVI W2B collective. After release, she became involved in the Ontario W2B Community Based Collective, which designs and facilitates workshops on W2B's pedagogy. She is an advocate for women's access to education and employment. She is currently in a carpenter's union working as a floor covering installer apprentice for Local 27 and an accountability coach for Building Up, a program that supports youth and adults who experience barriers getting into the trades. Melissa is also a peer support worker for youth and adults in underprivileged neighbourhoods.

Denise Edwards – I love many things, but especially travelling. One of my many quests led me to experience the carceral space of a federal prison institution in Canada. Four out of a ten-year stint led me to self-reflect, learn and most of all, grow not as an individual but in a community. Walls to Bridges allowed me that opportunity.

Hayden King is Anishinaabe from Beausoleil First Nation on Gchi'mnissing in Huronia, Ontario. He is the executive director of Yellowhead Institute, an Indigenous-led research centre focused on issues of law and policy, including criminal law, justice, abolition, and Black-Indigenous solidarity. Hayden advises the Faculty of Arts on Indigenous education and is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University). Motivated by his family's experiences with incarceration, Hayden participated in the Walls to Bridges Instructor Training program in June 2019 and since then has been working to establish education initiatives for Indigenous people inside.

Lorraine Pinnock is an advocate and a supporter of folks transitioning from the criminal injustice system to healthy communities. After spending nearly five years under correctional institution surveillance, she believes that providing disadvantaged people with some form of higher education and academic development can radically ensure one's success in breaking the revolving door trap of admission, discharge, and re-admission of incarceration. She is an alumni and co-founder of the Walls to Bridges Collective, based in Kitchener, Ontario. She counts spending time with her family and pets, running, traveling, and soup-tasting among her myriad interests.

Rai Reece (she/her) is an interdisciplinary scholar-abolitionist whose work broadly examines how carceral logics are relationally organized by racial capitalism and white supremacy. Her work specifically examines the intersection of punishment/criminalization and misogynoir in a Canadian context. In 2016, she participated in the Walls to Bridges Instructor Training program to further ground her work in the critical importance of examining the connection between abolition, community-based collaboration, experience, and self-reflection. Since then, she provides anti-racist training during the annual W2B Instructor training course held at Grand Valley Institution and helped train the alumni collective at GVI in facilitation skills. Rai is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University).