

Trickster Teaches: Doing Means Being Done To

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This speak out today is based on a collection of experiences throughout my life as a faculty member in different institutions across time and space.

As a Metis Traditionalist
Feminist, mother, healer, scholar, activist,
I Desire to bring Together my Life and Work
Within a Eurocentric, Patriarchal, University context.

My work is highly Contradictory,
Very personal
And Ultimately political.
It is in these Contradictions that I Exist
On an Hourly, Daily, Monthly, Yearly basis.
These contradictions inform my Voice,
My "First Voice" (Graveline 1998)
The Voice of experience I use Today.
I call upon the Power of Trickster,
The Transformer to Assist me
To Help me represent the Power of learning through Reversal
Through "inside-out" lessons.
Trickster tales Show us Multiple, Competing
Reflections of our Selves.
Not as a Mirror
In images that Unbalance, Reorient
Reveal Ordinary events in New ways.
Trickster gives Courage
To Examine
Uninvited, Uncomfortable
Threatening, Confusing Moments
As they Erupt in My life
In Our workspaces.
Dr. Battiste reminds us
"Contradiction and incoherence are inevitable and indispensable to successful transformation" (Battiste and Barman 1995, xiv).
Trickster teaches:
Backlash is also Inevitable
When creating Change.
Backlash:
The action Taken

By the Challenged ones
Those in Authority.
Backlash occurs
Continuously, Dialectically
In-relation to Any form of Transformation
Attempted or enacted in Any context
Including the University context.

I begin with Backlash
Experienced through my Expressed Identity
My Use of FIRST VOICE (Graveline 1998).
My Voice of Experience
Spoken to Inform, Inspire
In my classroom, in university politics.

We, the Too Few in number,
Are Charged with the Mission
To create Change
In Eurocentric patriarchal universities.
We are Held Continuously Responsible
For curriculum development
On Difference and Diversity.
We present our Stories and our Selves
Make efforts to address Issues
Gender, Race, Class, Sexual Orientation.

A Pain-full Reality
Retelling my experience
Means Reliving it.
Listening to other's experience
Means remembering my own Similar ones.
Speaking in First Voice
Works to position me
In highly contradictory Relations
Of Visibility and Appropriation.
Trickster asks:
How do I take the Risk to Speak
When I know Not
How Or by Whom
My words will be Taken?

The university Context is Not a "Safe Place"
To Challenge sexism, racism, homophobia
Or any other form of Oppression.
A Vulnerable position.
Efforts to Educate
Result in Denial, Minimising

Incomprehension, Overt Backlash
From Students And Administration.

Anger, Dismay, Defensiveness
Grinning and eye-rolling
All are Visible in Posturing.
Body language Shows Minds Closed
In a context where "Rational" Explanation is Expected
For All that one gives voice to.
Verbalising my Theoretical understandings
My Pain-full experiences
To a Disbelieving, Disengaged Audience
Can be Tiresome, Discomforting, Dangerous.
I can Expect My knowledge and contributions to discussions
Will be Undermined.

Achieving Comfort addressing Issues
In the face of students and colleagues'
Well-developed Denial is a Perilous journey.
Anticipation of, Recovery from
Occasions of outright harassment is Ongoing.
I agree with Weir,
"[W]hen the classroom becomes a site of anti-racist political struggle, the racism present
massively among white people will be spoken" (1991, 24).

Finding and Using my First Voice
Both Empowering and Oppressive.
Freedom to Voice is Always mediated
By Existing power relations.
To gain Empowerment through my Voice
Requires actually Being Heard,
Validation, Support, Recognition, Community.
Is this Possible in a White-dominated
Patriarchal institutional context?

I have received Backlash
From bringing Aboriginal TRADITION
Into the University context.
Trickster Teaches:
Aboriginal Tradition Adapted in the university Context
Can become a Negative, Hurtful thing.
Sarah, an Aboriginal Elder narrates Her/Our experience
When Talking Circle was Used in a political forum
Within the university context.
I quote her:

After the Circle was held one of the teachers or administrators made the comment that she felt that the students were coerced into saying what they did say. And I was so hurt! I was really, really hurt

over that. And I felt maybe we shouldn't be doing this here. They don't understand. They don't understand. They shouldn't even be in the Circle. This is something that belongs to our culture and I look at it with respect and so do all you people here. And I'd like the dominant society to learn from this. But I don't want them to exploit it or do damage to it, or make fun of it. That's my biggest fear. (4 second pause.) (Graveline 1998, 246)

What Specifically concerned the Elder and Others
Is the Backlash received by Aboriginal and Black participants
Who did Heartfully Speak Out in that Circle.
Our Acculturation to Circle Talk norms
Our Lived Experiences of racial Harassment
Produced clear and compelling Narratives.
These stories Heard by Ears
Open to "Accusations" but Closed to "Lessons"
Continue to Impact on All our lives, even Today.
Some lost Jobs, Degrees
Self confidence, Voice
Sense of humor, Community-mindedness.
Trickster teaches:
If Some members of a Circle hold Power Over others
And are Known to enact it
Risks are Too High.
Care Must be taken to Avoid placing ourselves
In Vulnerable positions by Sharing Too "Personal" information.
Some desire our Silence.
Some are Shocked, Afraid of the Stories
Deny our Pain, our Resistance.
Some Project Their Fear as Our Negativity.
Beware of Listeners who use "Personal" information as Data
To Defend the institutional Status Quo.
The power of Voice in Talking Circle
Can be used Against the "Heart-full", "Truth-full" speaker.
This experience of Backlash
Challenges me to be Cautious in Adapting Talking Circle
As a Forum for taking up Community issues in non-Native settings.
I have learned to Fear people's Fear
Fear of the New, Fear of the Unknown.
Fear Strips my academic Freedom.
Traditional tools Teach Lessons Stronger than Words.
Because of Backlash I have learned
To Fear people's Negative Reactions
To Smudge, Circle, Talking Circle.
I Courageously continue to Enforce my Right to Practice
Traditional pedagogies on These, Our Lands.
I Know, Live, Fear
Persecution for our Spiritual practices Continues today.

As an ACTIVIST,
 I take the Risk to Teach
 In ways that Disrupt people's view of Reality.
 I use Aboriginal pedagogies and Critical theories Combined
 To Resist Dominant forms of teaching and learning.
 Students are Challenged to Examine
 Something which They have Internalised as Part of Self
 From which They have benefited.
 Trickster teaches:
 Embrace Resistance as a Healthy Reaction.
 Not Every One is Willing to undertake Transformative work.
 Many innately Resist Changes To Known Reality.
 Can those experiencing Privilege be Expected
 To be Seriously Invested in Unveiling
 Internal and External forms of Domination?

Beware!
 Students do Project Their feelings -
 Anger, Guilt, Fear -
 Upon Me, Perceived Instigator of Their Discomfort.
 My experience of Backlash
 Resonates with Culley's description of Feminist pedagogy:
 "If she initiates a process challenging the world-view and the view of self, of her students, she will surely
 - if she is doing her job - become the object of some students' unexamined anger" (1985, 213).

Trickster teaches:
 Critically Reflect on the construct of "Comfort."
 How Far are We prepared to Go
 To Ensure our Own Comfort?
 Or the Comfort of those around Us?
 To Whose comfort level are we Consciously/Unconsciously
 Trying to Adapt?
 Confronting Racism, Sexism, Classism, Homophobia
 Creates Uncomfortable feelings for Some.
 What about the Uncomfortable feelings for Others
 Who are targeted Daily for Being
 Who We Are?

My Elders Teach:
 Offer a learning Opportunity
 Learner Must take Responsibility for Lessons
 Applied to him or her.
 Trickster teaches:
 If I take Responsibility for participants' Feelings/acts of Resistance
 This Solidifies Them as "Personal."
 Detracts from learning to Interrogate them
 Label them as Manifestations of Structural Reality.
 Paradoxically, When I address

Resistance of students
In a Direct and Honest way
Use it as a "Teachable Moment"
Anger, Guilt, More Resistance
Is often Produced.
The challenge is most frequently Taken
As Imposition of Authority of the "Teacher"
Not the Voice of the Oppressed Native woman
Calling into question the Tactics of the White privileged Oppressor.
New Awareness is definitely Produced
Each time I Risk to use my own Lived Experience
To Teach students And colleagues
How to "Know, See and Feel" Oppression.
Teaching potential of "Inside-out" lessons
Is Tremendous.

Trickster teaches:
Student Discomfort and Resistance
A Critical Political issue Today.
Massive implications for Academic Freedom.
Institutions are Increasingly Driven by market Demands.
Commodified learning.
Satisfy the "Customer"/student.
When students are Uncomfortable/Dissatisfied
Because they are Challenged to Critically See
What they have been Conditioned to Ignore
My Livelihood is Challenged.
Students Projecting Fear and Anger
Consistently are part of Every work environment.
When Administration Decides
Personal assassination is Required
To Deflect political Heat.
Dissatisfied students are recruited.
Given Voice, Given Power Over My Life.
My Academic "Freedom" is Conditional.
Satisfaction of Every student in Every class I Teach is Required.

Through my First Voice
my Traditionalism
my Activism
I Have Experienced
Ongoing Backlash.

Backlash wears many Masks including:
Personal slurs
On one occasion I was Yelled at
By an angry male student

Name-called across my classroom
 Slurred
 When I attempted to complain about Him
 To the Director
 I found he had complained about Me.
 I was told I should examine My "teaching style".

Threatening phone calls
 Including harassment by *Frank Magazine*.

Anonymous hate-filled notes
 On my office door
 In my campus mail
 In my home mail
 On my email.

Withholding Necessary Information
 By peers and administration
 About changes in deadlines, meeting dates, times and places.

5 Page memos
 Outlining my Wrongs, using:
 "Anonymous" written course evaluations
 Conversations Solicited from students in Hallways about content
 And Their personal satisfaction / dissatisfaction with Me.

"Chats" with the Dean/Director about:
 My "inappropriate" family relations
 My "non-collegial" behaviour
 in mentioning blatant harassment.
 The "narrowness" of my research
 race relations, equity, native studies, feminism.
 The "misguided" focus of my "community work"
 actually in the Native or women's community
 instead of in the university "community".

Ongoing "Review" of my course outlines
 Even once approved.
 Interrogation for being:
 Too Native; too feminist
 One time for being too Lesbian
 When I included a case example using a lesbian couple wanting to adopt - a 30
 minute exercise in a 3 credit course.

Denial of research / travel funds
 Is cyclical and ongoing
 Related to All of the Above.

Overturing failed grades
 When students' work is incomplete and/or unsatisfactory.

Failing completed students
 Based on "new rules"
 Like "self-plagiarism".

These issues Escalate on their Own

Even when one Ignores them,
 Or tries to "Be Nice".
 They Quickly Become:
 Official reprimands
 Disciplinary meetings
 Withholding increments
 Non-renewal of contracts
 Bad references.
 Backlash has a Substantial Ongoing Impact
 On my Personal Life and my Professional Life.
 The Life of my Family.

Backlash
 Appears in the Guise of being Told:
 I "have an Attitude Problem"
 Am "Too angry All the time"
 I "Put a Negative spin on Everything"
 Am a "Trouble-maker"
 Am Paranoid.
 I have been Chastised for "Intimidating" others
 Told to be less "Accusatory"
 Warned to be More Collegial.
 Like Kahlia (1991) I am left Wondering
 "Is it me or is it them?"

Backlash is often experienced as "Personal"
 It is decisively Political
 Needs to be Acknowledged as a Critical issue.
 Taking Action no matter How Big or Small we are Aiming does have Risks.
 Creating change can pose Threats to others
 Brings a Counteraction to Our Selves.
 In my book *Circle Works* I story-tell
 About my Own experiences of Backlash:

There's been more effort put out towards stopping or resisting any form of activism... than there has been to aid or add any energy to that work. I've been a bit shocked by the backlash. Then I say to myself: what's shocking about that? There's nothing really shocking about backlash. It happens almost routinely when somebody tries to make a difference or make a change, and it certainly happened to me a lot of times before. (Graveline 1998, 271)

Backlash can cause us to Spiral into Hopelessness, Helplessness
 Fatalism.
 Leonard proposes and I agree
 Fatalism has been "culturally constructed to serve the dominant order of things" (1990, 3).
 My story illustrates the Spiral
 That Creates and Sustains the personal Costs of Activism:

"You think of it as a little piece when you first start taking it on, but then you get embroiled in the detail of what's going on with it, and you get emotionally hooked into what's going on, and then you

start taking personal responsibility for what's happening, and then your little bit that you thought you were going to take on all of a sudden becomes something personally part of your own psyche, or your own will. Part of what you feel you need to do. And then sometimes you get locked in and you can't really [en]vision how this is just a little bit, and how this little bit is just one more thing! And it's not really you, and it's not really the world, it's just one piece of the world that you're trying to change, and maybe it's not the end of the world. (Graveline 1998, 272)

Trickster teaches:

Deep Personal Commitment to Change has left me Open.

A Target for Backlash.

Personal assassination plays a Large role

De-activating political activism.

My "speak-out" is a Lesson story.

To help My Self and others learn to be Self-Preserving in our Activist efforts:

"We have to keep our vision strong for what it is that we start with, and who we are in it, because one of the things that happens often is that when you're involved in a struggle, when people want this struggle to end, or they don't want it brought forward, then sometimes they use personal assassination to stop it. So to not take that seriously, to take it as backlash, to take it as a political thing. It's hard to not feel personal when people are saying things about you, and to keep seeing it as part of the overall picture. (Graveline 1998, 272)

As a Survival Tactic we must Remember

Negative labelling has always been Produced

Escalated due to Resistance.

The Necessity for Dehumanising Us

Historically Arose out of the Need to Justify

Actions Taken by Colonial Powers.

To "maintain control in the face of Native resistance" (Blaut 1993, 26).

I Agree with Mohanty

For universities to continue to Conduct

"Business as Usual"

In the Face of the Overwhelming Challenges we are Posing

Conflicts must be Personalised and Psychologized.

"Problems" of Race and Difference are formulated

Into "narrow, interpersonal terms".

Historical and contextual Conflicts rewritten

As "manageable psychological ones" (Mohanty 1994, 157).

Erosion of "the politics of collectivity through reformulation of race and difference in individualistic terms" (Mohanty 1994, 160) is Ongoing.

I ask: What does it Take to Keep Going?

How do we Stay Motivated to want to Continue to make a Change?

How do we Sustain that struggling Force

In the midst of All the Things

That happen to Us in our Lives

To Exhaust Us, to keep Us Down

To keep our Minds Off our activist work?

Keep Focused on the Politics
Behind Personal Attacks.
One strategy for Survival.
Learn Backlash is very Real
Expect it as part of activism.
Essential to help de-personalise Attacks When they come.
Personal/Collective Survival strategies are learned
Shared in story, offered as condolences, given reciprocally
Among activists.
Even in the face of Backlash
We must remain Real, Visible, Part of Community.
Support others for change to Occur.
Community support helps us remain Strong
In our activism

Change Is Occurring
On a Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Yearly basis.
Not All change reflects an Inclusive agenda.
Forces of Hegemony Continuously Exert
A Power-full Erosion of Any All Movements
Towards social Change.
Learn our Trickster tales well. Be Open.
Learn lessons embedded in our Daily Encounters
With Systems, With People
Who Hold and Enact Power Over Us.

I have Learned to sustain my Spirit of Resistance
Engaging in Aboriginal Ceremony
Visioning.
We "Vision" to Transform that which Is.
To actively Create more Potent lives for our Selves/our Children.
Visioning
We can Tap into Strength
The Traditions of our Ancestors.
The Energy of Earth Mother.
Regain the power of Visioning
A strategy Essential to Survival in these Systems:

So many of us have so little opportunity to really get in touch with what our lifework is. What our real vision or our heart work is. What our connection to the Earth is. What our connection to our work is. Many of us end up working day in and day out, but haven't, or don't and can't and are unable to really take the time to vision. To take the time to, as we used to in Ancestral days, go out on the earth and spend time, maybe days, waiting to hear, waiting to find out, waiting for a message that would guide us and lead us into our future path. So that we could move forward in the future with a certain knowingness that we were on the right path. I think that one of the losses, through acculturation, that we have to seriously work to regain, is the power of vision! Is the power of visioning. To not get so caught up, and I do this myself, caught up, bogged down, oppressed, beat up, by everything that's going on in our day to day. (Graveline 1998, 280)

Visioning gives us Direction, Hope
 Power to Survive backlash
 Desire to live to Enact our Visions.

Ceremony Teaches:

We Will Continue to have the Strength Required
 To be Warriors.

Working with Others we will actualise our Visions
 Change Oppressive Systems.

I stand Strong on my Ancestors' belief in Personal Responsibility.

I recognise the Need for Everyone to Contribute what they are Able.

JoAnn Cardinal-Schubert Tells it:

"You have to realize and believe that one person can make a difference. I was brought up to believe that"
 (1992, 135).

So was I.

Let's stand Strong Together for Community Healing and World Change.

To All my Relations, Megwetch.

This speak out is based on a collection of experiences throughout my life as a faculty member in different institutions across time and space.

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