

Message From the TODOS President February 2023

Dear Colleagues,

In December I talked about calendars and the ways that calendars were recordings of the ways in which humans, in different parts of this place known as Mother Earth, lived with Mother Earth and noticed cycles.

While I think of calendars as a physical object I also acknowledge that another way of recording is through the oral tradition; telling and retelling of the relationships. This past week I was reminded by a Cree knowledge holder that the full moon in this month now called February is called the “Eagle Moon.” This is the ‘month’ that eagles mate in this territory.

The month now known as April is known as the “Frog Moon” for the Cree in the territory I live. This is the time when frog’s ‘wake up’ from their hibernation. The ‘calendar’ for the Cree was in relation to the ways in which their non-human kin lived with the cycles of Mother Earth.

This recognition of the diversity of ways that humans ‘record’ their experiences of the cycle of Mother Earth helps me to think about the ways language and ‘recordings’ are used to talk about humans themselves.

I know that language matters. I strive to identify problematic phrases and terms that I use in my living. I am a human that identifies as Indigenous and who is “unlearning colonialism.” This is hard; as I did not learn the first languages of my mother’s family as I grew up. My maternal great grandmother fluently spoke two Indigenous languages plus English and French, I did not have the chance to learn either of the Indigenous languages for a variety of colonial reasons. I had the chance to learn English and French. This is unsettling for me as the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit language speakers that I know remind me that language emerges from the interaction between the places (e.g. where humans were) and the humans themselves. One language speaker often mentions this as we talk about the diversity of Indigenous languages, for example, and that languages like English, French, and Spanish were ‘brought’ to this place now called North America. English, French, and Spanish were not Indigenous to this place called North America. So, in my schooling, I was colonized because I learned only English and French.

For example, a term that I am becoming very uncomfortable with these days is BIPOC. I am uncomfortable with it for a variety of reasons; but mostly I feel that it is another way to erase the diverse experiences of humans who are ‘of colour.’ I think that ‘of colour’ also implies that you are a colour that is ‘not white’. I am one of those diverse humans that are captured in the phrase. I wonder where did the term come from and was it coined by Black humans, Indigenous humans, and other humans ‘of colour’?

A second example that I live with was when I was wrestling with my role as a teacher. I recognized that I was also a learner in my classroom. Yet, the images that I had for students in my teacher education program, was that students were ‘empty cups.’ The image implied that I,

as a teacher, would 'fill their cup' with knowledge. I quickly learned that students had 'cups with knowledge,' and my 'knowledge was being shaped and changed' as I was teaching. I struggled in those years finding language to express that I was a learner just like each of my students were learners. If I continued to use the language of teacher and students then was I continuing to perpetuate the idea that students were empty cups? This question led me to wondering about the roots of educational structures and the structures that perpetuated this notion that students were empty cups.

I believe that the membership of TODOS: Mathematics for ALL are humans that are on the journey of "unlearning colonialism" and we are all humbly learning. TODOS' mission and goals are advocating for structures to support ALL humans in learning high quality mathematics. I believe that all humans have been colonized in some ways and I believe that one of the ways that humans can engage in "unlearning colonialism" is to ask the questions like "how did the structure come to be?" or "who coined phrases or terms that are broadly used?"

TODOS: Mathematics for ALL celebrates its 20th Anniversary this year. Language has changed in 20 years and the humans that are a part of this amazing organization are always learning. I invite you to commit to this journey of "unlearning colonialism" in mathematics education by questioning language you use in your practices and living as a human of this earth.

Respectfully and in relation,

Florence Glanfield, President
TODOS: Mathematics for ALL