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Open Access **Indigenous Pedagogies Discussion**

Indigenizing the English Classroom

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Abstract: Given significantly increased awareness around the need to begin to incorporate Indigenous Ways of Being, Knowing and Doing into post-secondary pedagogy, this presentation seeks to build on the foundational approaches to unsettling the classroom and examine ways in which classrooms have been and could be "indigenized." Using Gaudry and Lorenz's (2018) framework on indigenizing as a three-stage process ("Indigenization as Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Decolonization" in *AlterNative*) and built around research on Indigenous pedagogies and experiential knowledge, this paper will also include examples of readings and in-class activities appropriate for writing and communications classrooms. A particular focus will be on differentiating indigenization from reconciliation, with a reminder of the difficulties of achieving true decolonization within current post-secondary institutions.

Keywords: Indigenous Ways of Being/Knowing/Doing, Indigenization, Classroom, Communication.

Introduction

Traditional Approaches to "Indigenous" Education

Before we begin to look at specifics, I wanted to give a (very) brief background on what "Indigenous" or Indigenized education is. Traditionally, Indigenous practical knowledge or education was not separate from notions of spiritual growth and these two concepts built "a deep responsibility [within the individual] to be a contributing member of society" (Holmes, 2014, p. 95). Transmission consisted of "intergenerational learning, experiential learning, learning through ceremony, [and] learning in Indigenous languages" (Madden, 2015, p. 7). "[These] knowledge systems were dynamic and adaptable…they were as complex and well-developed as scientific knowledge, while being locally rooted" (Coates, 2022, p. 1). It was cyclical and seasonal and based on specific community needs.

The characteristics of Indigenous learning as defined in 2007 by the Canadian Council of Learning in conjunction with the Aboriginal Learning and Knowledge Centre defines successful programs of Indigenous education as including "diverse learning styles defined in a holistic manner," is rooted in "place and culture," and takes a "transformative approach" embracing Indigenous knowledges and is supported by community" (Battiste, 2013, p. 176).

The key to education for specific nations was the relationship that those nations had with the land from which they evolved. It is understood that "places produce and teach particular ways of thinking about and being in the world" (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 9). Put another way, Indigenous knowledge is "a body of knowledge associated with long-term occupancy of a certain place" (Munroe et al., 2013, p. 321) or a defined traditional territory (Nathan Mathew, as quoted in Facing History and Ourselves, 2023, p. 3). Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) calls this "grounded normativity," which he defines as "the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and long-standing experiential knowledge that inform and structure [Indigenous] ethical engagements with the world and [Indigenous] relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (p. 13). This is why the residential school system, for example, was consciously pan-Indigenous, distinct from any sense of locality, as it was seen, was important in diminishing the children's connections to a singular Nation and a unique, traditional territory and way of being and knowing (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

So, there are a few massive challenges (or impossibilities) in discussing a singular "*Indigenous* education." To do so is to imply pan-indigeneity, the concept of grouping all Indigenous folks into one homogenous group, which speaks to a simplistic, colonial understanding of the complex and diverse civilizations that existed on this continent and evolved over millennia before contact with Europeans (Coates, 2022, p. 2).

For example, at Humber College, I hope that we eventually move away from terms such as "Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing" and move toward the more localized "Anishinaabe or Haudenosaunee ways of knowing, being and doing."

However, for the sake of this paper, I have attempted to find commonalities, though in remaining true to our locale, I've tried to focus on similarities in beliefs and actions among those Nations from the region we are in, specifically the Haudenosaunee and the various Anishinaabeg. It is important to ground decisions regarding Indigenous pedagogies and methodologies in those that are native to the area.

Also be very aware and wary of historicizing Indigeneity. While there has been an admittedly important resurgence in traditional ceremony and other culturally relevant traditions that were once banned and/or lost to time, Indigenous cultures were ones that were constantly progressing and adapting (even if not in ways evident to foreign eyes). The recent resurgence and reclamation of Indigenous cultures and practices should be seen not as a step back but as an attempt to shore up a damaged foundation: to establish a base upon which to build and to continue the organic growth and evolution that was disrupted by colonialism, settlement, loss of land and destruction of culture and language.

It is also important to differentiate Indigenous Knowledge (or Knowledges) from Traditional Knowledge (or Knowledges). Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge includes Traditional Knowledge (nature, oral tradition, knowledge keepers) but also consists of "unique aspects of the contemporary Indigenous condition" (Younging, 2018, p. 12)

What is Indigenizing? The Three-Part Spectrum of Indigenization

Adam Gaudry (Metis: Faculty of Native Studies, UofA) and Danielle Lorenz (Faculty of Education, UofA) (2018) developed the framework below in their paper "Indigenization as Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy."

The Three-Part Spectrum of Indigenization:

- Indigenous **Inclusion:** Increasing the number of Indigenous faculty, staff, and students; increasing content and visibility
- **Reconciliation** Indigenization – Institutional change: reshaping the relationship; reconciling Indigenous and European-derived knowledges
- **Decolonial** Indigenization: Transformative; a "wholesale overhaul"; Indigenous-run faculty/institution

As much as we'd like to think that we're not, we're still in the first stage. To help reinforce this, Palmater (2019) developed a "Brief List of Things that Reconciliation in Universities and Colleges is NOT" (see Table 1).

Table 1

A Brief List of Things that Reconciliation in Universities and Colleges Is NOT

1. Apologies 2. Land acknowledgements 3. Sr. Admin. and faculty attending powwows 4. Hanging Indigenous art 5. Changing building or street names 6. Partaking in cultural sensitivity training 7. Watching documentaries and reading books 8. Emails to Indigenous organizations asking what to do	9. Hiring more Indigenous faculty/staff 10. Having an elder open a conference 11. Giving Indigenous faculty awards 12. Inviting Indigenous faculty to sit on committees 13. Creating an Indigenous advisory committee 14. Social media activity on National Indigenous Day 15. Researching Indigenous peoples/issues 16. Inviting Indigenous folks to classrooms

Decolonization should be transformative. It should be deconstructive and truly altering. It should be uncomfortable. None of these things listed make us uncomfortable or are, on their own, transformative. This is all "Inclusion." It is important, but all of this is establishing a foundation to build upon. It's not the end.

Unsettling the Educator: What is Our Role in Indigenization?

Eve Tuck (Unangax̂ from UofT's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education-OISE) has noticed, with growing apprehension, "the ease with which the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 2). In a now well-cited paper, she, along with her co-researcher K. Wayne Yang, argues that "decolonization is not a metaphor" noting that "when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; [because] it recenters whiteness…extends innocence to the settler, and it entertains a settler future…[making] the easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization yet another form of settler appropriation" (p. 3).

UofT OISE's George Dei (Ghanaian) (2014) argues that "'decolonizing education' involves three central tenets–the ideas of multicentricity, Indigeneity, and Reflexivity" (p. 176). Multicentricity is to acknowledge multiple civilizations (decentering Eurocentrism). Indigeneity is about accepting Indigenous ways of knowing and being that are organic and central to place. Reflexivity is to bring self-reflection and interrogation into everything we do (Dei, 2014).

Applied in the classroom, a "decolonizing education" should be intersectional and teach and engage students [not only] in the discourses of colonialism [and] Indigeneity, [but also] anti-racism, social oppression, ableism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy" (Dei, 2014, p. 167). These approaches should ultimately provide spaces "where students can question their own positionalities, prior knowledge, biases, and taken-for-granted assumptions together with the ways that are implicated and/or affected by

colonial relations of power and privilege" (Styres, 2019, p. 33). Dei (2014) believes that educators can determine the instructional effectiveness of an inclusive, (unsettled) curriculum by asking and responding to key questions: Are students able to ask new and critical questions from what they are learning? How are students defining/articulating questions of ethics and social responsibility? How do students apply their learning in their classroom to their own communities? Are learners able to identify power relations and to deconstruct the curriculum? How do students place social justice, equity, fairness within their understanding of character and moral education? Essentially, centering an indigenized framework or (unsettled pedagogy) can and should actually help students to learn to think critically, which—at the very least—should be the primary desired learning outcome of English courses.

Notes on Inclusion in the Classroom: Articles and Approaches

Now that we have that out of the way and accepted where we are in the decolonial project, how can we create truly inclusive classrooms? Foundationally: all writing and communications professionals should be familiar with *Elements of Indigenous Style*, which has been adopted as a core text in Humber College's Professional Writing and Communications graduate certificate. Published in 2018 by Gregory Younging (former managing editor of Theytus Books), the text is an attempt to "indigenize" and counteract the ethnocentrism of Canadian publishing, specifically for writing by and about Indigenous Peoples. It's not a style guide in the traditional sense, but instead is designed to highlight the "Indigenous Voice." The guide outlines "22 Principles" (see Table 2).

Table 2

Guidelines from Elements of Indigenous Style (Younging, 2018)

1. The purpose of Indigenous style	2. The names of Indigenous Peoples
2. When Indigenous style and conventional styles disagree	13. Terms that should be capitalized
3. Indigenous Literatures and Can Lit.	14. Indigenous colloquial English
4. Recognizing Indigenous identity	15. Editing and publishing Indigenous trauma
5. Indigenous cultural property	16. English words of Indigenous origin
6. Collaboration	17. The Métis resistance
7. Elders	18. Inappropriate possessives
8. Working with Traditional Knowledge and Oral Traditions	19. Reusing cultural materials in archives or already in publication
9. The role of relationship and trust	20. Historical translations
10. Compensation	21. Indigenous language translation
11. Inappropriate terminology	22. Past tense

In my classroom, the vast majority (nearly all) of my readings come from Canadian magazines: *The Walrus, This Magazine, Maissoneuve,* and *Maclean's* account for most (*Tyee*, CBC, etc. are also consulted). I want writing that is relevant to our students. I used to approach WRIT 100 (an intro-level reading and writing course at Humber College) as an analysis of bad or biased writing (it was easy and fun to take down Margaret Wente and Jon Kay editorials), but then I switched to focusing on good, well-written, long form writing. It made analysis more nuanced but also more focused on what makes writing good. What does a well-argued claim look like? How can we recognize that? I also want to make sure that the writing is critical: that it engages in critical thinking.

I also have made the decision to not frame EDI process explicitly. I don't say, "okay, here's our EDI piece" or "now it's time for Indigenous inclusion!" My goal is to normalize these discussions. I want them to focus on the critical and analytical content of the writing instead of the reasoning behind why we are reading it, with the hope that in this way, the concept of equity, diversity and inclusion will be embedded in everything we do in the classroom.

Our students need to see themselves in the writers, not just the content. So, I don't always choose an article based purely on content but look at the writers too. I've had work by Fatima Syed on sexual harassment in the Canadian military, for example. Also, I always make sure to avoid tokenizing; I avoid questioning fundamental rights, like the right to exist. For example, in discussing transgender rights, I don't frame discussions on whether transgender folks should have equal rights. I focus on articles that explain current inequalities and explore ways to overcome them. For example, I like to use Ishani Nath's piece "Inequality Times Two: For Transgender Women, the Pay Gap is Even Wider" from *Maclean's,* that explores challenges trans women face in the workplace. Additionally, I introduce subjects that challenge the stereotypical—settler/euro/white-centered—notions of Canada. I very carefully brought in a piece by Robyn Maynard on the history of the Ku Klux Klan in Canada, for example. Once students read writers who are thinking critically about this culture, my idea is that this will help them do so as well.

Indigenous Pedagogies and Methodologies in Online Classrooms

First, it's important to note that digital spaces are essential in the lives of Indigenous folks: "79% of Indigenous people [said they] have used social media for activist purposes" (McLean, 2019, p. 94). The survey also noted that "Facebook is an important space for Indigenous families to share news and keep culture strong; remotely situated communities are using mobile technologies for diverse purposes, from digital activism to maintaining ties to family and country" (p. 94). Social media and digital spaces are important as a gathering spaces and became even more so during the pandemic, including becoming home to Powwows, Chief and Council meetings, language classes, and other community gatherings (speaking

from experience). The infrastructure built has continued to allow for accessibility.

Student Preferences

There were a growing number of studies on preferences for Indigenous students in the digital sphere. A Canadian study surveyed 212 Indigenous students and interviewed 20. Findings showed that "learning online in home communities can potentially facilitate learning" and overcome barriers that particularly those in rural communities face (Walton, 2020, p. 4). Some of the other findings in this survey include the following:

- "Including knowledge holders and community members in the online course design process" (p. 5).
- Inclusion of Indigenous culture and content in learning materials and activities (digital storytelling, for example).
- A preference for "embedded media, graphics, virtual environments, and games over other online design elements" (p. 1).
- More videos were not necessarily preferred (took longer to review than posted PowerPoints, for example).
- Limit the number of "logins" needed to facilitate learning.
- Group projects were the least preferred assessment method.
- A face-to-face (synchronous) component was identified as one of the most important supports.

A study done in Australia (Reedy, 2019) came to similar results.

- Including "yarning" (traditional storytelling) was seen as vital.
- Indigenous content inclusion was cited as important.
- "Localising" Indigenous content was favoured (p. 133).
- Synchronous component (and/or a strong faculty presence online) helped overcome the "isolating" and "lonely" nature of online learning and helped facilitate "a sense of belonging and community." "The participants' desire for interaction and to be part of a shared journey points to a *relational epistemology* being at the heart of the learning experience" (p. 137, 141).
- Better LMS training was cited as key.

Recommendations from the study of Aboriginal students in Australia were given (Reedy, 2019).

- Design for social connection.
- Facilitate interaction [among] Indigenous students.
- Develop strong teacher presence.
- Integrate Indigenous and diverse perspectives in course content.
- Make learning resources accessible (UDL).

Admittedly, as mentioned earlier, the vast majority of the research focuses on Indigenous studies programs and Indigenous learners within these programs, which, while helpful, is limited in its applicability in a general WRIT class. First, land-based learning is a central Indigenous pedagogy. While it is challenging to incorporate this into many classes and classrooms,

one way we can begin to do this is by directly acknowledging whose land we are on and coming to an understanding of how those People (or Peoples) understood and used the land specifically.

The Medicine Wheel

An online course at the University of Victoria was first created in 2013 but later updated with Indigenous pedagogies in mind: "holistic design was applied through usage of the Medicine Wheel as an organizing principle" (Tessaro & Restoule, 2022, p. 184). The understanding and use of the medicine wheel varies across Indigenous Cultures (four directions, four parts of the person, four Peoples), and it is widely known and used but, generally, in all its uses it is about "balancing the components, striving for unity and harmony" which reminds "us how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (p. 185).

The Medicine Wheel was used as the guiding principle in the course design with the four quadrants representing "*spirit*, or intuition, *emotion*, or feelings, *body*, or physical aspects of being, and *mind*, or intellectual aspects of being" (Tessaro & Restoule, 2022, p. 185). While the mind was the primary quadrant, emotions were engaged through emotionally evoking topics and activities (p. 185). Experiential learning was achieved through reflection exercises: "The practice of learning by relating teachings to personal experience, or to the *self*, bridges this form of experiential pedagogy to another Indigenous pedagogy of 'turning inward'" with the goal of understanding the self in relation to the whole (p. 186). Successful Indigenized course design is about engaging the whole being. The conclusions of the paper were that while online courses "do not provide *perfect* environments for Indigenous pedagogies, Indigenous pedagogies can be foundational in these spaces" (p. 188). The Canadian survey of Indigenous students mentioned above also cited a Medicine Wheel approach for engaging students online.

Talking Circles

Talking Circles are an important aspect of the Indigenous decision-making process, originally used by First Nations leaders as a means of ensuring that every member of a tribal council had an opportunity to share their thoughts (Currie & Kaminski, 2022). They are "a pedagogical approach rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, in which the circle reflects and embodies significant ontological, axiological, and epistemological principles and beliefs" (Hanson & Danyluk, 2022, p. 1). They can also help to establish some important principles about an educator's approach to the classroom, reinforcing the notion that "everyone belongs, we are a community, together we make a stronger whole, we bring all our differences to one circle" (Hanson & Danyluk, 2022, p. 5). However, it is important when using Talking Circles in the classroom to make clear the distinction between a Talking Circle as a classroom tool and one used

in a sacred or ceremonial way, so that students don't wrongfully equate those uses (Hanson & Danyluk, 2022, p. 4).

Best practices include introducing the Talking Circle in the first synchronous session and be explicit that it is a form of Indigenous pedagogy that does also have distinct ceremonial or sacred uses as well (Hanson & Danyluk, 2022). Educators can create a visual circle by arranging students' names on a circular diagram (p. 5). They can be used at the end of class to cover challenging content. Use simple protocols: have "one person speak at a time; allow for people to pass" (p. 7), for example. While Talking Circles provide an opportunity for formative assessment "by checking for understanding and progress…they are not a good fit for all class discussions, and students can tire of them if they are overused" (Hanson & Danyluk, 2022, p. 7). One important thing to note is that the educator should be well prepared when using this, or any other Indigenous-derived pedagogical tool, and they should be grounded in their understanding of colonialism and decolonization and understand their own personal positioning. Facilitators of talking circles must have respect for Indigenous Knowledges and approach the talking circle with humility (Hanson & Danyluk, 2022). Researchers (Hanson & Danyluk, 2022) also cited using the Seven Living Principles as a potential guideline (guided by the seven grandfather teachings):

1. Embody and enact **respect** for Indigenous Knowledge systems.
2. **Love** for other human beings.
3. **Bravery** in trying something complex.
4. **Wisdom** to discern what we ought to do or not do.
5. **Humility** to recognize what we do and do not know.
6. **Honesty** in sharing with students that we, too, are on a learning journey.
7. **Truth** in confronting harm being perpetuated against Indigenous people or ways (even if that harm originates in our own assumptions and actions).

Indigenous territories is the term being used to describe these Indigenous or Indigenized online spaces. They've become important for connection and building community and vital in documenting dissent and protests and land defense that often goes underreported elsewhere (such as Standing Rock and Wet'suwet'en) (Raheja, 2017). McLean (2019), another researcher, notes that these

> digital geographies offer avenues for changes, as well as sources for entrenching injustices; it is how people use and remake particular technologies that render these devices and spaces as oppressive or liberatory. Just as the category 'Indigenous' is multiple and situated, so too are the ways in which Indigenous [P]eoples co-produce digital geographies. (p. 106)

Indigenizing digital spaces is as much about approach and design as it is trying to apply land-based pedagogies. And as we can see through the

research, while studies have focused on Indigenous learners, using this approach can enhance the learning experiences for all our students.

Conclusion

An Indigenized higher education system should be grounded in the four Rs: "*respect* for Indigenous knowledge and traditional approaches…content that is *relevant* to, and builds upon, Indigenous students' relational views of human, natural, and spirit worlds; *reciprocal* teaching and learning relationships that disrupt a teacher/student hierarchy… [and the] *responsibility* to one's relations, including future generations" (Madden, 2015, p. 1).

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