A guide to building relationships, demonstrating care, decolonization, and Indigenizing your classroom in an online context
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Niá:wen, Miigwech, Thank you to everyone who contributed to creating this Guide to Indigenizing Online Learning. It is my hope that this guide will provide instructors with an introduction to building relationships, demonstrating care, Indigenizing their classrooms, and examples of ways to continuously work towards decolonizing education and adopting a culturally responsive teaching mindset.

- Liv Rondeau

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Acknowledgement of Territory

Queen’s University is situated on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Territory. To acknowledge this traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, one pre-dating the establishment of the earliest European colonies. It is also to acknowledge this territory’s significance for the Indigenous peoples who lived, and continue to live, upon it – people whose practices and spiritualities were tied to the land and continue to develop in relationship to the territory and its other inhabitants today.

The Kingston Indigenous community continues to reflect the area’s Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee roots. There is also a significant Métis community and there are First Peoples from other Nations across Turtle Island present here today.
Truth and Reconciliation in Your Classroom
How to get started and who can help

Learn about Indigenous peoples’ territories that you live on

Every classroom is on land that tells a story of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

- Approach your school district's Indigenous resource consultant.
- Begin conversations with local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers at friendship centres and university Indigenous Studies departments.
- Feature contemporary Indigenous leaders in your lessons.

Support authentic learning

Indigenous knowledge touches on all subject areas that you can integrate into any classroom.

- Prioritize authors with authentic expertise in Indigenous learning.
- Connect Indigenous learning resources to students' interests.
- Invite Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to lead classroom activities.

Relationship

Reconciliation is about co-learning and relationship-building.

Reciprocity

The best resources are human resources.

Respect

Education is a tool for reconciliation, but steer clear from appropriating culture.

Responsibility

Teachers have a responsibility to guide all students toward reconciliation.

Know your limits

With over 50 First Nations in Canada plus distinct Métis and Inuit groups, you don't have to be an expert on everyone.

- Attend community events and local professional development activities.
- Explore toolkits, online courses and podcasts to learn more about treaties and residential schools.

Be humble about your knowledge of a history and culture that isn't yours

Respect the sophistication of Indigenous knowledge, spirituality and wisdom.

- Ask questions about cultural protocols. Know what’s sacred.
- Teach about cultural genocide and residential schools gradually. Indigenous peoples are not victims first.
- Avoid activities that reduce Indigenous peoples to a caricature or stereotype.

NOTES

FOR MORE TIPS & RESOURCES: edcan.ca/inyourclassroom
TIPS FOR INDIGENOUS WELL-BEING

- Drink Cedar Tea
- Spend time on the land
- Put Cedar in your shoes
- Have a fire
- Drum and sing
- Put down Tobacco
- Have a Cedar Bath
- Make fry bread
- Participate in virtual Pow Wows and Drum Circles
- Make a Ribbon Skirt
- Garden and harvest at home
- Make a Ribbon Shirt
- Be kind to yourself and others
- Pick up your language bundle
- Sing to the water
- Take time to care for and honour all our relations
- Smudge yourself and your house
- Do some beadwork

Graphic Created by Liv Rondeau, ATEP Program Manager, Faculty of Education
CONSIDER THESE POSSIBLE INEQUITIES TO ONLINE LEARNING FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Across Turtle Island there are more than 630 First Nation communities, which represent more than 50 Nations and 50 Indigenous languages (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2017). While many Indigenous peoples experience similar inequities, when it comes to online learning, it is important to acknowledge that each community is unique in the challenges they may be facing. Consider researching the communities your students reside in and think about approaching online learning in ways that are adaptable and flexible to the needs of the students. Below is a list of some inequities to consider. Although candidates in your class may not be experiencing any or all of these, it is important to be aware that Indigenous communities are resilient and continue to persist despite facing challenges.

1. Limited Access to Resources
2. Limited or No Access to Internet/Wi-Fi
3. Crowded Living Conditions
4. Limited or No Access to Clean Water
5. Limited or No Access to Health Care
6. Working Full-Time or Part-Time Jobs
7. Caring for Children, Elderly, Friends, or Community Members
8. Single Device Households
9. Working and Learning from Cellular-Devices
10. High Cell-Phone or Data Plans
11. Many People May Be Experiencing Nature Deprivation
12. Having to Relocate to Public Areas with Time-Limits on Internet Access to Work
13. Many Indigenous Peoples are Planting and Harvesting to Feed Their Families and Members in Their Community. Being Tied to Technology For Pro-longed Periods Could Lead to Food Insecurity, or a Lack of Food Being Grown and Distributed
Host a Talking Circle Before Each Class

Lend some time at the beginning of every lecture to engage in a virtual Talking Circle. Talking Circles symbolize holism and completeness. They encourage dialogue, respect, and build a community space that allows us to open our hearts and connect. In a Circle, everyone’s contribution is equally important, everyone listens to one another, participants are welcomed to express themselves in a way that is comfortable to them, vulnerability is welcomed, and the space created becomes safe and judgment-free. Every Circle works towards building a stronger classroom community and allows for instructors to get to know their participants on a personal level.

Positive Body Language

A key component of relationship building is the ability to recognize positive body language. In an online capacity, this can be difficult. Try sitting farther away from your device or standing up so that participants can see you and pick up on positive body language and engagement.

Incorporate an Indigenous Language

Language has a strong connection to culture and identity. Teaching an Indigenous language or bringing in a few words or phrases in a language can enrich the spirit of our participants. It can also promote language revitalization efforts and encourage participants to continue or start learning their Indigenous language.

Indigenous Representation in Curriculum

Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). A pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to and celebrates fundamental cultures offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures (Brown University, 2020). Students need to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. There are many ways that this can be done, for example: learning within the context of culture, communicating high expectations, reshaping curriculum, student-centered instruction, weaving culture into lecture content, and using resources that reflect multiple cultures.

Build a Community

It is important from the first day of class to build a sense of community. Consider hosting an online meeting before or on the first day of class to get to know one another and discuss subjects outside of academics.

Set Ground Rules and Guiding Principles

Setting ground rules and guiding principles for your online sessions is a good way to set up expectations for the class. This could look like an announcement put out on OnQ about expectations or a slide at the beginning of class outlining the ground rules and guiding principles for that class. Some examples of these could be ‘please mute your microphone after you’ve had a few minutes to settle into a comfortable chair, say hi, etc.’, ‘hold space for others to be silent, answer questions, engage, nod along, etc.’, ‘respect each other, and remind ourselves that we all receive teaching/messages in different ways and how I share may be different than how others do’.
**Bring Learning Outside**

Land-based learning has always been a part of Indigenous cultures. It encourages critical interaction with the land, increases mental health, and builds an environmental awareness that encourages participants to think and learn about what our responsibilities are to all our relations. When possible, consider bringing learning outside. Whether it be participants connecting with the outdoors during asynchronous learning time or everyone/the instructor sitting outside while participating in a virtual community, it is important to bring the land into Indigenous learning.

**Check In With Students**

During this time, it is important to check-in with students frequently to ensure they are doing well, keeping healthy, and staying safe. Check-ins also demonstrate to students that as an instructor, you care about their mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. This also allows for one-on-one time with students where they may feel more comfortable opening up to you as an instructor and it continues to build a personal relationship.

**Adopt a Holistic Mentality**

The Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel focuses on holistic health. There are four parts to a person’s well-being: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. To have good health requires a balance in all four areas. The Medicine Wheel is circular to demonstrate that each element is equal and interconnected. It is important to recognize that each of these four areas influences one another. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to all parts of our health. As an instructor, it is important to care for all aspects of students’ well-being (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual) and ensure that lessons and assignments nurture all four areas.

**Teach Through Storytelling**

Indigenous cultures have passed on knowledge from generation to generation through oral traditions since time immemorial. Storytelling is a traditional method used to teach about cultural beliefs, values, customs, history, practices, relationships, and ways of life. Storytelling is a foundation for holistic learning, building relationships, and experiential learning. Whenever possible, try to teach and learn orally and build in time for communication between the instructor and students as well as student to student.

**Give Voice to Indigenous Elders and Community Members**

Reconciliation begins with building relationships, developing understanding, and allowing for Indigenous Elders and community members to collaborate on classroom initiatives or projects in the community. Even though learning is online, it is still important to give voice to Indigenous Elders and community members. Consider having Elders or community members come into your online class or continue to reach out to Elders and community members for guidance.

**Start Your Class With a Land Acknowledgment**

When doing a Land Acknowledgment, you might consider doing it in various ways. One way is to acknowledge Turtle Island and all Indigenous peoples from a broad sense. Another way is to acknowledge the territory that the host is delivering or creating materials on. Consider taking a moment to discover whose traditional territory you are on through using resources like [https://www.whose.land/en](https://www.whose.land/en) or [www.native-land.ca](http://www.native-land.ca). An important piece to Land Acknowledgments is also following through with reconciliation in a way that makes the acknowledgment meaningful. Think about why you are acknowledging the land and then think about how you are fulfilling your responsibilities as a person occupying that land and space.
Adopt Multiple Forms of Learning, Teaching, and Doing
Allow for students to submit assignments using multiple formats; this could be uploading a video of them talking through their assignment rather than writing it, creating a PowerPoint and posting it, making a brochure on the lecture content, or allocating time during online class to present their assignment as opposed to submitting it. The opportunities are endless and allow instructors to adopt a Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) mindset.

Learn From the Three Sisters
The Three Sisters teach us about relationships and how to support and care for one another. It is important that when teaching in an online capacity, instructors continue to adopt the mentality of supporting and caring for participants as well as encourage participants to support one another and their instructor(s) to build a positive online community that is grounded in reassuring well-being.

Have a Virtual Feather or Talking Stick
Talking sticks are used in many Indigenous cultures as a communication tool that ensures participants in the circle are given respect and that everyone’s voices are heard. Some cultures do not use a physical stick but use a feather, shell, stone, or other items. A virtual feather or talking stick can be used in an online talking circle where participants cannot see each other. Participants can type their response or comment followed by “>>>>” to indicate that they are finished ‘speaking’ and passing on the talking stick or feather. This creates a dynamic in the online class that everyone is involved in the learning circle.

Allow for Dialogue Between Participants
An online community should extend beyond the instructor talking to the students and encourage dialogue between students. Consider allocating time during synchronous learning for students to engage in conversation with one another and collaborate.

Have a Virtual Feast
Feasts are an essential part of Indigenous culture. Feasts are done for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to; providing sustenance, giving thanks, and celebrating important events. Consider having a virtual feast with your students at the end of the term where everyone can gather online, eat their meals, and engage in community and conversation. This is a good way to celebrate the end of a class and the beginning of the next steps towards everyone’s future.

Approach Everything with Kindness and Understanding
It is important to recognize that during this time many of our students are struggling mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Remember that we are all in this together and we must approach all situations with kindness, empathy, and understanding.

Encourage Indigenous Students to Participate in Cultural Opportunities
Many Indigenous students may be beginning to feel a sense of cultural disconnect or alienation as they are unable to participate in teachings, in-person communal ceremonies, or gatherings. Encourage Indigenous students to participate in virtual teachings, ceremonies, or gatherings to maintain a connection to community and culture.
Ground Rules and Guiding Principles

1. Please mute your mic after you’ve had a few moments to settle into a comfortable chair, say hi to a few others arriving, and then we will be able to listen to the words ahead.
2. Hold space for others to be silent, to question, to engage, to nod along, to speak up or step back as needed. Share time, space, and love in each moment we share together here.
3. As your facilitator, I will help support and guide all of us through this together.
4. If an emotion comes up, honour yourself, and all of us with that. Don’t feel that you need to hold back tears, sadness, joy, laughter, frustrations, if you feel they might flow.
5. Respect each other, and remind ourselves that we all receive teachings/knowledge/messages in different ways and the ways in which I share or you share will be different than the ways in which others do.

Provided by Lindsay Brant, Educational Developer, Indigenous Pedagogies and Ways of Knowing, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Our Elder in Residence, Deb St. Amant is here to offer culture-based counselling, guidance and support to Faculty of Education Teacher Candidates, Graduate Students, Faculty, and Staff. Support may include; academic and personal counselling, shared problem solving, helping to navigate the learning structures and expectations at Queen’s University, support and encouragement and regular check-ins.

Deb offers life experience, knowledge, and ability to provide Indigenous teachings. She strengthens community engagement, and helps to link culture, community and academia. In all of her work, Deb integrates Indigenous ethics, values and principles; carries her own knowledge and life wisdom with respect while respecting those of all students, faculty and staff; and upholds the integrity of the Faculty of Education and Queen’s University while supporting everyone in the development of their own knowledge bundles.

Deb can be contacted via email here: https://educ.queensu.ca/deb-st-amant
At the Centre for Teaching and Learning (2020), Lindsay Brant, Educational Developer, Indigenous Curriculum and Ways of Knowing, along with colleagues in the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Queen’s University lead a webinar and Q&A style session that focused on shifting our mindset from pandemic pedagogy (remote delivery during Covid-19) to a more purposeful pedagogy of peace that builds upon the three core teachings of the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace, which are peace, strength, and a good mind. This is for educators who are looking for ways to take a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning, through using compassionate educational frameworks and techniques to lead all learners through their learning journey with integrity, optimism, loving kindness, and support.

Follow this link to view the webinar: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8CjFT4DJ4I
SUGGESTED BOOKS


(2014, September 23) Teaching Each Other Book Cover. [digital image]. Retrieved from https://www.ubcpress.ca/teaching-each-other


Evans, Clancy, et al. “Indigenous Learning.” EdCan Network, 2020, www.edcan.ca/research/?topic%5B%5D=855&auth=&gclid=CjwKCAjw2a32BRBXEiwAUcugiK0dFhu eNZww2fUCk1m2n82CNloNtJRIPHxLju4ryk7ikyBDQLGOgBoCDg0QAvD_B wE


Strategic Alliance of Broadcasters for Aboriginal Reflection. (2003). Key terminology guidebook for reporting on Aboriginal topics.


ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Transforming Teaching Toolkit

Inclusive Community:
• Conversations on Decolonization Module
• Decolonizing and Indigenizing Teaching and Learning
  o What is decolonization? What is Indigenization?

Course Organization:
• Integrating Campus Supports:
  o Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre
  o Aboriginal Teacher Education Program
  o Office of Indigenous Initiatives

Assessment Strategies:
• New knowledge through creative use of technologies:
  o Alternatives for Common Assessments

Suggested Webinars:
• Strategies for Inclusive and Equitable Teaching in Remote Environments
  o Thursday, May 28, 1:30 - 2:30pm, Microsoft Teams

• Let's Sit Together: Building Classroom Community
  o Thursday, June 25, 1:30 - 2:30pm, Microsoft Teams

Queen’s University Library:
• Resources for Decolonizing Your Teaching

Other Sources:
• 100 Ways to Indigenize and Decolonize Academic Programs and Courses
• Indigenizing and Decolonizing Your Course
• Decolonizing the Classroom Is More Than Just a Checklist
• Indigenous Pedagogy: Decolonizing Higher Education
• Indigenizing Higher Ed – Foundations
• Indigenizing Higher Ed - Elders & Students
• Indigenous Post-Secondary Education and Training
• Decolonizing Education
• Indigenous Education Protocol for Colleges and Institutes
• Make Space for Indigeneity: Decolonizing Education
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