



Algoma
UNIVERSITY

INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGY IN REMOTE COURSES

What is Indigenization?

In the context of teaching and learning, Indigenization involves bringing Indigenous knowledge systems and approaches (pedagogies) together with Western knowledge systems so that equitable space for both can be explored.

What is Indigenous Pedagogy?

Indigenous pedagogies stem from pre-colonial approaches to teaching and learning which emphasize: (1) the development of the learner as a whole person; (2) learning through experience; (3) learning through the land; and (4) recognizing the important role that Elders and Traditional Peoples have in passing on knowledge.

1. Personal and Holistic

An Indigenous pedagogical approach is holistic in nature, focusing on the four interrelated dimensions of human development. A learner's intellectual proclivities, physical-awareness, emotional and spiritual growth are all equally valued, challenging dominant ideologies that specifically ignore the latter domain.

2. Experiential

Indigenous pedagogies emphasize learning by doing. Traditionally, young people learned how to participate effectively in their communities by practicing the skills they would need to perform later in life. In a contemporary context, students can learn through observation, action, reflection, and further action. For instructors, this means creating opportunities within courses for students to share and learn from direct experience.

3. Place-based learning

Indigenous pedagogies connect learning to a specific place, and thus knowledge is situated in relationship to a location, experience, and group of people. Students benefit when provided opportunities to explore, inquire, and learn on the land, and to be in relationship with the land alongside others.

4. Intergenerational

In pre-contact societies, Elders had a vital role to play in passing on wisdom and knowledge to youth. That relationship is still honoured today, as Elders remain the most respected educators in most Indigenous communities. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can learn a great deal from Elders, and instructors can collaborate with them as experts in Indigenous pedagogy.



Indigenous Pedagogy for Remote Learning

Educators have a responsibility to address the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, particularly the call to “integrate Indigenous Knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms (Call to Action #62).” While virtual classrooms are no exception, there are clear benefits and inherent challenges to doing this work, as well as important practices to be mindful of when beginning the Indigenization process.

Benefits

- Digital technologies allow us to reach wider populations than what is typically possible, which can open the way for meaningful collaboration between instructors, their students, and Indigenous community experts from across the world.
- An online learning environment provides a convenient, flexible, and to some, less intimidating setting by which students can reflect openly on their experiences with others.
- Students have deeper options for how they choose to share with others, with various digital tools at their disposal (e.g. oral presentations can be enhanced through the use of audio-visual and communications technologies).

Challenges

- Commonly framed as a “landless territory,” our conceptions about online education risk ignoring the importance of place-based learning, a core component of Indigenous pedagogy.
- Indigenous pedagogies emphasize authenticity as a required condition for learning; however, remote learning can often feel impersonal or detached from students’ personal and everyday lives (i.e. there is a gap between “internal” and “external” experiences).
- The nuance of subtle energy generated from self-reflection and openly sharing with others provides a sense of community and interconnectedness that is not often present in most traditional classrooms and is especially difficult to duplicate in online settings.



Wise Practices

Knowing Yourself

Colonial systems persist in modern-day society, harming, ignoring, or disadvantaging Indigenous people, often to the benefit (privilege) of non-Indigenous groups. Therefore, before the Indigenization process can begin, it is essential that instructors reflect critically on their own positionality. Unawareness of personal privileges and/or biases can hinder the ways in which they understand Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning – this is thus a critical first step.

Course Design

Successfully incorporating Indigenous teaching and learning approaches involves considering all of the following aspects of remote course design:

- Goals: Do course goals include the holistic development of the learner? If applicable, does the course benefit Indigenous people or communities?
- Learning outcomes: Do the learning outcomes emphasize intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual development? Is there room for personalization, group and individual learning goals, and self-development?
- Learning activities: Have learning activities that are land-based, narrative, intergenerational, relational, experiential, and/or multimodal been included?
- Assessment: Is the assessment holistic in nature? Are there opportunities for self-assessment that allow students to reflect on their own development? If applicable, do assessments have real-life implications (i.e. creative forms of cyber-justice, online campaigns, community projects, etc.)?
- Relationships: Are there opportunities for learning in community, intergenerational learning, and learning in relationship to the land? Has the course been developed in collaboration with Indigenous people?
- Format: Are there opportunities to expand “digital boundaries” to include learners’ offline learning contexts (i.e. real-life experiences, land-based learning, etc.)?
- Accessibility: Can all learners engage in the same interactions and enjoy the same education in an equally effective and integrated manner? Are students’ unique strengths (gifts) identified and nurtured?



Incorporating local knowledge

Incorporating local knowledge is a good way to show respect for the Indigenous peoples for whose lands one's institution is built upon. Instructors should look for opportunities to connect their courses to the culture that exists in these places, even when said courses are being delivered virtually. Institutions often have an established relationship with neighbouring Indigenous communities that can be honored through the incorporation of local knowledge in online and remote courses. Doing so models to local Indigenous learners that their culture is being thoughtfully represented across learning environments. This process is collaborative and requires input from both the instructor and local community experts.

Collaboration

It is essential that the work of Indigenizing remote education be done in partnership with Indigenous people. Establishing relationships however takes considerable time and effort, as many Indigenous people have experienced negative interactions with non-Indigenous institutions (e.g. the government, the education system, the healthcare system) in the past. Instructors will need to work hard to build relationships of trust that overcome the damage caused by colonization.

Most institutions have staff that can support this process – for example, Indigenous support services staff or a colleague who has established strong, positive relationships with Indigenous partners.

During an initial meeting, one should be clear about their goals, ask questions, be prepared to make mistakes and, as necessary, apologize for those mistakes. This is a lifelong process that can be challenging, but through patience and practice, relationships will grow.

Appropriate Use of Indigenous Pedagogies

Misappropriation (using the intellectual property, traditional knowledge, or cultural expressions, from a culture that is not one's own without permission) challenges Indigenous peoples' rights of expression, protection and transmission of cultural knowledge. As such, there are important protocols that instructors must follow to ensure the appropriate and respectful use of Indigenous pedagogies and resources:

"In the mainstream academic system, copyright is used to ensure permission for written resources. In Indigenous cultures, oral permission is required to use cultural materials or practices such as legends, stories, songs, designs, crests, photographs, audiovisual materials, and dances (BCcampus, 2020)." Permission to use such materials or practices may be considered in the context of one's intent and relationship with the owners.



Instructors must therefore build connections with Indigenous communities so that they can incorporate Indigenous culture in ways that are not harmful or exploitative. "This may be harder work than simply adding an Indigenous text, speaker, or activity into a course, but it is the responsibility of all educators to engage in this work (BCcampus, 2020)."

Making Mistakes

Learning from mistakes is a common aspect of Indigenous pedagogy. After the process of acknowledging and fixing a mistake, it is important that one continues to learn, ask questions, and move forward. While it is normal to feel uncomfortable upon making a mistake, Instructors are encouraged to not let this discomfort keep them from doing the important work of Indigenization.

**Adapted with permission from Mitchell Huguenin at Trent University*

