

Indigenizing the Curriculum: From Challenges to Opportunities

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Proposed Mini-Description (50-word)

The purpose of this research is to examine the responsibilities, perspectives, and experiences of educational developers, and others in related roles, working to support the Indigenization of curricula at Canadian post-secondary institutions. We intend to collaboratively draft recommendations on how this group might network nationally, distribute capacity, and mobilize change.

Full Description (300-1000 words)

After an eight-year review of the destructive impact of the residential school system towards Indigenous peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) argued that the education sector should play a central role in bringing about reconciliation. Among its 94 Calls to Action, the group called on post-secondary institutions to deliberately and formatively “integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms” (TRC, 2015). This call, intended to forge a space for voices, ways of knowing, traditions, and values long silenced, was echoed by Universities Canada as they asked leaders at Canadian institutions to “close the education gap” and indigenize curricula “through responsive academic programming, support programs, orientations, and pedagogies” (Universities Canada, 2015).

Members of the post-secondary community have taken steps in working towards these goals: an informal review of the strategic plans of more than 20 Canadian universities confirms there is a commitment to developing mechanisms that support the decolonization of curricula. As such, many institutions have hired educational developers, and others in related roles, specifically tasked with undertaking this support. This approach, while valuable, has come with its challenges: many of the people hired into these positions are part-time or contract staff, isolated and part of a one-person team tasked with having an impossible breadth of disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge. Siloed individuals, working independently to effect system-wide change, runs in opposition to literature on effective change practices in post-secondary institutions which suggests that a systemic, distributed approach is most effective (Bolden et al., 2009; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2013; Wright et al., 2008). Further, making changes to an institution’s teaching practices and approaches – however supported in principle – is challenging in reality, as it requires large groups of people to question and reshape their values and alter their approaches and behaviours (Arreola, 2007; Hénard, 2010). Researchers at the University of Alberta found that Canadian institutions have made little progress toward Indigenizing the academy (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), findings similar to those of researchers in countries around the world that have undertaken efforts to decolonialize curricula (Behari-Leak, 2019; Darlaston-Jones et al., 2014; McLaughlin & Whatmas, 2008).

The purpose of this project is to take pause and create a forum for those specifically tasked with supporting the decolonization of curricula. Through a nationally distributed survey, we will:

- collect and examine the breadth of responsibilities, perspectives, and experiences of educational developers, and others in related roles, working to support the Indigenization of curricula at Canadian post-secondary institutions; and
- gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by this group as well as their perceived needs.

From this data, we intend to contribute the following deliverables:

- an updated list of those working to support the Indigenization of curricula at Canadian post-secondary institutions;
- a report summarizing the efforts around and challenges to undertaking this work; and
- using participants' critical insights, recommendations on how this group might network nationally, distribute capacity, and mobilize long-lasting change.

This research will inform Phase 2 (undertaken with additional funding from alternative sources) where we will partner with additional institutions and host a webinar and day-long symposium inviting those working to support Indigenization and providing a forum for sharing and networking and resource building.

The Educational Developers Caucus (EDC) has been explicitly exploring expanding its capacity to support and engage others in Indigenizing curriculum and pedagogy (i.e., through conference panels <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asiSVj1tyTI&feature=youtu.be>; and the Indigenous Knowledges Action Group). In informal consultation with others, we believe there is a need to better support those hired into positions with a focus on Indigenizing curriculum and pedagogy, as well as a strong desire from many EDC members to learn more about opportunities, growth, and challenges.

This project is aligned with the interests and concerns identified in the EDC Living Plan, particularly:

- Working within and with academic units for curriculum, program and organizational change (2.1)
- Facilitate systemic and organizational change, including exploring and addressing barriers and levers to change (2.3)
- Supporting valid, meaningful, and appropriate assessment of teaching and learning processes, practices, and programs for the purpose of continuous quality enhancement (3)
- International/inter-cultural education (5.2)

Research Team

We are modeling a reconciliation approach in this research, as the team is made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, representing multiple institutions and with expertise in Indigenous pedagogies and ways of knowing.

Impact of Physical Distancing on Project Plan

At this time, we do not expect ongoing physical distancing to impact this phase of the project. We do not intend to launch phase 2 until 2021.

References

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Budget

Description of Budget Item	Cost
1. Personnel Costs	
One Graduate Student Responsibilities will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing an environmental scan of cross-Canada post-secondary institutions' website data, including a review of Strategic Plans in order to identify institutional commitment to Indigenization and a review of the types and scope of positions supporting Indigenization • Conduct a guided primary analysis of survey data 	\$ 2702.7 7 hours/week at \$30/hour, plus 1.17% benefits over 11 weeks

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to resources and reporting 	
2. Other Expenses	
In-kind contributions provided by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Windsor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipment (i.e., computers) Software (i.e., Qualtrics) 	\$0
Total	\$2702.7

Proposed Timeline (Draft)

- Create online survey: June 2020
- Finalize an application to UWindsor’s research ethics board: July 2020
- Disseminate online survey: August 2020
- Interview and hire graduate research assistant: September 2020
- Train and mentor graduate research assistant: September-October 2020
- Undertake a national environmental scan of post-secondary institutions using website data; this includes a review of Strategic Plans, teaching and learning centre websites, and types and scope of positions hired to support Indigenization: September 2020-December 2021
- Analyze results of survey: October-January 2020
- Document results, summarizing efforts and challenges, and drafting recommendations based on data: January-February 2021
- Share results with participants: February 2021
- Share results more broadly, including the EDC Conference: February-May 2021

Agreements

[x] I/We agree to provide the EDC community, who funds this grant, with access to resulting information and resources for which the copyright remains with the author(s).
[x] I/We acknowledge that I/we will submit an interim report and a final deliverable.