

# Personal & Institutional Reflections on Indigenizing the Academy

## Workshop Breakout I

### Breakout Group 4 (Students)

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\*introductions

\*the session covered three questions:

- what interests you about 'Indigenizing the academy'?
  - How did you learn about the gathering and what brought you here?
  - What do you hope to learn and share during this gathering?
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### Safety, Security, Feeling Comfortable and at Home

- How can we make the institution feel more like 'home'?
- Completely at home within the environment (including within the limited resources).
  - Indigenizing means Creating a safe place for everyone (not only aboriginal people).
- We must be careful to indigenize and assimilate. "If it's comfortable – it's not right" it should be uncomfortable. De-colonizing is painful and needs to be done with mind, body and emotions. Only then can we create a good space for everyone without abusing the culture.
- Although many institutions have created an aboriginal student only space it is usually allocated in a remote part of the institution and furnished with awful old couches and mismatched tables, yet this space, no matter the aesthetics, is a safe place to be who we are: a space that is fondly remembered. This space is important to aboriginal student success.
- Just because learning was uncomfortable for me does not mean that I need to make it uncomfortable for my students. I try very hard to create compassionate, genuine, reciprocal relationships with my students.

### Renewal

- Most of the time I am surrounded by non-aboriginal voices. To be here and to listen to aboriginal voices fills me; it creates energy for me that I will take forward.
- I came to the conference get re-inspired. It seems the system continues to lower the expectation for aboriginal students. How do we inspire aboriginal students to complete their schooling so that they can go to university?

### Accessibility

- First Nations ways means **it must be personal, not conforming**. The conforming nature of the institution make it less accessible for indigenous people.

### How to Indigenize

- What can we do in the future to better indigenize?

- ‘Networking’ with other disciplines and knowledge bases i.e.: architecture, geography.
- Addressing misconceptions of what indigenizing means
- How to indigenize within a euro-centric environment – For example, administration approved of a pow-wow on campus but only if they did it quietly.
- What is the best approach to indigenization, who will it impact and how do we include everyone?
- What are the key questions we need to be asking and how do we indigenize strategically
- We must be careful to indigenize and assimilate. “If it’s comfortable – it’s not right” it should be uncomfortable. De-colonizing is painful and needs to be done with mind, body and emotions. Only then can we create a good space for everyone without abusing the culture.
- The process of indigenizing must include elders
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- We must **de-colonize** before we indigenize. This has to happen on an individual level, a family and community level and at an institutional level.
- I would like to discuss self-determination, self-control, setting goals, and taking control of the process of indigenizing.
- How can I do a better job in not recreating the awful parts of the university?
- I’m here to help and to learn
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- How can we share our truth?
- We need more professionals, doctors, lawyers etc. that understand the culture and the history. They will have a different world view that will help to indigenize.

## Definition of Indigenization – what does it mean

- How to indigenize within a euro-centric environment – For example, administration approved of a pow-wow on campus but only if they did it quietly.
- Indigenizing means:
  - **Bringing love, compassion and a connectedness** to everything including natural science etc.
  - **Creating a safe place for everyone (not only aboriginal people).**
  - **Creating interconnectedness** with all disciplines and body, **mind and spirit.**
  - **First Nations ways means it must be personal, not conforming. The conforming nature of the institution** make it less accessible for indigenous people.
  - **Is more than bringing culture to the academy?**
- We must be careful to indigenize and assimilate. “If it’s comfortable – it’s not right” it should be uncomfortable. De-colonizing is painful and needs to be done with mind, body and emotions. Only then can we create a good space for everyone without abusing the culture.

- My experience is an institution “educating” about aboriginal people by taking tours through the aboriginal residence. We aren’t a museum here for your viewing pleasure.
- Often we find ourselves as lone aboriginal students in a class where comments or misconceptions are shared and we are the only ones who can say something about it. Sometimes I have the energy to fight, sometimes I don’t.
- I would like to discuss self-determination, self-control, setting goals, and taking control of the process of indigenizing.
- When looking at other systems that have attempted to indigenize such as the criminal justice system or the child protection system we see that once the process was in place it was actually worse off. We need to look at those systems and ensure we do things differently. We must be very careful as we move forward.
- How can we share our truth?

## **Elders**

- The process of indigenizing must include elders

## **Inclusion**

- You have to pick your battles to make it through a system that talks about inclusiveness but is backed by infrastructure and policy that does not allow for inclusion. For example, the system that governs masters and PhD dissertation processes
- How to indigenize within a euro-centric environment – For example, administration approved of a pow-wow on campus but only if they did it quietly.
- What is the best approach to indigenization, who will it impact and how do we include everyone?

## **Conformity/nonconformity**

- We want to make the institution fit the student not the student fit the institution.
- First Nations ways means it must be personal, not conforming. The conforming nature of the institution make it less accessible for indigenous people.
- My experience at a conference in the past is that as long as I looked like them and talked like them I was welcome

## Eurocentrism

- How to indigenize within a euro-centric environment – For example, administration approved of a pow-wow on campus but only if they did it quietly.

## Strategies

### Student Retention/Recruitment

- To share obstacles and solutions to how to **make systems less confusing for students**. This would **increase the retention rate of First Nations** students.

### Student Success

- Although many institutions have created an aboriginal student only space it is usually allocated in a remote part of the institution and furnished with awful old couches and mismatched tables, yet this space, no matter the aesthetics, is a safe place to be who we are: a space that is fondly remembered. This space is important to aboriginal student success.
- The process of aboriginal education is improving but very slowly. Only recently, aboriginal people were limited to a grade 5 education. It is only this generation that sees aboriginal people at university. Unfortunately, there is only a 50% graduation rate for aboriginal students from the k-12 system. However, aboriginal students who complete their undergraduate degrees are considerably more likely to go onto higher degrees than the average population.
- Complete your schooling! By completing it you are making it easier for the aboriginal student following you.
- I came to the conference get re-inspired. It seems the system continues to lower the expectation for aboriginal students. How do we inspire aboriginal students to complete their schooling so that they can go to university?

## Spirituality

- Bringing love, compassion and a connectedness to everything including natural science etc.
- Creating interconnectedness with all disciplines and body, mind and spirit.

## Institutional Policies

- We want to make the institution fit the student not the student fit the institution.
- To share obstacles and solutions to how to **make systems less confusing for students**. This would **increase the retention rate of First Nations** students.
- You have to pick your battles to make it through a system that talks about inclusiveness but is backed by infrastructure and policy that does not allow for inclusion. For example, the system that governs masters and PhD dissertation processes
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## Decolonization

- We must be careful to indigenize and assimilate. “If it’s comfortable – it’s not right” it should be uncomfortable. De-colonizing is painful and needs to be done with mind, body and emotions. Only then can we create a good space for everyone without abusing the culture.
- We must de-colonize before we indigenize. This has to happen on an individual level, a family and community level and at an institutional level.
- My experience is an institution “educating” about aboriginal people by taking tours through the aboriginal residence. We aren’t a museum here for your viewing pleasure.
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## Elders

## Racism

- Blatant racists are easy to deal with; it’s the uneducated people that refuse to take the time to learn that are more difficult. “You live on our territory – take the time.”
- Often we find ourselves as lone aboriginal students in a class where comments or misconceptions are shared and we are the only ones who can say something about it. Sometimes I have the energy to fight, sometimes I don’t.
- Canada is not innocent when it comes to racial discrimination and social injustice. We need to dismantle the structural discrimination that exists in the typical euro-centric post-secondary institution. IE: sitting in rows, exams etc. How do we do that?
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## Tokenism/Isolation

- Often we find ourselves as lone aboriginal students in a class where comments or misconceptions are shared and we are the only ones who can say something about it. Sometimes I have the energy to fight, sometimes I don’t.

- As an aboriginal student I am expected to answer everyone's questions about aboriginal history and culture. I am still learning. I may not be able to tell you. Learn with me. (or go read a book)
- Most of the time I am surrounded by non-aboriginal voices. To be here and to listen to aboriginal voices fills me; it creates energy for me that I will take forward.
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## **Healing**

- Children think their problems are their own. Once they learn about aboriginal history they come to understand why they are struggling at a different level and are validated that it isn't just them. Learning about the history is part of their healing process.
- Most of the time I am surrounded by non-aboriginal voices. To be here and to listen to aboriginal voices fills me; it creates energy for me that I will take forward.
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## **History**

- How do we include historical teachings in what we do at the academy
- The history that both aboriginal and non-aboriginal children learn about in the k-12 system is based on one Christian white man's biased opinion of what occurred.
- Oral tradition is more clear and richer
- Children think their problems are their own. Once they learn about aboriginal history they come to understand why they are struggling at a different level and are validated that it isn't just them. Learning about the history is part of their healing process.

## **Oral tradition**

- Oral tradition is more clear and richer

## **Traditional knowledge**

## **Student success**

## **Vocabulary/meaning/semiotics**

- It is important that we be aware that the vocabulary we use has different meaning and different impact on different people.

## **Gatherings/Ceremonies/Traditions/Culture**

- There seems to be a trend to broader sharing of ceremonies and traditions amongst the nations. We are seeing more gatherings where it doesn't matter which nation you are from, you are encouraged to come together to celebrate with everyone.
- How to indigenize within a euro-centric environment – For example, administration approved of a pow-wow on campus but only if they did it quietly.
- Indigenizing is more than bringing culture to the academy?
- We must be careful to indigenize and assimilate. "If it's comfortable – it's not right" it should be uncomfortable. De-colonizing is painful and needs to be done with mind, body and emotions. Only then can we create a good space for everyone without abusing the culture.

## **Nations/Multinations**

- There seems to be a trend to broader sharing of ceremonies and traditions amongst the nations. We are seeing more gatherings where it doesn't matter which nation you are from, you are encouraged to come together to celebrate with everyone.

## **Indigenous teaching and learning styles**

- I want to learn about teaching techniques that are more suitable to indigenous people. I find myself teaching the way that I taught...and it still doesn't work well.
- Canada is not innocent when it comes to racial discrimination and social injustice. We need to dismantle the structural discrimination that exists in the typical euro-centric post-secondary institution. IE: sitting in rows, exams etc. How do we do that?
- I am here to network and bring back knowledge and teaching techniques to work with aboriginal youth

## **Budget/funding/financing**

- Completely at home within the environment (including within the limited resources).\
- Resources are limited so what do we want to accomplish with the resources we have
- It's frustrating that image and numbers are all that institutions are about.
- Interesting that the CCYA that is responsible for connecting aboriginal youth with initiatives such as drop in centers etc. 22 million dollar budget was cut while we have an existing 28 million dollar budget for historical re-enactment.

## **Self-determination**

- We want to make the institution fit the student not the student fit the institution.
- I would like to discuss self-determination, self-control, setting goals, and taking control of the process of indigenizing.

## **Communities**

- How do we get communities more involved education and language preservation?  
There seems to be a disconnect between communities and educational institutions

## **Language Preservation**

### **Aboriginal Education**

- The process of aboriginal education is improving but very slowly. Only recently, aboriginal people were limited to a grade 5 education. It is only this generation that sees aboriginal people at university. Unfortunately, there is only a 50% graduation rate for aboriginal students from the k-12 system. However, aboriginal students who complete their undergraduate degrees are considerably more likely to go onto higher degrees than the average population.
- I am here to network and bring back knowledge and teaching techniques to work with aboriginal youth
- Just because learning was uncomfortable for me does not mean that I need to make it uncomfortable for my students. I try very hard to create compassionate, genuine, reciprocal relationships with my students.
- Complete your schooling! By completing it you are making it easier for the aboriginal student following you.
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### **Academic Knowledge**

- I am here to be able to learn from the collective knowledge base so I can improve my practice as an academic

### **Voice/Silencing/communication**

- How to indigenize within a euro-centric environment – For example, administration approved of a pow-wow on campus but only if they did it quietly.



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- It is important that we are aware that the vocabulary we use has different meaning and different impact on different people.
- Most of the time I am surrounded by non-aboriginal voices. To be here and to listen to aboriginal voices fills me; it creates energy for me that I will take forward.
- How can we share our truth?

### **Aboriginal youth**

- I am here to network and bring back knowledge and teaching techniques to work with aboriginal youth

### **Criminal Justice system**

- When looking at other systems that have attempted to indigenize such as the criminal justice system or the child protection system we see that once the process was in place it was actually worse off. We need to look at those systems and ensure we do things differently. We must be very careful as we move forward.

### **Child Protection System**

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### **Teacher-Student Relationships**

- Just because learning was uncomfortable for me does not mean that I need to make it uncomfortable for my students. I try very hard to create compassionate, genuine, reciprocal relationships with my students.

### **Aboriginal-non aboriginal relations/engagement**

- Often we find ourselves as lone aboriginal students in a class where comments or misconceptions are shared and we are the only ones who can say something about it. Sometimes I have the energy to fight, sometimes I don't.

- I don't like when non-aboriginal people will not engage in conversation about aboriginal topics because they "don't know anything" they should go out and meet people and learn.
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### **Indigenization of Professions' world views**

- We need more professionals, doctors, lawyers etc. that understand the culture and the history. They will have a different world view that will help to indigenize.

### **Eurocentrism**

- How to indigenize within a euro-centric environment – For example, administration approved of a pow-wow on campus but only if they did it quietly.
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