

Towards A Pedagogy for Reconciliation-Indigenization: What it is and Why it Belongs in the ESL Classroom

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Description

This 16-page article provides a rationale for including indigenous voices in the ESL curriculum, along with the challenges of doing so and suggestions for best practices.

Salient Points

Despite the move to integrate Indigenous perspectives in higher education institutions, the notion of doing so in the ESL curriculum has been met with resistance and discomfort. In this article, the author argues that Indigenous voices and perspectives must be included in ESL/EAP curriculum. She begins with a definition of "Indigenization" and a discussion of the Medicine Wheel and the seven sacred teachings.

The author recognizes that most ESL teachers are settlers, not Indigenous, and as such, are not experts. However, they can take on the role of allies as they look for input from Indigenous knowledge keepers and colleagues.

As well, the author argues that Indigenizing the curriculum is part of the ethical responsibility of educators. We model respect for our learners, along with intercultural understanding, reflection, and perspective taking as we expose them to issues of injustice, inequity, racism, and privilege. Language teaching is inherently political, and teachers hold positions of power in the classroom. Settlers and colonialism are not just historical topics – immigrants are also settlers as they participate in and benefit from colonial culture. Uncritical presentations of Canada and Canadian history do learners a disservice. Instead, Indigenous voices can have a place in the ESL classroom with support from Indigenous colleagues and the Elders. The author discusses the difference between Indigenous world views and colonial worldviews (e.g., related to land and time), and implications of this in how knowledge is gained and passed on (e.g., oral transmission, storytelling, and incorporation of traditional sources of knowledge).

Drawing on the literature, the author suggests best practices for implementing Indigenous perspectives in the ESL classroom. Some of her suggestions include mandatory professional development with Indigenous facilitators as resource speakers, comparing mainstream and Indigenous views of history and current events, including Indigenous voices (speakers/authors), and using Indigenous teaching approaches such as talking circles and storytelling activities. Other suggestions involve encouraging a critical and analytical stance when looking at resources, culture, and even grammar (e.g., the use of the passive voice).

Questions for Reflection

As you read this article, consider the following questions:

- The author presents one iteration of the medicine wheel: the Gifts of the Four Directions (See figure 1, page 33). Reflect on this medicine wheel, clockwise from the East to the North. Is there one quadrant that you privilege in your classroom? Are any of the quadrants absent? How can you incorporate the worldview represented by this medicine wheel to promote a more interconnected and holistic pedagogy?
- As mentioned on page 36, colonialism not only happened in the past but is replicated in the present through institutions, ideologies, and epistemology. What can you do (or what do you do) to make sure you are not continuing to propagate this colonial worldview in your teaching context?
- As mentioned on page 40, ESL teachers must be careful to avoid decontextualizing Indigenous experience from history. How will you ensure accuracy and balance, and avoid cultural appropriation, when handling Indigenous themes, stories and materials?

Keywords

Pedagogy, reconciliation, Indigenization, Indigenous voices, Elders

Reference and Links

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