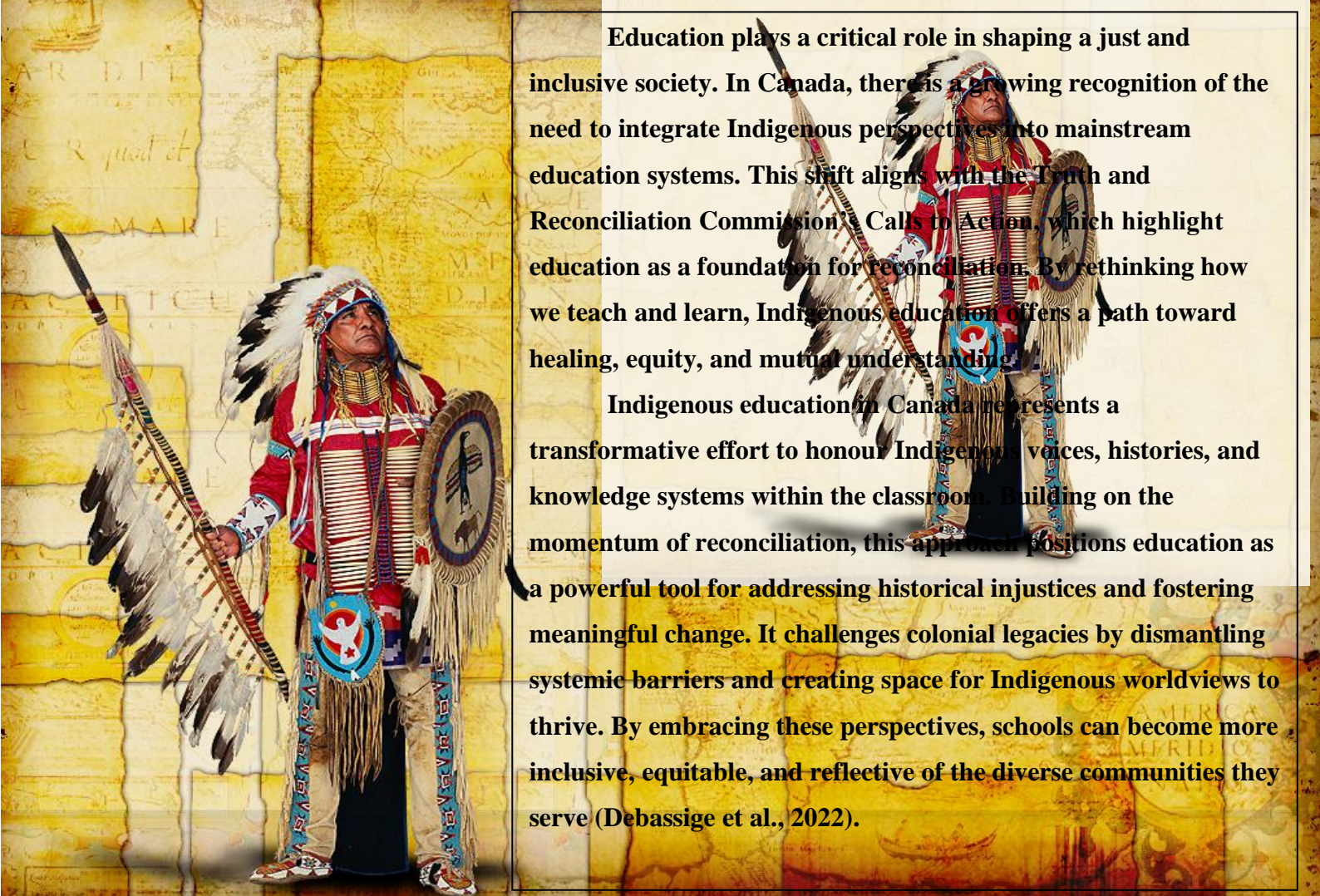


# INDIGENISING THE CURRICULUM



Donate to Indigenous Rights  
Organizations





Education plays a critical role in shaping a just and inclusive society. In Canada, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate Indigenous perspectives into mainstream education systems. This shift aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, which highlight education as a foundation for reconciliation. By rethinking how we teach and learn, Indigenous education offers a path toward healing, equity, and mutual understanding.

Indigenous education in Canada represents a transformative effort to honour Indigenous voices, histories, and knowledge systems within the classroom. Building on the momentum of reconciliation, this approach positions education as a powerful tool for addressing historical injustices and fostering meaningful change. It challenges colonial legacies by dismantling systemic barriers and creating space for Indigenous worldviews to thrive. By embracing these perspectives, schools can become more inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the diverse communities they serve (Debassige et al., 2022).

## WHAT DOES INDIGENIZING THE CURRICULUM MEAN IN CANADA?

Indigenizing the curriculum in Canada refers to transforming educational content and teaching practices to meaningfully include Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and pedagogies. This process goes beyond simply adding Indigenous content; it aims to challenge and reshape the Eurocentric foundations of Canadian education, centering Indigenous voices, histories, and worldviews [2 4 8](#).

## CHALLENGES

Despite progress, institutional barriers still hinder the full implementation of Indigenization efforts. Many institutions depend on part-time staff or isolated individuals to lead these initiatives, which limits their long-term sustainability. Resistance to systemic change and to addressing colonial legacies continues to pose a significant obstacle. Additionally, a lack of comprehensive resources and educator training often prevents the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous content (University of Alberta, 2018). These challenges highlight the need for sustained support and strategic planning in driving meaningful curriculum reform.

# 1. KEY APPROACHES TO INDIGENIZING THE CURRICULUM

## OPPORTUNITIES

Policy frameworks such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples offer strong foundations for curricular change. Collaborative approaches that actively involve Indigenous communities promote authenticity, respect for cultural traditions, and reciprocal learning. For instance, BC campus's *Pulling Together* series offers free, practical resources to support postsecondary institutions in integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into their practices (BC campus, n.d.). Innovative strategies—such as mandatory Indigenous history courses and interdisciplinary models—have shown promise in fostering deeper engagement with Indigenous perspectives.

Research identifies five predominant approaches within Canadian universities:

- Including Indigenous knowledges and perspectives across disciplines, not just in specialized courses.
- Capacity building through curriculum support and informal learning/unlearning opportunities for both educators and students.
- Mandatory Indigenous course requirements for all students.
- Increasing Indigenous autonomy by creating and elevating Indigenous-led programs and offices.
- Building partnerships with Indigenous organizations to guide and inform curricular change<sup>5</sup>.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive and are often implemented in combination.

## CURRENT PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

While many institutions have made efforts to indigenize their curricula, most changes to date have been minor reforms focused on individual transformation rather than deep, structural change. There remains a significant power imbalance, with the burden of adaptation often falling on Indigenous peoples within predominantly Euro-Western institutions <sup>4 5</sup>. Meaningful indigenization calls for:

- Centering Indigenous peoples, lands, and knowledges in curricular change.
- Ensuring Indigenous leadership and autonomy in decision-making.
- Moving beyond token inclusion to substantive structural revision <sup>4 5</sup>.



# CLASSROOM STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS IN INDIGENOUS STUDIES

## ACTIVITY 1: PLACE-BASED LEARNING THROUGH LAND EXPLORATION

### Inherent & Treaty Rights

- Supports research into differing worldviews and understandings of the land
- Explores rights and responsibilities to the land
- Supports activism and advocacy



### Engaging

- Seeks locally developed learning possibilities and potentials
- Encourages a sense of play & explorations on the land
- Teaches communication and collaboration skills

### Inquiry-Based

- Supports inquiry and reflection
- Encourages deeper questions & imagination to solve real world problems
- Supports capacities for students and teachers to engage in project based learning

## LEARNING THE LAND



### Culture & Language

- Language and culture revitalization efforts take place in relation to the land
- Supports local protocols, ceremonies, and cultural teachings



tānitê ohci kiya?  
Ānti wēnciyan?  
Dókiyadahq yahi?

### Where are you from?

- A place-based learning focus.
- Honours local environments.
- Builds sense of self within community.



wahkohtowin  
Mamowi-manachitiwin  
Ugi-daguchiabi

### Connections

- Explores interconnections within all of Creation.
- Bridges connections between Indigenous & scientific worldviews.



māmawi-okāwīmāw  
Māmawi okīnān  
Ina Makoce

### Mother Earth

- Content is connected to the land and its teachings.
- Explores *Mother Earth* and its teachings.
- Follows seasonal practices.

Indigenizing the curriculum involves:

- Understanding the diversity of Indigenous peoples, languages, and cultures.
- Incorporating Indigenous perspectives and pedagogical approaches.
- Critically examining and transforming existing content and teaching methods to reflect Indigenous worldviews<sup>1 2 8</sup>.



**OBJECTIVE:**

To connect students with Indigenous ways of knowing by exploring the relationship between land and knowledge.

**RATIONALE:**

Indigenous knowledge systems have their roots in the earth. Students that are exposed to nature as teachers are better able to comprehend how Indigenous peoples see their environment. This activity emphasises indigenous educational concepts such as community, environmental respect, and experiential learning.

**MATERIALS:**

Accessibility to an outside place, such a school, playground, woodland, or open area. A notebook or journal for every pupil.

If possible, an Indigenous elder or information keeper will lead the exercise.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

Continue by discussing in class the importance of land for Indigenous cultures. Explain how land is not just a geographical place but also an expression of individuality, knowledge, and spirituality.

Give instances of how Indigenous groups transmit information (such as seasonal cycles and traditional ecological knowledge) through land-based learning.

**OUTDOOR EXPLORATION:**

Take students outside to a natural setting. If possible, invite an elder or knowledge keeper to guide the activity. Students may learn from the guide the value of indigenous animals, plants, or ecosystems (e.g., medicinal applications of plants or sustainable hunting practices). Children ought to be encouraged to focus on what they view, hear, and feel in their surroundings and to consider how these relate to the globe.

**REFLECTION:**

After returning to school (or while still outside), ask pupils to write about what they experienced in their journals. Some such prompts are:

- What did you take away from this experience?
- What relevance does this have to your knowledge of indigenous belief systems?
- How might this approach differ from traditional classroom learning?

**CLASS DISCUSSION:**

Group discussion by encouraging students to work on their reflection. Emphasise how this exercise relates to more general curriculum subjects like history or environmental science.

## ACTIVITY 2: STORYTELLING CIRCLE

### OBJECTIVE:

To educate students about the traditions that are used by indigenous people as teaching.

Reason: Storytelling communicates histories, culture and lessons from one generation to the next. This activity develops empathy and critical skills among students.

### MATERIALS:

A comfortable seating arrangement. (to create an positive atmosphere). Stories from Indigenous authors or elders (can be written, audio-recorded, or video-recorded).

Audio-visual tools for remote learners if necessary.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Begin by explaining the importance of storytelling in Native American cultures. Explain that stories can be used in developing ethics, traditions and culture. Use examples of popular Indigenous stories or traditions, such as The Seven Grandfather Teachings.

### SESSION OF STORY TELLING

If possible, invite an elder from indigenous group to tell story. If that is not possible then read aloud a story from indigenous author book or play a recorded video. Ensure that everyone listens carefully.

### OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSIONS:

Discuss about the take aways after this story. By asking thought provoking questions like. What is the lesson of this story?

What themes, such as community, or respect for nature, are connected to this story?

How can storytelling be connected to the modern education?

### CREATIVE APPLICATION:

Ask students to create their own stories from their learning. Students can share their stories with the class.



## ACTIVITY 3: COLLABORATIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN

### OBJECTIVE:

To engage students to prepare lesson plans that integrate Indigenous perspectives into various subjects.

### RATIONALE:

This activity encourages students to think critically about how indigenous values can be used in modern education. This encourages creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills in students.

### MATERIALS:

Curriculum guidelines or examples from subjects like math, science, history, or literature.

Access to online research tools (e.g., academic articles on Indigenous education frameworks).

Collaboration platforms such as Google Docs or Microsoft Teams.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Begin by discussing why it is important to indigenize curricula in modern education systems. Highlight examples where Indigenous perspectives have been successfully integrated into various subjects (e.g., using traditional ecological knowledge in environmental science).

### GROUP WORK SETUP:

Divide students into small groups and assign each group a subject (e.g., math, science, literature).

Provide them with resources such as curriculum documents and examples of indigenized lesson plans.

### LESSON PLAN CREATION:

Ask each group to design a lesson plan that include an Indigenous perspective into their assigned subject.

### EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

**Math:** Exploring traditional measurement systems used by Indigenous communities.

**Science:** Studying sustainable practices like crop rotation or fishing methods.

**Literature:** Analyzing works by Indigenous authors like Thomas King or Lee Maracle.

Groups should outline clear objectives, materials needed, and step-by-step instructions for their lesson plan.

### PRESENTATIONS AND FEEDBACK:

Have each group present their lesson plan to the class. Encourage constructive feedback from peers on how effectively the lesson integrates Indigenous perspectives.

### REFLECTION:

Conclude with a discussion on how these lesson plans align with reconciliation goals and contribute to decolonizing education.





In order to create transformative servant leadership (TSL), the inspiring and visionary aspects of transformational leadership are combined with the caring, follower-centered principles of servant leadership. This method is highly relevant to addressing educational difficulties like curriculum indigenisation since it places a strong emphasis on building connections, achieving shared goals, and promoting personal growth.

### THE USE OF TSL TO INDIGENISE THE CURRICULUM

By incorporating indigenous methods of being, doing, and understanding into educational practices, the course of study can become more indigenous. This calls for tearing down colonial notions and establishing culturally welcoming spaces that honour and represent Indigenous viewpoints. TSL ideas, which place a strong focus on empowerment, collaboration, and holistic development, can help leaders and educators navigate this process.

### LIVING OUT CALLING

By acting in accordance with their principles, transformative servant leaders demonstrate their commitment to social justice and equity. Promoting systemic change is necessary to indigenise the curriculum and truly include indigenous perspectives into educational frameworks (Shaw et al., 2018). Leaders must back legislation that focusses on Indigenous viewpoints in curriculum development.

### BUILDING CHARACTER

At TSL, ethical management and integrity are highly regarded. By speaking with Elders, employing conventional teaching techniques, and creating an atmosphere that encourages reciprocal learning, leaders can show their admiration for cultural traditions (Tegelberg, n.d.). This method fosters trust and guarantees that indigenous development initiatives are authentic rather than symbolic.



## **DEVELOPING CHEMISTRY**

TSL places a strong emphasis on developing relationships. In order to co-create curriculum that represent Indigenous people's history, languages, and worldviews, leaders can form collaborations with these groups (Brunette-Debassige, 2022). Working together makes sure that teaching methods appeal to Indigenous students while also enhancing the educational process for everyone.

## **DEVELOPING COMPETENCY**

Effective TSL leaders focus on both personal growth and organizational performance. In indigenizing education, this involves equipping educators with the skills to integrate Indigenous knowledge effectively. Professional development programs can help teachers unlearn colonial biases and adopt inclusive pedagogies (Learning Bird, 2024).

## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

There are obstacles to overcome while implementing TSL principles to indigenise the curriculum. Progress may be impeded by structural hurdles, resource scarcity, and resistance to change. But by empowering stakeholders, promoting a common vision, and emphasising long-term effects over immediate profits, TSL offers a framework for resolving these challenges (EdCan Network, 2024).

Initiatives to increase instructors' ability, cooperation with Indigenous organisations, and mandated Indigenous course requirements are all promising strategies (Brunette-Debassige, 2022). TSL's emphasis on communal success and holistic growth is in line with these tactics. Systemic obstacles, resource scarcity, and resistance to change can impede advancement. But by encouraging a common goal, empowering stakeholders, and putting long-term effects ahead of immediate profits, TSL offers a framework for resolving these challenges (EdCan Network, 2024).

Compulsory Indigenous course requirements, instructor capacity-building programs, and forming alliances with Indigenous organisations are examples of promising strategies (Brunette-Debassige, 2022). These tactics complement TSL's emphasis on group achievement and holistic development.

The sources describe a **symposium on Indigenizing Teacher Education** held in July 2018, which aimed to explore ways to create learning environments that respect Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The event resulted in a summary report with key findings and recommendations, including visuals and graphic recordings (Bradd, 2019).



An efficient framework for tackling the problems of indigenous educational development is offered by transformational servant leadership. The way schools' function might be drastically altered by TSL by promoting moral leadership, teamwork, and empowerment. The classroom becomes more inclusive and equitable for all students, while also increasing educational possibilities for Indigenous children.

## REFERENCES

- BCcampus. (n.d.). *Indigenization Project*. <https://bccampus.ca/projects/archives/indigenization/>
- BCcampus. (n.d.). *Pulling Together: A Guide for Indigenization of Post-Secondary Institutions*. <https://bccampus.ca/indigenization/>
- Bradd, Sam. (2019, October 19). Indigenizing teacher education - supported by Graphic Recording. Drawing Change. <https://drawingchange.com/resource/indigenizing-teacher-education-supported-by-graphic-recording/>
- Brunette-Debassige, C., & Gaudry, A. (2022). Mapping approaches to decolonizing and indigenizing the curriculum at Canadian universities: Critical reflections on current practices. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2022.13.3.14109>
- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). (2018). *Indigenizing Teacher Education – Summary Report*. [https://cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/390/SITE\\_2018\\_Report\\_no-marks\\_EN.pdf](https://cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/390/SITE_2018_Report_no-marks_EN.pdf)
- Debassige, C. B., Wakeham, P., Smithers-Graeme, C., Haque, A., & Chitty, S. M. (2022). Mapping Approaches to Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Curriculum at Canadian Universities : Critical Reflections on Current Practices, Challenges, and Possibilities. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 13(3), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2022.13.3.14109>.
- EdCan Network. (2024). Indigenizing education: Lessons from the north and a path forward without excuses. Retrieved from <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/indigenizing-education-lessons-from-the-north-and-a-path-forward-without-excuses/>
- Learning Bird. (2024). How to decolonize and indigenize your teaching. Retrieved from <https://learningbird.com/how-to-decolonize-and-indigenize-your-classroom/>
- Shaw, M., Firestone, S., Patterson, K., & Winston, B. E. (2018). Understanding how transformational servant leadership affects student leadership development in a higher education program in China. *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice*, 5(2), 13–40.
- Tegelberg, R. (n.d.). A journey of transformational-servant leadership [PDF]. Trinity Western University. Retrieved from [https://www.twu.ca/sites/default/files/mael\\_lip\\_-\\_rob\\_tegelberg.pdf](https://www.twu.ca/sites/default/files/mael_lip_-_rob_tegelberg.pdf)
- University of Alberta Research Summary (2018). *Indigenizing the Curriculum: From Challenges to Opportunities*. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1137&context=research-result-summaries>