

Indigenous Perspectives on Education

This module is meant to discuss the myriad of ways that 2SLGBTQ+ experiences can be included in Indigenous Education courses. For ideas regarding an Indigiqueered, paradigm-shifting approach, please see the [Indigiqueer](#) section of the website.

Many teacher education programs include a course that focuses on Indigenous perspectives or Aboriginal education, or other variations of material that addresses pedagogical, cultural, and/or traditional content from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis contexts/communities. Sometimes this takes a broad approach, focusing on histories of Indigenous peoples in Canada, and sometimes it is content or regionally specific, relating to language learning, cultural contexts/practices, or pedagogical approaches. This module has been written with a current instructor of Indigenous Perspectives/Aboriginal Education in mind, so some terminology may be new to those with a different teaching background.

Note: There are many Indigenous Teacher Education Programs (CATEP, ATEP, etc.) offered at various universities and colleges, which provide adapted timeline programs or Indigenous-specific focus for teacher education. We have integrated some Indigiqueer content throughout the modules, and there is also a more comprehensive section under development.

What does it mean to queer Indigenous Perspectives courses?

Indigenous Perspectives courses vary between institutions, but most include an overview of traditional models of Indigenous education, as well as an examination of the colonial project of schools as part of Canada's assimilationist policies. Queering Indigenous Perspectives courses means including content that reflects Two Spirit and Indigenous LGBTQ+ identities. This inclusion necessitates addressing the ongoing impact that colonization has had on Indigenous peoples' understandings of sexuality and gender, and the enforcement and normalization of heteropatriarchy. Prior to colonization, most Indigenous communities had views of gender and sexuality that included a spectrum of roles and identities (Wilson, 1996). Colonization's disruption of these understandings and enforcement of patriarchal attitudes towards women and gender non-binary/gender non-conforming people has contributed to the violence and marginalization of Indigenous cultures and people and is an act of epistemicide. Despite these major disruptions, Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous peoples have been part of decades of resurgence efforts across communities.

Why do we need to do this?

We are in a moment of change within education systems. Many universities have begun mandatory Indigenous content courses for all students, and provincial bodies are including more Indigenous perspectives within curriculum documents. Indigenous Perspectives courses within Bachelor of Education programs address Call to Action 62 issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, seeking funding so that all teacher education programs include Indigenous content. Teachers are less likely to teach Indigenous content they do not feel comfortable with or do not understand fully (Dion, 2012), so this inclusion in teacher education programs is deeply important for advancing the goal of reconciliation within the school system.

Indigenous youth in these systems face multiple intersections of oppression, and queer Indigenous youth can be affected at home by the same stigmatization and ostracization that non-Indigenous queer youth face (Wilson & Laing, 2018). By queering Indigenous Perspectives courses, we are asking educators to deliberately include the voices and stories of 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous peoples in a meaningful and transformative way.

How do we do it?

- *Social location.* Teacher candidates need a deep understanding of their own social location to guide them when they are teaching Indigenous content in their own classrooms. By examining and critiquing their own social locations, teacher candidates will be able to model this non-defensive understanding of different perspectives, and specifically the relationship that different types of social location (i.e., Indigenous to this land, settler, forcibly displaced person, etc.) have with teaching and learning Indigenous perspectives.
- *Examining bias.* When discussing queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous perspectives, teacher candidates will be asked to face their own inherent biases and understandings of 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous peoples. These biases, both conscious and unconscious, affect non-Indigenous and Indigenous, queer and straight teacher candidates alike due to our experiences with systems built to uphold heteropatriarchy. By setting time aside to discuss these learned biases and the ways in which taught heteropatriarchy reinforces ongoing colonial theft of land and epistemicide, students will be better equipped to negotiate conversations with colleagues and students once in their own classroom.
- *Connect with the community.* Bring in a Two-Spirit or queer/trans Indigenous community member who would be comfortable speaking about barriers and experiences within the education system. It is important to include contemporary Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+ perspectives and the ways in which our current systems are failing queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous students, instead of implying that this disruption occurred in the past by discussing it only in the context of the residential school system. If there are no available community members, there may be appropriate or recommended videos online.
 - *Note:* On occasion, students in Indigenous Perspectives courses may be very resistant to hearing these stories, due to their own prejudices and justifications of the colonial project. Community members should not be brought into a hostile classroom.
- *Word choice.* For those who have not taught this subject before, or who are non-Indigenous, this may not have been something you have interrogated before. Many Indigenous community members have had their perspectives impacted deeply by Judeo-Christian thought (Wilson & Laing, 2018). This is reflected in discussions of male/female gender roles in pre-colonial Indigenous communities, and the power of women being connected to being life-givers. For some, it is difficult to see these

comments as dangerous, instead of complimentary, but this continues to reinforce heteropatriarchal standards.

- *Note:* It is not appropriate for non-Indigenous teachers to question the teachings of Indigenous students within the class. Instead, bring in readings or speakers who demonstrate the vast multiplicities of understandings about sexuality and gender in Indigenous communities. See the suggested reading list below.
- *Correcting historical record.* In some Indigenous communities, negative attitudes/understandings of 2SLGBTQ+ identities have become so pervasive that LGBTQ+ identities/orientations themselves are seen as an imposition of colonialism. Valuing Two-Spirit and Indigenous queer/trans peoples means sharing stories and affirming historical attitudes. This can be done effectively through bringing in speakers, studying primary documents, and critically examining the perspectives that we have available in standard textbooks.
- *Step out of comfort zone.* Queer and trans Indigenous perspectives must be taught by all educators, even if they themselves are cisgender/heterosexual or non-Indigenous. Modelling the risk-taking and community-building nature of teaching other perspectives is deeply beneficial for teacher candidates. Demonstrate what accountable representation of other communities looks like by sharing ideas from queer and trans Indigenous peoples with full credit to those individuals, and encourage and be receptive to criticism or critique from queer and trans Indigenous peoples. Putting aside the “educator as expert” role and embracing humility in pedagogy will encourage teacher candidates to do the same in their future classrooms.
- *Practice activities.* Demonstrate exercises and activities centering Two-Spirit & Indigenous LGBTQ+ perspectives that teacher candidates can take to their classrooms. See the Teaching Activities section below for some ideas.

Teaching Activities

- In small groups, teacher candidates create case study profiles of prominent 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous peoples. Encourage students to profile educators, artists, doctors, leaders, politicians, and so on. Present each profile in either a conference-style presentation or a gallery walk.
- Create a timeline outlining the terminologies that Indigenous peoples used for themselves and the assigned names and anthropological labels that Euro-Canadian settlers have attached to these same groups. Include an analysis of these terms and terminologies, and what the consequences of each term were. Be sure teacher candidates include the term *berdache* as well as the emergence of *Two-Spirit*.
- Read and discuss the Wilson and Laing (2018) article “Queering Indigenous Education” and have each teacher candidate select two to three quotes to discuss as a group. These may be quotes that were impactful, or challenged previous conceptions, or reconciled those perspectives with the ones previously understood.

- Conduct a critical analysis of primary documents related to settler contact with 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous Peoples. An example could be to critically examine the John Tanner writings about Ozawindib, and compare to contemporary writings about Two-Spirit peoples (e.g., see [Pyle, 2019](#)).
- Bring a 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous knowledge holder into the classroom and invite them to share their perspectives on any of the usual content in the Indigenous Perspectives course. As noted above, be sure that the class will be a safe space for any knowledge holder before inviting them into that space.
- Explore Kenanow Learning Model, and other Indigenous education models ([First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model](#), [UCN's Kenanow Bachelor of Education program](#), etc.). Assign a typical lesson topic for the age range and design a lesson/set of lessons with the aim of teaching that content through the Kenanow model and centering 2SLGBTQ+ perspectives.
- Unpacking the 2SLGBTQ+ Backpack activity. Work with teacher candidates as a class to update, Indigenize, and queer the exercise created by Peggy McIntosh (e.g., [LGBTQ Toolkit: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)).
- Examine the ways in which family structure and understandings of gender and sexuality were targeted by colonization, and the repercussions of this intentional targeting.

Resources

- The University of British Columbia Xwi7x̓wa Library has created a guide to Two Spirit and Queer Indigenous resources, including academic and non-academic books, videos, collections of fiction and poetry, and published articles. [This guide can be found here: https://guides.library.ubc.ca/ld.php?content_id=35328191](https://guides.library.ubc.ca/ld.php?content_id=35328191).
- Two-Spirit Archives. <https://archives.uwinnipeg.ca/our-collections/two-spirit-archives.html>
- Video: “Two Spirits, One Voice” (16:27min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8XUCuuJPCc>
- Video: “Residential Schools’ Impact on Two-Spirit People” (6:21min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzT2ed8xRIU>
- Safe and Caring Schools for Two-Spirit Youth <http://www.safeandcaring.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Two-Spirited-Web-Booklet.pdf>
- Youth Podcast: Two-Spirit: Two Crees in a Pod featuring Prestin Thotin-awasis (43:00min) <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/embracing-my-two-spirit-journey-with-prestin-thotin-awasis/id1517083728?i=1000508997066>

References & Suggested Readings

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