

3QTL: Three Questions About Teaching and Learning

Episode 6 – How can we practice reciprocity?

Guest: Jessie Loyer

Description:

We rarely imagine the library to be a “rowdy” space, but for Jessie Loyer, unruliness and quiet contemplation can (and should!) coexist in our libraries. Drawing from her research on Indigenous information literacy and the Cree legal concept of “wâhkôhtowin”—the imperative to know your relatives—Jessie invites us to rethink what it means to “visit” a library, both ethically and relationally. How, as instructors, are we in a reciprocal relationship with not only our students, but also with the knowledge we acquire through research and those spaces in which we conduct it? How did the sudden shift to online teaching and learning transform our abilities to “visit”? And how might centering reciprocity in our classroom practices also surface the importance of care, compassion, and—perhaps most importantly—a pedagogy of cute cats?

Bio:

Jessie Loyer is Cree-Métis and a member of Michel First Nation. For over a decade, she was a librarian and associate professor at Mount Royal University and will step into a position with the University of Alberta in March 2024. Her research focuses on Indigenous information literacy, supporting language revitalization, and ongoing research relationships through kinship.

References:

- Lee, D. 2008. “Aboriginal Students in Canada: A Case Study of Their Academic Information Needs and Library Use.” *Journal of Library Administration* 33, nos. 3-4 (2008): 259-92. https://doi.org/10.1300/J111v33n03_07.
- Lee, D. 2011. Indigenous knowledge organization: A study of concepts, terminology, structure, and (mostly) Indigenous voices. *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research*, 6(1): 1-33. <https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v6i1.1427>
- Loyer, J. 2018. “Indigenous Information Literacy: Nêhiyaw Kinship Enabling Self-care in Research.” In *The Politics of Theory and the Practice of Critical Librarianship*, edited by Karen P. Nicholson and Maura Seale, 145-156. Sacramento: Library Juice Press.

Sound clips:

Excavation:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/bab1969a595c0534c56beb3fc5adbc2cb7cb98786ff8816288101c0af6bad66f/->

University classroom: <https://freesound.org/people/almalaut/sounds/377955/>

Footsteps: https://freesound.org/people/Caitlin_100/sounds/365617/

Chalkboard: <https://freesound.org/people/pogmothoin/sounds/401310/>

Computer clicking:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/db93d04de3383a4538cf1ae89718c0ea090dc00f822fff4c31a99f07defbc859/->

Mouse Scrolling: <https://freesound.org/people/MootMcnoodles/sounds/426340/>

Chair: <https://freesound.org/people/Dig2008/sounds/67239/>

Exhale:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/35e8c125cd2034e32ec00711d3986674b9cb750472072fbc8b879592ceca8c73/->

Transcription:

DERRITT MASON: [00:00:01] A note to our listeners that this episode contains some discussion of residential schools.

[Music theme in]

JESSIE LOYER: [00:00:16] Research is an emotional process. When my students are looking at things like residential schools, it isn't sort of an arm's length discussion. We're seeing our relatives' names in these records. We might be hearing a story for the first time about trauma that affects our own families. It really requires care and thoughtfulness.

DERRITT MASON: [00:00:36] Hello, I'm Derritt Mason. Welcome to "3QTL: Three questions about teaching and learning." This season, we're in conversation with post-secondary faculty from across disciplines, and our three questions focus on how the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped values and transformed classrooms, challenging faculty and students in extraordinary ways, while also sparking innovation. Our guest today is Jessie Loyer, a researcher and librarian at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada. Despite the many years I've spent in higher

education, my conversation with Jessie really challenged me to rethink the role of university libraries: in particular, how we might imagine the relationship between library and researcher as a reciprocal one. What does it mean, ethically and relationally, to visit a library? And what did visiting look like during the worst of pandemic lockdowns? As it turns out, things got a little unruly in Jessie's experience, but in a good way.

Hi, Jessie. Thank you so much for being here today. I know that you're joining us remotely from home while you are on leave. And I just want to say I so appreciate you taking the time. And I'm really, really looking forward to our conversation today.

JESSIE LOYER: [00:02:02] Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited too.

DERRITT MASON: [00:02:06] I've been looking forward to this opportunity because I think you're bringing a very refreshing and different perspective to the podcast. As a librarian, you connect more than one area of the teaching and learning experience, you collaborate with faculty and students, suggest paths for their research projects; you provide guidance to find resources and new questions to inform new inquiries. And you also have your own research interests that coexist with and support the research leadership that you provide. And I mean, in my view, this makes librarians such an important part of universities. I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind taking a minute just to introduce yourself to our listeners.

JESSIE LOYER: [00:02:42] So, my name is Jessie Loyer. I'm a librarian and a researcher at Mount Royal University. I've been there since 2012. I generally focus on Indigenous perspectives on information literacy. I think about the ways that we have reciprocal research relationships. I use a particular Cree perspective on it. That's kind of how my research has gone and has shifted and it takes different turns. But it's largely looking through the lens of relationality in the way that we understand and use and create information. It's kind of the broad way of thinking about it. I'm a member of Michel First Nation, I'm Cree Métis. Who I am and sort of the kind of legal traditions and the cultural perspectives on relationality come through in my research quite strongly, I would say.

DERRITT MASON: [00:03:30] Can you say more about what a reciprocal research relationship from a Cree perspective looks like?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:03:35] A lot of scholars are using the concept of wâhkôhtowin now. And so, wâhkôhtowin is a Cree legal concept. It's sort of a legal imperative to know your relatives. In knowing them, that's an active state. It's not just sort of listing a kinship term, but it is: how are these relationships enacted? In a sort of an anthropological sense, sometimes it pops up like, you know, what's your relationship to your cross-cousins or to your mother's brother or to your grandparents. For example, there's a particular relationship that exists between a great-grandparent and a great-grandchild -- nicâpân; they call each other the same name. But it

extends beyond a family unit, that sort of anthropological kinship sense. It used to be used in trade during the fur trade, but it's used in sort of educational spaces now, and thinking about the other people that are part of our communities. I use particularly wâhkôhtowin while thinking about what do librarians have relationships to, and so, primarily to our students, that we help think through the questions that they have, but also the instructors who are directing those questions; to the information itself, right; to the information that we're familiar with. It's relationality, kind of in its biggest, most expansive sense, but very much in terms of the action between all those kinds of components.

DERRITT MASON: [00:04:53] As you know, this is a teaching and learning podcast. What does teaching and learning look like for you?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:04:59] So, librarians at Mount Royal University essentially function as guest lecturers. We're invited into people's classes. There will be an assignment that requires some sort of research. So, we come in and tailor our teaching to that research. So, if someone is doing an essay, for example, we kind of train students in thinking through where they would find information on this topic. What kinds of databases might be useful to you? How do you think through this concept? How do we need to think about other terms for that? But it doesn't have to be just essays, right? Things that you might be familiar with. I do all kinds of guest lectures on all kinds of stuff. I work with anthropology as well. Sometimes we're looking at, you know, how do you take information from gravestones and then find out what were the pandemics of the time that might have changed why people died at this age or in this way? It's really interesting, because it means that we kind of have a really expansive sense of how to help people make meaning from the information that they require to do their assignments. It keeps me excited because it's different every day. So that's what my teaching sort of looks like. And then of course, doing one-on-ones with students. Occasionally, I will be there to support faculty research as well, too. That's sort of my bread and butter.

DERRITT MASON: [00:06:26] So, as part of our podcast, we ask every guest three standard questions. And the first question is, I'm curious to know what the core value were that guided your teaching and learning practice or your practice as a librarian before COVID. And how, if at all, you found these values shifting during the pandemic.

JESSIE LOYER: [00:06:44] So, I would say that that sort of reciprocal care relationship was really central to my practice, from probably the first or second year that I was at Mount Royal. I was kind of drawing from Deborah Lee's discussion. She's an Indigenous librarian who works in Saskatchewan. She was thinking about the ways that the library is reciprocal with students or not, right? And in many cases, the library fails to be reciprocal. Students show up to the library, they are enriching the library, but the library fails to meet them. And so, it's thinking through how do we do better forming that relationship? So, that was a big part of how my

teaching was structured, right? It is thinking about the fact that when I'm engaging with students, it's not a one way, me kind of dumping information into their brains, but I'm enriched by what they're asking. It helps the collection grow because their questions are growing our collection. It's helping me kind of think about what do I need to learn about, and really just kind of broadly helping us have a better sense of the information that's required in the programs that we have. So, that reciprocal care was really important. The other component of it is that research is traumatic sometimes. Research is an emotional process. It's not sort of just a mental robotic situation, but sometimes we're engaging with material that's really hard. Talk about pandemics. It makes you weary to think through all of the ways that this is weighing on us, being aware of checking in on our kind of emotional status. How are we feeling about this? How do we kind of build breaks within it, that was a big part of what I did. Partially because I'm coming from an Indigenous studies support area, when my students are looking at things like residential schools. It isn't sort of an arm's length discussion. We're seeing our relatives' names in these records, right? We might be hearing a story for the first time about trauma that affects our own families. And so, it really requires that care and thoughtfulness and how do we do self-care as part of the research process? That really guided my teaching and learning kind of before COVID.

DERRITT MASON: [00:08:41] Did you find this shifting at all? I'm so curious to hear.

JESSIE LOYER: [00:08:45] It was a big shift, I would say. So much of that sensibility about care requires visiting, right? It requires the ability to sit with people. As librarians, we step into a relationship that people already have with the library before they ever meet us, or they have a sense of what the library is. We step into that. That persists long after we have a class with them or a session with them. Similarly, at least for Indigenous students, I would see them in the community before they ever knew me as a librarian. And I see them now after they graduated and have kids, and there's sort of this continuation of a relationship. We step into a stream that's already running. So, with COVID, for me, it felt like a lot of that just paused; there was a real break. It was hard to get back into it to understand what visiting looks like online. You know, what does it mean for me to connect with people and to do classes online? There's a different kind of intimacy in some ways. You know, I think we're being invited into people's living rooms and bedrooms, and we see their babies and their pets. And so, the intimacy and care of the relationship still exist, but it was really different. And because of the need to feel connected, I would say that I was really missing that sort of visiting component. When we're on Zoom, it's very structured, it has a start time, the end time. After the meeting is done, we don't linger or walk somewhere together, or visit in that way, we're sort of done, and then we're suddenly alone. So, it was really missing that visiting component in Cree, the concept of kiyokewin goes hand in hand with wâhkôhtowin. So kiyokewin is visiting. The way that we visit, it's one of the action components that animates wâhkôhtowin. So, when you don't have that, you're sort of missing one of the processes that wâhkôhtowin exists within. I really felt like I was missing

that process of visiting and like, what does visiting look like online? I really like a rowdy class. I like a class where people are talking to each other. I'll get them to pair up and work in groups, get them to walk around and think together. Because I think, like so often, we think about research as a solitary process. And it rarely is. So, I would say that I missed that sort of rowdy class dynamic. I didn't see people talk to each other, sometimes in the chat that would happen. But yeah, I really struggled with having people connect to each other and with me when I was teaching online like that.

DERRITT MASON: [00:11:13] I'm curious. Did you experiment or try out any methods to reproduce visiting online? And were they successful or not?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:11:21] I tried to have Google Docs as sort of a space of connection and communication and collaboration because, you know, I definitely was using boards, where you can talk to each other and get into groups. It's a little hard to do in a Zoom space. Sometimes, the chat will work like that. But I was using either Google Docs or Jamboards for those spaces where people could have more informal conversations. Truly, my favorite thing is when somebody writes something, I would say that is not the correct answer but it's a bit cheeky, and I kind of love that. So, I have a class where I've asked them: what are some synonyms for Indigenous. Because that's one of our biggest challenges in this area, right? How do we think about all the ways that Indigenous people have been named by others and named by ourselves? And so, I always think it's really cute when Indigenous students will use joke, cute little terms for ourselves. They'll use like "NDN," chat shorthand for "Indian." I'm always really charmed by that or even sometimes, more in group terms, that probably the rest of the class is a bit shocked by but I'm quite charmed by. I was happy to see the sort of cheeky ways that they were able to slide into that, instead of it being very prescriptive, right? "Oh, we're just going to answer your question." So, if I could see some of that dynamic, it was a little bit of a sense of connection in a way that I was really seeking out.

DERRITT MASON: [00:12:44] Yeah, you were able to reproduce some of the unruliness of your in-person classroom on Jamboards. Did you invite it, specifically? Were you like, feel free to be unruly, feel free to be cheeky or did they just kind of find their way to a natural cheekiness?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:12:55] I think you'll find this in any class, right? It really depends on the class dynamic. There are some classes that are like, "we are rule-followers, and we're here to answer this question." There are other classes that you like, have to pull them back from it. Sometimes, I would leave a space and just be like, you know, tell me a joke. Or if I had an extra Jamboard that accidentally opened up, I'd be like, draw me a picture in here. And I don't know if it was just people being home with their pets all the time, but people would often draw me cats, or maybe that's easy to draw online, right? You can easily do it with your mouse, but it was really sweet. People have a sense of what the library is too, right? A sort of space of

meditation or contemplation, this quiet reverence. And I think that, so often, in libraries are places where information is being created, there is a rowdiness to that space. It's not always exactly what people imagined. That's sort of the sweet spot that I live in.

DERRITT MASON: [00:14:03] We've addressed some of this already, but I'm curious to know if there's more you'd like to say about what helped your teaching and learning and librarian practice during COVID and what hindered it the most?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:14:15] One of the things that was challenging for librarians around COVID was that our collections essentially became closed stacks. So, open stacks and libraries are where people can peruse whatever they'd like, they can take books off the shelf. Closed stacks are where you make requests, and the librarian goes and finds you something brings it back. Academic libraries are frequently open stacks, encouraging people to kind of browse and check things out and get familiar have their own relationship with this space. We couldn't do that because people were off-campus. And so, people really had to almost already know what the collection could offer them and specifically request individual items. And so that's a change in our behavior, right? It's a change in the way that we relate to people. That was a really hard thing to adjust to. I would say that for support in this area, it was so helpful to see what other people were doing. Because I think for so many of us, we were being thrown into a space where all of a sudden, we had to learn a whole bunch of new tools in zero time. We go from teaching in person to the next week teaching online, right? When usually, that would be a much longer process, and you'd be trying out things, and you'd be sort of getting yourself in a different pedagogical space. We didn't have the time to do that. I really benefited from coming back and seeing people using different tools, especially collaborative tools. I did this sort of teaching triangle with a colleague at the U of C [University of Calgary] and one at the U of A [University of Alberta], where we sat in on each other's classes to see what they looked like. And so, we were just in the Zoom with them. I really loved that because, you know, you get into your own rhythm of teaching, you think you know what works for you. And then you see someone else doing something and you are like, "I want to do that, that looks so fun, or like that worked, that really worked!" That was so exciting to see the way that other people were responding to the challenge of the screen, right, this lack of visiting and the inability to connect in the same way.

DERRITT MASON: [00:16:08] Were there any tools that stood out for you in these experiences, being particularly useful, that you've incorporated into your own practice?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:16:15] I saw someone use a Jamboard, and I was like, "This is so great, we can move stuff around, you know." I'd used Google Docs in the past as a collaborative shared note space. But there's a linearity to that. You have a start of a document, you have an end of a document. A Jamboard with the ability to like,

move stuff around and clump things. Sometimes, I had students, if I was doing a brainstorm, I would get them to pop all kinds of information in. But then I would say, you know, if you're a student who likes organization, and that's something that satisfies you, feel free to start to organize other people's thoughts. Because for me, it doesn't bother me. But I know for some of you, like, "this is the same answer here and here. Why are they over here? Let's bring them into the corner together." So, to be able to give people the ability, to say "you find your joy, I know some of you are going to love organizing this." I found that reflective questions are really helpful, too, because then I was getting to sort of that more emotional component of research. I do this discussion number around reading where we talked about when we're reading texts, we're always in conversation with them. And so, what were questions you had at the start of the text, and then as you come to the end of this reading, were those questions answered, why or why not? So, allowing people to do that sort of meta-analysis of their own work, of their own reading and their own research. So that reflective questions kind of could bring up a little bit more of that emotional care component of my work, that I was finding really hard to connect to. I saw someone do it. And I was like, "Ah, yes, let's discuss our feelings."

DERRITT MASON: [00:17:47] So, you would ask reflective questions, not only based on a reading that students were doing but also just how folks were doing at a given moment in time, I guess.

JESSIE LOYER: [00:17:56] Yeah, checking in to see. In some classes, especially higher-level research classes, I'll see them multiple times throughout the class. And so, we're saying, "what are you bringing from the class that we just had? How are you feeling about that? What's missing? If you don't remember, that's fine. Tell me you don't remember. It is anonymous, so I can't tell who's telling me this. But I want to know kind of where you're at. And if you're hanging on to this information. We're in a pandemic. I mean, you are in school, which is already a brave thing to be doing in a traumatic life experience like this."

DERRITT MASON: [00:18:27] Can I ask how students responded? Were they receptive to these questions and willing to share?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:18:32] Yeah, I think it really was a spectrum. I would say that for some students, they're like, "I don't want to turn a camera on. I'm not gonna put anything in the chat. I'm basically just soaking up information." And, like, yeah, I think that's fair. I think we deal with information, especially when you think about information overload, we were all kind of zoomed out. So, for those students, I was like, "I get that." And then for other students, I think they were craving that level of intimacy. They were inviting me into their homes when we had individual consultations. I would talk to their kids when they would be popping into the frame. For those students, that discussion around emotional care and their own emotional relationship to their research, I think was really essential. It was, in many ways, a space that they weren't being able to articulate in other places. But to be able to do

a little bit of that visiting, offering them the space to have an emotional reflection, I think, was a rare opportunity for them. I really liked it. I think that the ones who wanted to and could articulate it, got the benefit of it.

DERRITT MASON: [00:19:35] I love that return to visiting too, that you just kind of bookmarked this conversation with because visiting, as a kind of checking in that can take place in digital spaces, and in addition to the physical visiting that's so important that we do face to face.

JESSIE LOYER: [00:19:49] I think the intimacy of it is so interesting because I think that that's also really tiring. When we talk about visiting and care, it requires more of us; it requires not more, but a different part of us. And so, in a time when we were already really fatigued, to ask a little bit more emotional care, emotional awareness, like, it is a lot to ask of people. It's also sort of asking people to do something that you don't want to do always, like, if you're in a workshop, and you're like, "I don't want to answer this question." I'm like, "Yes, yet I'm asking all these students to do the same." So, it requires a lot of vulnerability from me, in asking them to be vulnerable too.

DERRITT MASON: [00:20:47] Jessie, if there's one thing that you started doing that was brand new during the pandemic that you think you're going to keep doing into the future, what would it be?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:20:55] By risk of hyping up Google too much, but Jamboard was really helpful to me. It really was so useful to sort of have a nonlinear way to have student feedback that was anonymous, but also encouraged interaction where you could interact with other people's thoughts and move them around, do that kind of thing. Because I think it was a useful way of trying to get to how we think through things in groups, in person, which, for me, is so important to how we do research. Because, again, research doesn't happen in a solitary manner. It's happening in the way that we have conversations with people, you know, even when we're reading, we're in relationship with that reading that we're engaging in, and all the history of it and who else is taking it on. So, we're stepping into this relationship that already exists. I think that sort of space of connection, that was really helpful for me to think through, like, "Oh, I could use this in the future, even when we're going to be kind of in person again, but this is such a good way to help certain people have that element of collaboration, especially if they're people that don't want to do that in person." I've continued to use it even today. I really like it as an engagement tool. And then people will draw me cute cats.

DERRITT MASON: [00:22:03] People draw you cats, they get unruly: the pedagogy of unruliness, if it doesn't already exist -- we'll have to Google it later -- we can trademark it here today. So, Jessie, we've covered the three questions that we normally invite our guests to answer. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:22:21] Yeah, I would say that when you can't physically be in a space where you're being asked to do everything, an online space, is asking students to do a level of assessment that we don't usually throw them into until later on in their research journey. So, for first-year students, we're often just kind of an introduction. These materials are not the same kind of materials that you regularly read online; they exist in a different context, you know, you're stepping into a different kind of way of reading. And so, we really try and ease them into it in the first year, we couldn't really do that in the same way. We were asking them to think about relevance and assessment at a much higher level than we usually do. Because we're like, there's so much misinformation out there. No one is walking you through sort of the step-by-step of what this research might look like. And it really was asking so much more of them. And I think that so many students rose to the challenge, but I think it also was a lot for them. For a fresh anthropology class, I would literally go, and we would look at physical atlases, you look at physical encyclopedias to be like, this is your starting place. Asking students to do a process of higher-level assessment, that was, I think, a real challenge. And one that I think many of them rose to that challenge. But it really required me to think through how I was trying to scaffold that way earlier than I would usually do it.

DERRITT MASON: [00:23:44] So, I know that currently, as we're recording in early 2023, you're on leave. And I'm wondering, going forward, when you return to the classroom, what are your priorities going to be in your interactions with students?

JESSIE LOYER: [00:23:57] I really am still drawn to that sort of emotional care component of information. We're so bombarded with information constantly that we don't even really check how it feels to us. I mean, the term "doomscrolling" is a great one to really capture that emotional component where we just are like on social media, just scrolling and being like, "why aren't I feeling any sense of satisfaction. I feel worse now than when I sat down to relax." Many people are starting to think through and articulate sort of the emotional component of the information that we engage in. We're looking at the news, we're looking at our social media, and we're looking at wherever we get information from. But when we do it in a really focused way with research, like if we're looking at an essay that people are writing, or they're pulling together research for a particular class, it's also asking people to engage in a space of research they might be unfamiliar with. With that comes trepidation and anxiety and all of the emotional components that people maybe aren't even ready for or can't articulate. So, part of my job is to think through how do we make this make sense to us? How do we manage it? How do we think through it? I'm not just seeing a student kind of one-on-one for one time. For me, it's a continuation of the library's experience in their life and the continuation of the student as a person, right, as they continue to be in the world, as opposed to just that one moment of connection that we have in a classroom. And so I want to give them tools to think through that outside of when they see me. For me, that's really honed in on how do I make visiting possible in different ways? How do I help

people think through what is emotionally sort of affecting them in their research? And really, how am I thinking through sort of that reciprocal part of it? How can I continue to be a good party to that reciprocal nature, as opposed to just like, “here’s information I’m dumping into you,” but what am I learning from it too? So those things, I think, are really coming in strong, as I think about being back in the classroom.

DERRITT MASON: [00:25:51] That’s so great. Thank you so much, Jessie. I’ve so enjoyed this conversation. I’ve learned so much from you. Thank you for being here.

JESSIE LOYER: [00:25:58] Yeah, thanks so much. I really enjoyed this too.

DERRITT MASON: [00:26:05] 3QTL is recorded at the University of Calgary, which is located on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in southern Alberta. The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis nation of Alberta, districts five and six. This episode was produced by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz, edited by Tarini Fernando, and features additional editing and sound design by Eric Xie, who also composed our music. Our consulting producer is Stacey Copeland. Support for 3QTL is provided by the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary and a generous financial gift from the Flanagan Foundation. I’m Derritt Mason, 3QTL’s host and executive producer. Thanks for listening, and we’ll see you again soon.

[Music out]

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> and copyedited by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz and Derritt Mason.