Building Community through Collaborative Learning

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Editors | TEACHING ACADEMY

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY | Teaching Academy

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About the Teaching Academy

The Teaching Academy is a community of instructors who have received a University of Calgary Teaching Award in recognition of their exemplary contributions to teaching and learning. The members of the Teaching Academy form a dynamic community of teaching and learning scholars from different ranks and disciplinary backgrounds, positioned to engage in and cultivate educational leadership at the University of Calgary. The collective depth and diversity of backgrounds and experiences allow engagement with the entire breadth of the teaching and learning community on campus, encouraging the free flow of ideas in a vibrant and dynamic network of educators and educational innovators. The Teaching Academy operates as a working group of professionals interested in supporting the development of teaching and learning expertise at the University of Calgary.

As demonstrated in this guide, the Teaching Academy is committed to communicating the importance of creating meaningful collaborative learning experiences in UCalgary classrooms.

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Contents

Foreword

On behalf of the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, I am pleased to present this guide on "Building Community through Collaborative Learning." This collection brings together the voices of accomplished, award-winning educators who share practical approaches for creating meaningful connections in post-secondary classrooms. The essays collected here demonstrate how intentionally designed collaborative activities—peer teaching, transdisciplinary projects, and structured reflective discussions, among others—transform learning spaces into communities where knowledge is co-created rather than merely transmitted. What strikes me about these approaches is how they deepen student learning by establishing genuine connection. When students engage with diverse perspectives and build upon shared insights, they develop not only subject knowledge but also essential capacities for empathy, critical dialogue, and collaborative innovation.
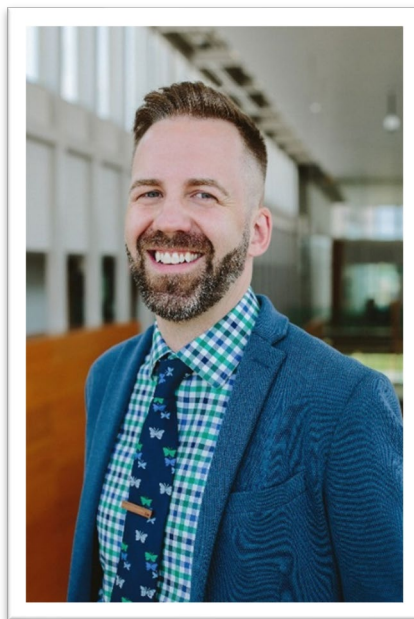
These practical strategies can be adapted across disciplines, class sizes, and teaching contexts. They offer alternatives to the isolating aspects of academic work that many of us have experienced. In a post-secondary landscape that sometimes overemphasizes individual achievement, these approaches remind us that learning is inherently social.

As a scholar trained in English Literature—a discipline that has traditionally celebrated individual intellectual pursuits—I've witnessed firsthand how solitary academic work can foster isolation. Yet by pushing myself to offer more opportunities for connection in my classrooms, I've discovered unexpected joy and deeper insights through collective knowledge-making. This transformation has extended beyond my teaching and motivated me to enrich my research by seeking out opportunities for partnership. My hope is that these thoughtful essays will not only inspire your classroom practices but also invite you to reimagine collaboration across all dimensions of your scholarly life.

I encourage you to explore these pages with an open mind and a willingness to experiment. The journey toward more collaborative classrooms may challenge some of our disciplinary traditions, but as these authors demonstrate, the rewards—for both our students and ourselves—are transformative.

Derritt Mason, PhD
Acting Senior Director,
Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning (2024-2025)

Introduction

The 2025 Teaching Guide produced by the Teaching Academy focuses on ways to build community through collaborative learning. The authors who contributed to this volume come from a range of different disciplines, such as architecture, planning, and landscape; medicine; kinesiology, social work, education, and the social sciences.

The nine chapters included in this guide explore how educators can facilitate collaborative learning among students to build cohesive learning communities (Chapters 1-5), how educators collaborate to engage students I community-building learning (Chapters 6 and 7), and how educators can collaborate to develop powerful learning experiences for students and other educators (Chapters 8 and 9).

In Chapter 1, the authors describe how they build community among learners through specific, collaborative learning exercises. Chapter 2 focuses on student peer-teaching while Chapter 3 explores using guided small group discussions to encourage students to collaboratively reflect and critique preparatory materials such as assigned readings. Chapter 4 describes how reflection circles and storytelling can create learning communities guided by collective care and a pedagogy of kindness. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on collaboration in a continuing education, non-credit creative writing class.

Collaboration among educators can provide valuable learning opportunities for students. Chapter 6 discusses interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues to engage students in transdisciplinary artwork. Chapter 7 illustrates the value of team teaching when facilitating collaborative and interactive learning about anti-Black racism.

Finally, the last 2 chapters focus on community building among educators to create learning materials for both students and other educators. Chapter 8 details how an interdisciplinary and international team collaborated to develop an international group study program to decolonize social work education. The final chapter discusses how the collaboration between researchers and educators lead to the development of teaching resources to aid educators in incorporating Indigenous knowledges into their teaching.

We would like to thank the authors for sharing their insights and teaching practices, and for providing suggestions how to implement their practices in our own teaching. We would like to thank the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning for their continued support of the Teaching Academy and its various activities, including the production of Teaching Guides.

Chapter 1:
Build it and they will come: A case study of a Postgraduate Certificate Program

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Context

With this case study we want to showcase specific teaching practices that seek to build and foster community through collaborative learning. Humans are social, interdependent beings relying on each other for identity construction, a sense of humanity, and purpose. Despite the potential alienation and hopelessness of these neoliberal times, instructors and students are looking for opportunities to collaborate and develop a collective identity. This case study outlines a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert LTHE) program in the United Kingdom and its collaborative design that helps instructors re-conceptualize teaching, learning, and assessment (TLA) as essentially collective, dialogic, and creative processes. The distinctive character of our PGCert program is that we do not teach about collaborative practice – but through it: it is an immersive, experiential, and empowering certified professional development program for educational professionals aimed at enhancing their educational practice. While the program is situated in a particular context, an inner-city, widening participation university in London, we use methods and methodologies to foster community that are universally applicable. We "de-school" (Illich, 1971) and "un-school" (Holt, 1981) via a playful, collaborative pedagogy that involves joint 'making'; project-based and -driven learning. We argue that with and through co-creation, personal and professional development can be enhanced, which, in turn, can enhance classroom practice and student outcomes. Outlined are specific collaborative examples from our

Facilitating Student Learning (FSL), Managing the Assessment and Feedback Process (MAF), and Curriculum Evaluation and Development (CED) courses, which constitute the PGCert LTHE program.

We argue that with and through co-creation, personal and professional development can be enhanced, which, in turn, can enhance classroom practice and student outcomes.

Background

The PGCert LTHE program is open to all instructors at London Metropolitan University (2024). It is accredited by AdvanceHE (https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/psf), a sector body that works with Higher Education (HE) across the world to improve higher education for staff, students, and society. This aligns the program to the Professional Standards Framework 2023 (Advance, 2023) requirements that identifies three sets of related Dimensions (Professional Values, Core Knowledge, Areas of Activity) that present, through Descriptors, a set of criteria statements against which instructors can evidence their practice. The PGCert LTHE program is thus a taught route within the University's Certified Professional Development (CPD) in Academic Practice scheme for new and experienced staff seeking professional recognition.

The PGCert LTHE program is offered annually, allowing instructors the flexibility to select courses that best meet their needs. The design of the three courses highlighted in this case study – FSL, MAF, and CED – is grounded in community building. This approach means that the TLA practices are informed by the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) on collaboration and co-creation (see, for example, Abegglen et al., 2023; Abegglen et al., 2021). Additionally, the program incorporates pedagogy that emphasizes collaborative academic practice and critical reflection, by both instructors and course participants, on the collaborative TLA practices employed and taught. Consequently, the PGCert plays a crucial role at the University in promoting "ambitious, inclusive, collaborative, creative" high-quality, inspirational TLA and scholarship (Centre for Teaching Enhancement, 2024).

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Focus

The PGCert LTHE program is designed to support instructors who aim to enhance their TLA practices – whether they are new to teaching in HE, transitioning into UK HE from other countries or industries, or seeking to explore new, more inclusive pedagogies. Its curriculum and pedagogy emphasize active, collaborative exploration of liberatory practices – holistic, creative, and playful approaches that prepare instructors to engage diverse students in inclusive and socially just ways, aligned with the ethos of "education for social justice" (London Metropolitan University, n.d.).

The FSL, MAF, and CED courses are specifically designed to challenge the deficit model that views widening participation students – those from disadvantaged backgrounds, low-income families, or non-traditional educational pathways – as "in need of fixing". Instead, instructors-as-learners engage in empowering practices within each course, where every class becomes an activity in co-creation. They are encouraged to apply the ideas and insights gained to their own teaching contexts, and to reflect on their experiences.

Thus, the PGCert LTHE program is not a stultifying dry theory but theory-in-action where instructors explore a range of contemporary and liberatory concepts through real-world, interactive classroom practice. Learning is further deepened through extensive individual reflection, collaborative dialogue, and meta-reflection, allowing participants to critically examine and refine their practices and knowledge. Additionally, the program fosters SoTL through its assessment tasks and methods, providing opportunities for action-based and practice-oriented research into TLA. This not only enhances teaching quality but also builds scholarship and research capacity across the University.

In the following community-building examples from each course are highlighted, with recommendations on how readers might adapt the TLA practices outlined to their own contexts.

Course Examples

Facilitating Student Learning (FSL): In this course, we aim to build a collaborative community even before the enrolled instructors-as-students arrive in the classroom by setting them: The Apron Challenge (Abegglen et al., 2020; Burns et al., 2021). The challenge asks participants to either create a "study apron" – a domestic shield or armor that reflects their thoughts and feelings about studying – or to design a study space within their home and share it with peers on the class Padlet for feedback and discussion. Building on this, every session involves small and large group challenges which are reflected upon in individual blogs, logs or journals that

are posted in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) such that the instructors-as-students are encouraged to read and comment on each other's posts. This approach fosters an environment of ongoing discussion and exchange. Each participant also reviews a peer's teaching and is observed in return, along with an instructor-led observation. This reciprocal process further promotes professional conversations on TLA practices, focusing on constructive dialogue rather than critical judgment. In the final, compulsory meta-reflection, participants are encouraged to consciously examine both the module's content and its collaborative approach, outlining strategies for integrating these collective practices into their own classrooms.

Managing the Assessment and Feedback Process (MAF): From the first (of seven) sessions, the instructors-as-students are introduced to collaborative project work. They are asked to form project groups – working together to research a topic designed to take the module learning forward. To increase the difficulty but also the creativity and joyfulness of this process – together they produce a multimodal artifact and a critical commentary for the assessment session (Session 06). On the journey, they co-develop the criteria by which the group presentations are assessed – and use these as they engage in 360-degree marking of the group presentations themselves. That is – each group self-assesses and is assessed by their peers and course instructors based on the collectively developed assessment criteria – with the final mark being an average of the whole (we recommend looking at Jesse Stommel, 2023, to learn more about alternative assessments and assessment processes). Whilst the final assignment is an individual project, participants are also asked to submit a reflection on the group work processes in which they have engaged – including considerations of how they will in turn scaffold successful group work and collaboration in their own TLA.

Curriculum Evaluation and Development (CED): Initially a more theoretical module, we re-formatted it such that the module content was divided up amongst the student groups – who then researched and refined their topic areas and presented back to the class as a whole. The rest of the learning is also driven by collaboration where Project Proposals and Draft Project Reports are developmentally peer reviewed and discussed in supportive and empathic ways. One component of the final assessment requires a reflection of the peer review process, which is formally evaluated receiving 20% of the overall course mark. Within this instructors-as-learners are encouraged to investigate and reflect upon peer learning approaches. How can we foster community and exchange in the classroom for learning?

Implications

We argue that collaborative experiences and collective action in HE are important to create new and more nuanced models of co-creation for academic community building. In these super complex, competitive and siloed times, we need to rediscover the power of the collective – and we need to recommit to each other, all those involved in the tricky business of education, as equal partners. Only by fostering genuine collaboration and mutual support can we navigate the complexities of the modern academic landscape and build solidarity – inclusive communities that thrive on cooperation and shared knowledge. And, only by teaching through creative, collectivist and collaborative practices and processes can we help instructors experience in embodied and powerful ways the true power of collaborative TLA. Collaboration can serve as the cornerstone for a more interconnected and resilient academic ecosystem, where diversity is celebrated, and collective intelligence flourishes: a new ecology of practice (Abegglen et al., 2023; Abegglen et al., 2021). Ultimately, this collaborative approach reimagines HE as a space where collective efforts drive transformation, paving the way for more inclusive, adaptable, and socially conscious learning environments.

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Recommendations

Based on the provided examples and argument, here are some recommendations for instructors to foster collaborative classrooms:

- Model Collaboration: Lead by example and demonstrate the value of collaboration in your own teaching (and research) practices. Collaborate with colleagues on curriculum development, (research) projects, or interdisciplinary initiatives to showcase the benefits of working together towards common goals.

- Incorporate Creative and Collectivist Practices: Integrate creative and participatory teaching methods that encourage active engagement and exchange.

- Encourage Shared Knowledge: Facilitate opportunities for knowledge sharing and exchange among students, instructors, and other stakeholders. Promote interdisciplinary dialogue,

cross-disciplinary collaboration, and the dissemination of ideas to enrich the academic experience for all.

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Chapter 2:
Building a Learning Community through Collaborative Peer Teaching

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Course Level: Senior Undergraduate (third and fourth year)

Field/discipline: Health Sciences

Keywords: Peer teaching; collaboration; social learning

Introduction and Learning Context

The scholarly literature offers many definitions and manifestations of peer teaching, such as peer tutoring, near-peer teaching, peer instruction, along with a variety of way in which collaborative learning can be integrated, including team-based problem solving and senior peers leading learning for junior peers (Ten Cate & Durning, 2007). In its broadest sense, peer teaching can be defined as "the use of teaching and learning strategies in which students learn with and from each other without the immediate intervention of a teacher" (Boud et al., 1999, p. 413). This chapter describes collaborative peer teaching as a pair or group of students working together to teach a concept or narrow topic to a group of their peers in the same course. Research shows that students can effectively teach significant curricular content, while developing critical thinking, presentation and communication skills (Stigmar, 2016). Although it is not discipline-specific, collaborative peer teaching has been widely used in STEM and medical education (Ramaswamy et al., 2001; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007),

> *A classroom where students work together and learn from each other encourages social interactions that promote leadership skills, respect for other perspectives, and consequently a type of learning community that counteracts academic isolation.*

Collaborative peer teaching fosters a sense of community, belonging and engagement in the classroom (Stigmar, 2016). A classroom where students work together and learn from each

other encourages social interactions that promote leadership skills, respect for other perspectives, and consequently, social and self-awareness. Such a classroom environment creates a type of learning community that counteracts academic isolation by aligning with the sociocultural perspective of learning, which centers social interactions as key to cognitive development, learning and building a learner identity (Carrino & Gerace, 2016).

This chapter will focus on the implementation of collaborative peer teaching in two undergraduate health sciences courses – at the intermediate and at the advanced levels. Both are required courses for health science majors and are considered small classes, with an average of 25 to 30 students enrolled in each course. In the 400-level course, students take a critical perspective of the structures and systems that shape the health of populations, with a focus on the political economy of health, racism, gender binarism and sexism, and colonialism. The 500-level course explores global health and related research, with an emphasis on the application of public health principles; this course also includes a capstone project. Themes of social justice and health equity anchor both of these courses. In addition to disciplinary expertise, the learning objectives for these courses also include the demonstration of advanced critical thinking, communication, collaboration and academic research skills. These two examples illustrate practical applications of collaborative peer teaching and reflect the author's familiarity with these contexts as the instructor. However, this chapter aims to describe how this pedagogical approach can be appropriate for a variety of learning contexts and across disciplinary boundaries.

Collaborative Peer Teaching: A Learning Activity and an Assessment

To encourage active learning and engagement, students in the two senior level health science courses were tasked with teaching a small portion of the subject matter to peers in the class. The details of implementation of collaborative peer teaching were different for each course; however, threads of similarities that run across the two examples include: a thoughtful structuring of the peer teaching activity, clear assessment guidelines, and providing student support and ongoing feedback. The activity is also intentionally named a "Student-led Seminar" to emphasize student-centeredness and responsibility given to students to guide each other's learning.

Student-led Seminar: Canadian Public Policy Critique (400-level course)

In groups of two to three, students in the 400-level course worked together to lead a 30-minute session focused on a public policy intervention and its implications for population well-

being and health equity in Canada, from the perspective of one of the course modules (political economy; racism; sexism / heterosexism / gender binarism; or colonialism). Students signed up for the topic of their choice in the second week of the term, with only two groups presenting per module. Student-led seminars occurred after each module so that the sessions aligned with the course content presented over the previous 2-3 weeks. Student-led sessions were required to contain elements to engage the class in discussion and critical thinking such as case studies, small group and/or class discussion, or other engaging active learning activities.

The assessment guidelines focused on both content and delivery. Students were expected to describe their chosen policy, to draw explicit connections to course concepts, and to demonstrate critical thinking about how the policy either advances or contradicts health   equity. Seminar leaders were also required to provide learning objectives for their session, incorporate an interactive activity to elicit student engagement and critical thinking, and to demonstrate effective communication skills and thoughtful organization of the session. Time in the first week of classes was devoted to explaining the task in detail, including what makes a session engaging and examples of active learning activities.

In addition to email exchanges between students and the instructor throughout the seminar planning process, group check-ins were scheduled one week prior to the seminar date. Students met with the course instructor(s) to discuss their planning progress, including the selected policy (or options they were considering) and a preliminary outline of the seminar, with learning activity. This was an opportunity to provide feedback, redirect students who have strayed from the seminar expectations, and for student questions about seminar framing, content or delivery.

Peer-teaching sessions were graded based on the criteria provided to students by the instructor(s). Each student-led seminar group received written feedback based on the assessment guidelines within two days of delivering the peer learning session.

Global Health Student-led Seminar (500-level course)

The 500-level course student-led seminars provided students an opportunity to work collaboratively to develop seminar leadership skills by comprehensively, creatively and critically exploring the global health concepts presented each week. Students worked in pairs or trios to design and deliver a one-hour learning session about a topic of their choosing to provide a deeper exploration of that topic within content delivered each week. This three-hour weekly class typically began with an interactive lecture delivered by the instructor on a global health topic, which the

student-led seminar was expected to build on. For example, there may be a 30-minute interactive lecture introducing the concept of One Health and a related case study presented by the instructor. Following a break, seminar leaders took over the class to teach about Rabies control and prevention as an example of a One Health success in different parts of the world.

The assessment of these student-led seminars was based on how well the leaders presented their chosen topic and made important connections to other course concepts (in this example, to transdisciplinary approaches for wicked problems, communication principles, and health equity). Seminar leaders also selected a scholarly reading from the research literature to integrate into their session, which was assigned to their peers as pre-reading. Similar to 400-level course seminars, 500-level course students were required to include learning objectives, and at least one interactive activity to encourage a discovery, active learning, and understanding beyond the assigned reading. Students were also assessed on the integration and synthesis of the content, organization and communication skills, and class engagement.

Seminar leaders submitted a seminar outline to evidence organization of content, planning of seminar activities and integration of academic literature one week prior to seminar date. The outline included learning objectives, a description of each seminar activity with the allotted time for each, and the scholarly reading to be assigned to the class. Students received written feedback on their seminar outline; those whose outlines needed additional feedback were requested to meet with the instructor. Seminar leaders also received an outline and class plan for the content to be delivered prior to their seminar by the instructor. Seminar leaders were provided written feedback based on the assessment guidelines after the delivery of the seminar.

Implications and Considerations for Implementation

Collaborative peer teaching is a student-centered active learning strategy that develops ownership and agency as the students move into the role of "expert", and the role of the instructor shifts to that of facilitator and mentor (Casteel & Bridges, 2007). There are a number of benefits for students, both as the peer-teacher and as learners. There are also important considerations for the instructor to address potential challenges to implementing collaborative peer teaching and to support students in the process appropriately.

The Peer-Teacher Experience

The saying that the best way to learn something is to teach rings true for collaborative peer teaching. When students' roles shift from being passive learners to active teachers, they need to select, process, synthesise and understand the material at a deeper level to be confident to teach their peers (Dosoftei & Alexa, 2024; Stigmar, 2016). Having to organize content and clearly articulate complex topics, like those related to global health and health equity, is an effective way to reinforce deep learning (Stigmar, 2016; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007). The process of teaching can also improve metacognition; seminar leaders have to think about the thought processes associated with learning as they plan how they will explain concepts and provide explicit examples to stimulate critical thinking in their peers (Carrino & Gerace, 2016; Stigmar, 2016). Students may also experience increased engagement and motivation in the course, knowing that they will be tasked with presenting connections to course concepts to peers (Ten Cate & Durning, 2007).

Seminar leaders must work collaboratively to design an effective session. They are encouraged to divide tasks according to strengths and interests but are also held accountable for a cohesive seminar that ladders learning from the introduction to the applied, interactive component. In addition to being a core health science competency, collaboration has been shown to improve students' learning processes, foster a sense of community, and promote self-regulation (Scager et al., 2016). Delivering a session to peers in a welcoming and safe teaching and learning environment can also provide a sense of achievement and enhance students' self-efficacy and identity as 'experts' and belonging to their discipline (Scager et al., 2016; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007). Doing this as a pair or in a group, rather than solo, can reduce anxiety and promote a sense of safety and comradery from the shared experience. The act of taking on the teacher role and working with others to deliver the learning session could also improve important transferable skills, including leadership, communication, self-regulation and feelings self-efficacy (Dosoftei & Alexa, 2024).

Learning from Each Other

Research suggests that peer teaching works because the peer-teacher and students share a similar knowledge base, or a cognitive congruence (Stigmar, 2016; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007). However, seminar leaders use language that their peers understand and explain concepts at an appropriate level, which professor instructors may have a hard time doing. Students may also feel more at ease and less intimidated learning from a peer, rather than a professor; since peers hold no position of authority, students may be more willing to take on academic risks, including disclosing

lack of knowledge, being open to making errors or trying out new ideas (Ten Cate & Durning, 2007). Being able to relate both socially and academically with their peer-teachers, students may facilitate deeper learning.

Considerations for the Instructor

In the examples presented, collaborative peer teaching is used as both a learning activity and as part of an assessment strategy. Collaborative peer teaching as well as modelling a more cooperative and humane set of learning practices, can help instructors as they balance time, effort and the most effective learning strategies in their course design.

> Collaborative peer teaching can help instructors as the try to balance time, effort and effective learning strategies, and can also provide insights on new teaching approaches that the instructor can translate to their own teaching practice.

The examples provided are both within the context of a small class; however, this strategy could be used in a large class by using larger peer-teaching groups or breaking up the class to peer-learning groups in which students take turns in the role of peer-teacher. As a learning activity, this strategy emphasizes student autonomy and active participation in the learning process, which can enhance student engagement in the course and foster a sense of community in the classroom, both outcomes that instructors often strive for (Stigmar, 2016). Collaborative peer teaching can also be used to target a number of non-discipline specific transferable skills (collaboration, communication, leadership, organization and critical thinking), while also addressing learning objectives related to disciplinary knowledge and expertise. In essence, collaborative peer teaching can be an ethical and efficient way to enhance student learning in a course and promote 'co-learning' (Freire). Watching students learn from and with each other provides insights that the instructor can translate to their own teaching practice. Peer-teachers may have novel ways of approaching complex concepts that are more appealing to students or that better align with students' knowledge base. Students' creativity in designing active learning strategies can also be impressive and inspiring. Overall, this learning strategy is a high impact teaching and learning practice that can benefit both students and instructors. In the examples presented, collaborative peer teaching is used as both a learning activity and as part of an assessment strategy. Collaborative peer teaching as well as modelling a more cooperative and humane set of learning practices, can help instructors as they balance time, effort and the most effective learning

strategies in their course design. The examples provided are both within the context of a small class; however, this strategy could be used in a large class by using larger peer-teaching groups or breaking up the class to peer-learning groups in which students take turns in the role of peer-teacher. As a learning activity, this strategy emphasizes student autonomy and active participation in the learning process, which can enhance student engagement in the course and foster a sense of community in the classroom, both outcomes that instructors often strive for (Stigmar, 2016). Collaborative peer teaching can also be used to target a number of non-discipline specific transferable skills (collaboration, communication, leadership, organization and critical thinking), while also addressing learning objectives related to disciplinary knowledge and expertise. In essence, collaborative peer teaching can be an ethical and efficient way to enhance student learning in a course and promote 'co-learning' (Freire). Watching students learn from and with each other provides insights that the instructor can translate to their own teaching practice. Peer-teachers may have novel ways of approaching complex concepts that are more appealing to students or that better align with students' knowledge base. Students' creativity in designing active learning strategies can also be impressive and inspiring. Overall, this learning strategy is a high impact teaching and learning practice that can benefit both students and instructors.

There are a few things that instructors need to consider to pre-empt challenges in implementing collaborative peer teaching. While students have strong opinions about how they want to experience learning, they often lack the skills and experience to design and deliver sessions intended to teach peers. The instructor needs to strike a balance between student autonomy and freedom and providing structure and direction for the student-led seminar. How much structure is required will depend on the students' knowledgebase and seniority in their program; however, even the most senior students will require some level of direction. Student-led seminar instructions should also be clear and transparent about how the activity will be assessed. Assessment criteria should address content and delivery, how well discipline-specific learning objectives are achieved, and transferable skill development.

When implementing collaborative peer teaching, the job of the instructor shifts to the background to provide support, direction and encouragement. Students need to gain confidence that they can in fact take on a peer-teacher role. And regardless of how clear and transparent the assessment guidelines are, students need reassurance that they are on the right track or may need re-direction. Check-ins and draft proposals are a great way to provide formative feedback to enhance students' sense of self-efficacy and to provide a constant sense of support (Dosoftei &

Alexa, 2024). Most importantly, creating a supportive learning environment is key to encouraging enthusiasm for and maximizing the benefits of collaborative peer teaching. Taking on the responsibility of peer teaching can feel risky, especially to students who are anxious about public speaking and lack confidence in their abilities. A classroom environment that embraces inclusion, encourages questions and open dialogue, and values diverse perspectives can set the tone for a respectful peer teaching and learning exchange.

Recommendations

Collaborative peer teaching is a dialogic learning strategy that promotes students taking an active role in their learning. This learning approach can have cognitive and affective benefits for students, and help instructors create opportunities for deep learning and the development of important transferable skills. The following are a summary of recommendations for using collaborative peer teaching, or student-led seminars specifically presented in this chapter:

- Create a supportive and inclusive culture in the class, which will make the peer teaching experience feel safer for students. Provide ongoing feedback and model inclusive behaviour in your language, tone and a growth mindset.
- Be open to new and innovative approaches to learning. Let students' creativity inspire your own teaching practice.
- Provide adequate support throughout the process, through check-ins, ongoing feedback and clear instructions.
- Design clear and transparent assessment guidelines. Be mindful of where students are at in terms of their confidence and knowledge base.
- Model active teaching strategies and risk taking in your teaching practice – don't be afraid to let students know when you are trying something new or if an approach is not working. Students will take their cues from how you approach teaching and learning in the classroom.

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Consume-reflect-connect: A process for creating community and deepening learning

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Context

I teach undergraduate courses ranging between 19-125 students without TA support and in a variety of classrooms across campus. The courses I teach include leadership, coaching, and physical literacy. I used to assign readings, podcasts, and videos to students to read, listen to, or watch (which I will collectively call *consume*) prior to class. When students arrived in our classroom, I would highlight aspects of the assigned media I believed to be most important. Looking back, I see that I was unconsciously showing students they did not need to think critically or creatively about the assigned materials because ultimately, I would tell them what mattered. I did not create space or time for students to think about or discuss what they found relevant, confusing, or interesting about any assigned course media. This process of disingenuously integrating course media in my courses kept students silent, isolated, and singularly focused on what they needed to know.

The scholarship which informs the consume-reflect-connect process.

In his must-read book, *The Skillful Teacher*, Steven Brookfield (2015) reminds us that effective teaching means designing and doing whatever *helps students learn*. He writes that when we show students we want to understand what they are thinking and wondering, we build rapport and trust with them (Brookfield, 2015). When we encourage and facilitate discussion in our classroom, we create opportunities for students to connect with and learn from each other. And when we combine our own authentic interest in students' responses to course materials with a

pedagogical design that supports student collaboration and relationship building, we become facilitators – enabling student learning rather than telling students what they need to know. To me, this truly *helps students learn*.

While Brookfield's (2015) guidance kick started the process I will describe in this chapter, it does not specifically address the relationship between assigned course material and effective teaching. Through thinking about, imagining, and searching for SoTL which could help me change the traditional process for integrating assigned media into my courses, I discovered literature describing critical reading and its influence on student engagement and social connection (Manarin et al., 2015). For students in higher education to critically consume media, we need to invite students to interact with assigned course media through connecting it to their life experiences, knowledge, and beliefs. Further, the active critical reading, listening, and watching process is most effective when we provide students with open-ended questions to think about and answer as they consume assigned media. In fact, research indicates students' engagement with outside-of-class materials is lower when open-ended prompts are not provided by instructors (Manarin et al., 2015).

The questions and prompts I provide to students ask them to invite reflect on and critique assigned media from their unique perspective. The learning process the prompting questions enables invites students to personalize, deepen, and actively make sense of assigned materials (Chang, 2019). I expand upon the process I have designed and facilitate in the process section of this chapter.

Once students complete their individual responses to the assigned media before class, I ask them to discuss their reflective responses with their peers in class. This phase of the process is where community building begins through discussion-based pedagogy (Sibold, 2017). Discussion-based pedagogy extends the personal reflective cycle through including a communal debrief which expands students' ways of seeing, thinking about, and understanding the assigned materials.

Discussion-based pedagogy holds the potential to strengthen critical thinking; however, it also presents specific challenges I work to proactively minimize. For example, I talk with many instructors who worry that students will learn the "wrong content," or miss the key points of assigned materials if they are discussing them with their peers instead of hearing the instructor tell them what to think about these materials. My facilitation at the end of student discussions (more on this in the next section) and full class debrief allows me to shape and highlight aspects of

Because I believe learning is done by students, and not to them, I am willing to say less and listen more.

student conversations and comments which help each member of the class – including me – see the media from multiple perspectives. When I facilitate this final phase of our consume-reflect-connect process effectively, students strengthen their capacity to apply their deep learning in course projects, assessments, and most importantly the real world.

Another criticism of discussion-based pedagogy is that students will not participate in class discussions because they fear public speaking. I work to lower the pressure and the demand for students to speak in front of the whole class through reminding them (often) that when media is assigned, they need to answer the prompts posted in our LMS on their own and that they will discuss their responses in small groups of peers. I let them know I will not lecture on the media but that they need to understand it. At first, I am not sure students believe me, but after going through the consume-reflect -connect cycle, they see the pattern and the potential impact of it on their sense of peer connection and their learning. Ultimately, classroom discussions help student develop communication, collaboration, and perspective-taking skills (Sibold, 2017) – and in my experience these three skills create a foundation for creating classroom community.

When I describe the way I integrate required materials into my classes most instructors say something like, "I can't do that in my classes, we just have so much we have to cover." And I typically smile and don't really respond – do any of us want to defend our instructional design? But I do walk away wondering: When breadth supersedes depth what do students take from a course? Because I believe learning is done by students, and not to them, I am willing to say less and listen more.

This way of working with assigned course media may seem impossible to apply in large classes; however, after a few semesters of working with the consume-reflect-connect cycle in my small classes (n=30), I piloted a similar pattern in a large 300-level class where I make small teams of students (n= 4-5) who do not know each other prior to the course to create and implement a term-long group project. In my pilot modification of a large class (n=125) consume-reflect-connect process, I give students: 1) the same description of the purpose of this way of developing their understanding of assigned course media; and 2) the same instructions for consuming media on their own and responding to the five reflective questions noted below. For the small group discussion and whole class debriefing phases of this cycle, I post a Google Doc with each question typed in large bold font in our LMS and live, in class ask students to discuss their individual responses to the assigned media with their teammates. After this small group discussion write bullet point notes under each question in the Google Doc after their discussion. Before the

following class I read through the Google Doc on my own, bold and italicize ideas I will highlight live at the beginning of the next class. This final step in the process allows me to debrief and thank students for their contributions, clarify any confusion, and validate their contributions. In both large and small classes, consume-reflect-connect helps all of us feel connected to each other and see the media through new eyes.

The Consume-Reflect-Connect Process

Students consume media and respond to reflective questions on their own.

On the first or second day of class, I show students in our learning management system (LMS) the links to assigned media, reflective prompts, and dates we will debrief them together. I clarify the unique process we use to connect, critique, and understand the media and say, every term, "I won't lecture on assigned materials, we will debrief them together." I tell them they will discuss their individual responses in small groups. The reflective and open-ended questions students typically respond to while consuming assigned media on their own include:

1. What are the most important points or quotes you notice in this media?
2. What were you already familiar with in this media? Where and how did you learn it?
3. What is unclear or confusing to you in this media?
4. In your opinion, what overlaps with course content and what diverges from it in this media?
5. How might this media influence your real-world leadership (or coaching) practices?

In class discussion and debrief cycle

When students in smaller classes (n=25-35) arrive to class after completing step one, I create one station for each of the five reflective questions. In small groups, students circulate to each station, discuss their individual responses, and co-create some bullet-form ideas which they jot note on their whiteboard. Next, students circulate to each whiteboard and place an asterisk beside the points they resonate with and a question mark beside any jot note they would like clarified. Throughout this two-phase process, I use a timer and shout, "Rotate," to keep everyone on task and energized. In rooms without whiteboards, I write each question in large letters with a thick black marker on its own piece of paper tape each one on the walls throughout the room. When using this format, I bring sticky notes for writing post-discussion jot notes on and placing beneath each question. Depending on space and room configuration I sometimes bring inexpensive gift wrap paper (rather than the very expensive giant sticky papers) and write the questions on the back

of large pieces of this paper in black marker. I leave a few pens at each station and students follow the same process of discussing and documenting the ideas which emerge during their small group conversations. No matter which medium we use, the steps in the process are consistent.

After each group has spent time at each reflective question station, I facilitate a debrief of the collaborative jot notes question by question. In this phase of our debrief I highlight points with many asterisks beside them and work through those with questions beside them – while this is not an expectation, students often help me clarify these points. This is a crucial phase where I value student responses through showing excitement and embracing multiple ways of interpreting the media. To complete this process, I ask students if they have questions they would like me to answer about the media and/or their responses to it. By this phase of the process, I am invariably asked rich and challenging questions.

First rotation: **Each small group discusses their answer to the question and jot notes at each of the stations**	**5 stations x 5-6 minutes each**	**25-30 minutes**
Second rotation: **Each small group travels to each station and annotates jot notes they find there.**	5 stations x 2-3 minutes each	10-15 minutes
Third rotation: **Instructor goes to each station commenting on, clarifying, and answering new questions which emerge.**	5 stations x 2-3 minutes each	10-15 minutes
		45-60 minutes

As noted in the table above, the Consume-Reflect-Connect in-class process takes between 45-60 minutes to complete. For instructors who do not have this amount of time to devote to the process, cutting the number of questions students reflect on, discuss, and then debrief together in class is a great option. This is also a simple way to try this way of creating community and

deepening learning for the first time (e.g., Ask students one open-ended question to discuss and make jot notes about etc. would take less than fifteen minutes).

Implications

The respectful active listening, openness to peers that students do not know, and the sharing of diverse perspectives during the in-class steps of this process indicate collaboration and community. Peer discussions initiate and strengthen connections between students and the peer relationships I notice as the term progresses look, sound, and feel like community. Hearing what former students experienced through this way of working with their peers and course media reveals the potential implications for translating the consume-reflect-connect process to other course contexts. One former student writes, "*I have never been in a class that felt like a team, where I knew everyone's name and talked with them before.*" And another former student writes, "*Talking with others humbled me. Not everyone has the same point of view and experiences ... sharing our notes and perspectives made me better understand the topics and the people,*" in class.

The way of building community and deepening learning I have described here is something I love facilitating in my courses. It allows me to see, feel, and hear what our students are capable of in real time. It reminds me to hold tightly and tenderly to my beliefs about how learning happens.

> *Talking with others humbled me. Not everyone has the same point of view and experiences ... sharing our notes and perspectives made me better understand the topics and the people.*

Recommendations

The consume-reflect-connect process is enjoyable. For readers interested in piloting this way of integrating course media in their classes, I am sharing four pieces of advice:

- **Seek out** a classroom with space for students to circulate in small groups and (ideally) with whiteboards. In larger classes – or when an appropriate classroom is not available – digital tools can facilitate multiple variations on the theme of Consume-Reflect-Connect.
- **Be transparent** about the purpose of this new process and describe how it will increase their understanding of the materials in collaboration with their peers. Describe in detail the way discussions will happen and reassure students this is not a public speaking challenge.
- **Start small** – both in class size and the media you select for your first try. To help clarify this process, it may be helpful to describe it during class, and they try a mini process together. For example, you could post two reflective questions in your LMS and show a short video or

a one-page reading. Next you could give students time to respond to on their own, discuss their responses next in small groups, give the discussion groups time to jot ideas on boards, paper, or digitally (depending on class size, room configuration and accessible materials). Finally, look through responses live and give two or three examples live of how you will highlight and value their ways of understanding the media in the future.

- **Celebrate student contributions** through highlighting common and novel ways of interpreting the media. Spend time clarifying questions which arise and be enthusiastic about multiple ways of understanding the media.
- **Enjoy** the sight, sound, and impact of this process, which in my experience develops community and deepens learning at the same time

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Chapter 4:
Navigating the Rocky Mountains of Academia through Collective Care

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Context

How do *we* care? Why should *we* care? "Care work is a classification of highly gendered and racialized labor that remains largely unpaid, underpaid, and deeply devalued" (Eales & Peers, 2020). In higher education, care(-ing) is invisible and immeasurable, often contrasting the profit-driven standards of the institution. When understood as an ethical pedagogical stance, it can play a valuable role in effective teaching and learning (Anderson et al., 2020; Foster, 2008; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). Superseding the confines of deadlines, grade point averages, and teaching evaluations, care work involves the recognition of higher education as an emotional, cognitive, and embodied process for instructors and students alike (Pham et al., 2024). We argue that collective care, specifically, is needed to nourish a culture of authenticity, agency, and well-being. This "gentle deconstruction" of the archetypal pedagogies entrenched within academia (i.e., lecture-based, individualistic, standardized) can cultivate a shared enthusiasm for teaching and learning, a deeper engagement with course content, and a sense of connection to one another.

This chapter offers insights into praxis guided by collective care and a pedagogy of kindness (Denial, 2024). We write from a shared voice of undergraduate students, Laiba Awan and Miila Gordon, and a Doctoral candidate and Sessional Instructor, Chelsea Rozanski. Our relationship was established during a Spring 2023 course, Introduction to Global

> *Care work involves the recognition of higher education as an emotional, cognitive, and embodied process for instructors and students alike.*

Development Studies (DEST201). With an enrollment of 21 students from across disciplines, this foundational course explored the emergence of complex development issues, including poverty, inequalities, and resource extraction using various modes of learning. In what follows, we highlight two learning strategies that fostered inclusivity and celebrated the lived experiences of learners in DEST201: reflection circles and storytelling.

Reflection circles can enable intercultural understanding, horizontal learning, and multigenerational knowledge co-creation through "re-membering" (Absolon, 2011). When the classroom hierarchy is transcended, individuals can learn from one another more deeply and form communities that support collective well-being and growth. Storytelling can also bring visibility to the care process by fostering creativity, reflexivity, and common understanding amidst societal challenges. Drawing upon the Development Studies concept of extractivism–the study and process of natural resource extraction for the purpose of modernization–our next section will navigate the "Rocky Mountains of academia" (Figure 1) by reflecting on these strategies with a dialogic narrative.

Focus

What could a praxis of collective care look like? In DEST201, we began by co-creating a foundation of mutual respect and vulnerability. On the first day, we situated ourselves in our learning and on lands of Treaty 7 and Métis Nation Districts 5 and 6 by journaling: *Who (not what) is your name and your kin? How and from whom have you come to know what you know? Why did you choose to take this course? What expectations do you have of your instructors, peers, and yourself?* Moving outside, we shared our reflections in an Introduction Circle guided by Mapuche Elder Sara Rodriguez Huenchullan, who challenged us to practice radical compassion. This form of activism fosters a sense of unconditional care for one another and ourselves, to collaborate in the fight against structural inequities (Hobart & Kneese, 2020). A relational, dialectic approach to reflexive learning was also encouraged through a storytelling activity called Musical Reflections (Rozanski et al., 2024). To stimulate our nervous systems and gauge comprehension of the required readings, we began walking around the room to music. When the music stopped, we formed pairs and discussed a new prompt on the board: *How could your positionality influence your research design? What is the value of objectivity versus subjectivity? In what ways does pursuing an education in Canada shape your understanding of development?* Another learning strategy that challenged us to navigate the rocky terrain of power, privilege, and representation was Community Spotlight Photo Essays. Here, images of participatory action research were brought to life through multilingual

storytelling and homemade cultural dishes. In a final Closing Circle, we contemplated: *What constitutes 'progress' and how do we measure success? What would 'decolonized' development or academia look like?* To us: collaboration, community, and care.

These three values help break down preconceived ideas about success in academia and deinstitutionalize learning; the goal being to empower students to question what they know and how they know (Mutch & Tatabe, 2017; Newstead, 2009; Noddings, 2012). This approach ensures that the institution of education goes beyond the confines of traditional modes of learning. By prioritizing collective care, instructors can create a space for students to develop relationships that hopefully continue beyond the semester and lead to collective action.

Reflections of Collective Care

Figure 1: The "Rocky Mountains of Academia" through an Extractivist lens (Generated by ChatGPT)

The snow-capped peaks of the Bow River Valley glisten above the fog, greeting us good morning. We inhale the crisp June air tinged with pine and begin our walk along the base of the Three Sisters Mountains. While gazing upon 'Big Sister', we uncover an excavation site and reflect on the terrain of our learning journey.

Chelsea: It feels like just yesterday that we had our first class. I recall feeling exposed, like this site before us, and so nervous that my palms were sweaty. Would I know the answers to your questions? How would you feel about the participatory activities? Imposter Syndrome set in. What are *your* memories from that first day?

Miila: When you greeted me with an energetic "Welcome!" I was shocked to be accepted with open arms, I thought DEST201 was just going to be a 'box to check'. I imagined I would shuffle in and out of a lecture hall without uttering a single word or interacting with my peers. I remember being scared of sharing my lived experiences, and how I have walked on Treaty 7 land as a settler. I thought, *What do I do? Does Prof. Chelsea really want to know about me?* I believe that this small action of care set the path for what was to come. Folks, do you feel the sun? It is wonderful!

Laiba: Yes, I do! Just like you Miila, I enrolled in the class to satisfy my Minor requirement, expecting it to follow a traditional lecture style where we would sit for hours, take notes, go home and repeat. This wasn't the case. The day we reflected on our lives and shared them with each other, made me think about who I am as a person. I didn't expect to speak to almost everyone. It was a unique first impression which set the foundation of collaborative learning that we were about to experience in the coming weeks. Woah, did you both feel that cold gust of wind?

Miila: That breeze is strong! Chelsea, how was that first day for you?

Chelsea: Besides the nerves, I was ecstatic to see so much thoughtfulness and joy in the learning process. It was not only important for me to understand your expectations for the course, but who you are as individuals who form part of a community. I was also grateful that Elder Sara could join us, as her presence instills a sense of calm and confidence in me as a new instructor. Wasn't it thoughtful how she brought sliced oranges and Chilean pastries for everyone?

Miila: It was: I felt so cared for. Even through the noise of construction, I loved hearing from Elder Sara and all my peers.

We stop for a moment to rehydrate and admire 'Middle Sister', feeling the weight that stories hold. These peaks, for instance, could tell us stories dating back millions of years. When Elder Sara spoke of her political repression as an Indigenous woman, it deepened our understanding of extractivism for wealth, power, and control. Each of us are made up of a collection of stories, which when shared, have the potential to build greater empathy, connection, and collaboration.

Chelsea: Did you find the Community Spotlights helpful for bringing the various development theories to life?

Laiba: Absolutely! The stories you shared with the Ese'Eja Nation of Peru and Ngäbe of Panama were intriguing. One day I hope to do fieldwork in the same manner as a Political Science student. Hearing these experiences showed me how various fields within academia are intertwined and how I can use this course in my everyday life, instead of just trying to simply pass the class. Do you guys see that? I think there's a grizzly bear across the stream.

Miila: I do, yikes, let's get moving! Same here, Laiba. I feel the learning process is often sterile. Chelsea, I appreciated how you shared the ups and downs of your research travels. They also helped me recall course content and relate theory to reality. For me, actively seeing the pitfalls of development is haunting. In my field of Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, once you see inaccessibility, you realize it is everywhere.

Chelsea: Thank you for sharing that, Miila. Your feedback gives me courage to continue experimenting with different modes of storytelling. Like the Musical Reflections.

Laiba: I remember this activity! At first, I felt awkward and exposed, but when I finished my first interaction I realized that maybe I wasn't the only one who felt this way. When we put ourselves out there, especially when we're not used to it, it can feel uncomfortable; but when we open ourselves up to new experiences, only then are we able to welcome different emotions. This vulnerability that arises from discomfort can foster bonds between students and become friendships, which are rarely seen in many university classes. When I thought about my positionality and how it can influence power and ethics in development work, it made me realize that I *can* make a difference in the world.

      After several hours, we arrive at the Bow River's edge. With 'Little Sister' in view, we are reminded of the region's coal mining history. From the 1880s to 1979, coal was extracted to service Canadian Pacific Railway trains, which in turn brought goods and services from coast to coast. We think back to the last day of class, where we once more contemplated the meaning of

development. *We* hope it would mean a mountain range of more collaboration, community, and care.

Implications

From coal mining to oil pipelines, hydroelectric dams to industrial farming, the field of Global Development Studies analyzes the ecological, sociocultural, and political implications of extractivist development. Similarly, within higher education, individuals are often understood as resources from whom to extract time, energy, and knowledge for the benefit of the institution. When care is present, it can fall susceptible to performativity, ultimately serving the capitalist agenda and burying the most human parts of us that crave connection (LeGrange, 2024). Analogous to extractivism in the Rocky Mountains, we argue that the root cause of superficial care, or a lack of care altogether, is an oppressive power dynamic that hinges upon hyper-individualistic values and the marginalization of individuals. But what if what we did see, beyond the lecture hall rows of monocropped trees for logging, were the strong peaks of *meaningful* care, collaboration, and community? While navigating the "Rocky Mountains of academia", our hope is that educators and learners walk this winding path together to co-develop communities of care and a pedagogy of kindness.

> *While navigating the "Rocky Mountains of academia", our hope is that educators and learners walk this winding path together and co-develop communities of care*.

Recommendations

- **Create an environment of mutual respect, compassion, and agency.** This can be facilitated by co-setting class expectations, allocating time for discussions on controversial topics that include the impact of institutionalized prejudices (Pham et al., 2024), and checking in with one another. In DEST201, check-ins would occur throughout the semester before and after class, and during lecture breaks: "How are your other classes going? Are you working on top of studying? How are you feeling about the upcoming assignment?" These small acts of care can help students to feel more open to participate in class discussions, as there is compassion for each other and the class itself.
- **Be flexible and open to communication.** The concept of productivity and being readily available can lead to burnout and general apathy. Broadly, there is little acknowledgement of the pressure to participate in an academic system rooted in extractivism. Thus, it is

important to recognize the visible and invisible needs of students *and* instructors (Martino et al., 2024). Accommodating changes to syllabi, tailoring course materials and strategies to students' needs, and building in lecture breaks can support overall well-being, promote self-care, and normalize the communication of one's needs.

- **Continue caring outside of the classroom**. To move away from transactional relationships, we must continue caring for one another beyond the classroom. While being mindful of our limited time and resources, instructors and students can co-organize campus walks, coffee chats, or potluck picnics, for example. In these more accessible and non-hierarchical spaces, we can continue learning from one another and build more equitable communities.

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Chapter 5:
A Community of 'Real' Writers: Creative Writing in Continuing Education

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Course Level: non-degree credit

Field/discipline: Literature, creative writing

Keywords: creative writing, adult education, community education

Context

      This chapter discusses experiences of adult students engaged in creative writing coursework in non-degree credit continuing education contexts. Continuing and extension courses are usually taken by adults who are looking for either career enrichment or upskilling, or who are exploring personal and creative interests. Most of my teaching is in the creative writing stream, where my students are engaged in genre fiction: mystery, science fiction, fantasy, fanfiction, and franchise writing. My courses are taught in an online, asynchronous format over 6-8 weeks for a total of 15 instructional hours. My students are, for the most part, emerging writers taking early steps towards their goals of publishing or self-publishing their work. Many of them have always been interested in creative writing, but did not have the opportunity to more fully engage in creative practice—and now, as older adults, are making time and space for themselves. There is a degree of vulnerability at play...moving from writing privately to putting forward work for instructor and peer feedback is a big step, and involves opening one's self to criticism and critique.

      I've observed that my creative writing students frequently approach courses with an internalized 'script' around perceived inabilities or doubts, and struggle to see themselves as what they call a 'Real Writer.' I describe teaching practices that can help to create a learning environment that offers alternatives to those views so that students can engage and gradually come to see themselves as welcome (and welcomed) members of the larger community of creative writers.

      Post-secondary continuing education programs are vibrant, community-facing spaces: an accessible pathway to credit and non-degree learning for adult students. It is where I do my work,

teaching creative writing courses with no pre-requisite entry requirements beyond a willingness to tell stories. I've come to see that adult students often enter continuing education classrooms with a variety of concerns about their perceived ability make meaningful contributions, and a real trepidation about their perceived ability to participate—and an inability to view themselves as members of the community of writers—a 'Real Writer,' as they often remark, with the capital letters heavily implied.

This is because, I think, adults come to learning "with a complex personal narrative" about their ability to learn. In Groen and Kawalilak's (2014) foundational adult education text, Dr. Tara Hyland-Russell comments that "[m]any adults have been marginalized and excluded from learning through experiences with poverty, interrupted or negative educational experiences, unstable housing, trauma, discrimination, immigration, or illness," and that a 'powerful impediment' to engagement in the learning environment is "an internalized script of self-doubt and lack of ability" (p. 148). There is also the very practical aspect of students' lives: the average age of creative writing students in my program is 41. Their lives are busy–they speak openly of family, children, careers, and various obligations and responsibilities in the community, and most of my students describe themselves as women or non-binary people when introducing themselves. In creative work, these internalized scripts are compounded by the subjective nature of what is 'good' literature, and that their work will not be 'good enough.'

Focus: Building Community Through Collaborative Learning

Because of this, I've come to approach my creative writing teaching practice with a collaborative, community-building mindset by creating a learning space that focuses on showing students that they are part of the continuum of literature that is constantly forming and reforming with each new work of fiction–what T. S. Eliot refers to in *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1920, p. 44-45). I take Eliot's remarks somewhat more liberally–where he may have been referring to published works, I think that each new work, each creative endeavour has a place in the community of works and the implied community of writers. We writers are more than the sum of our publication credits, but the overwhelming sense is that a writer must be published to be successful, and only successfully published authors can *call* themselves writers.

Learning skills and techniques around plot, character development, and pacing in fiction is something students can achieve with time and practice. The larger task is working with them to reshape internalized scripts to show them that they are welcome members of humanity's

community of writers. Creating a welcoming learning environment that offers ways to mitigate that internalized script isn't just about making the space inclusive...it's also a way to hold space for students to focus less on real and perceived barriers to their success, so that there's time and energy available to support the collaborative learning that takes place in formal discussion activities and the informal, social networking. It's in these spaces–the marginalia of creative writing spaces, so to speak–that students begin to see themselves as part a community of writers, and where the real work of coming to see themselves as capital-letter 'Real Writers' begins.

But how do we draw students into these spaces, and how do we hold that space for them? This is where small modifications to teaching practices can have the biggest impact: small, simple measures that offer a feeling of safety that doesn't challenge doubts and fears, but offers alternative to make the experience of engaging in creative writing work possible.

In the context of my classrooms, I work to create an experience that allows them to explore their creative writing practice without unnecessarily burdensome barriers that prevent them from developing a sense of community with their peers–if they are too focussed on grades, deadlines, and course requirements, there is not enough space for them to take risks with their work or to offer time and energy for discussions with peers. Adapting my teaching practices, then, is how I can offer a collaborative pathway to welcome students into the creative writing community.

Building connections

Online classes are convenient for adult learners, but in each course, we have to work to build a sense of community. To that end, I offer an introductory Zoom meeting–it's an opportunity to introduce the course, but also for students to see and hear me. I make the Zoom session optional, offering a captioned recording for students who can't attend. Over time, though, I found that students were not attending the introduction session. To combat this, I'm now prototyping a 'quickstart' meeting with my students–a brief, 10-15 minute individual session with me.

Connection strategies:

This task is ungraded, but required, and I provide a booking calendar for students to select their meeting time. During the quickstart meeting, I ask students to describe their writing practice and experience, their goals for the course, and whether they have a particular story project in mind. In the context of building a sense of community, requiring their attendance without attaching grades to their participation creates a low stakes experience, and helps to overcome some of the barriers around their self-perception as 'Real Writers.' It also offers me an opportunity to hear questions they may have, and to

Quickstart	A brief (5-10 minute) mandatory but ungraded meeting to discuss a student's goals and background.
1:1 session	Bookable optional meeting (20 min) for students to ask questions and consult about their work.
Co-writing session	Optional drop-in time (1 hour) for students to work quietly together in Zoom, with brief pauses to comment on their writing.

offer reassurance and advice, and to subtly encourage their participation in classroom discussions and sharing their work.

I continue to experiment with various strategies to encourage student engagement. This has included co-writing nights—a scheduled, weekly hour to gather on Zoom and quietly write together. I also offer regular one-on-one consultation appointments, which students can self-book through a scheduling app. I set out 20-minute slots, and allow back-to-back bookings by the same individual to ensure they can request more time if needed. In every weekly email to the class, I remind them of the option to use these sessions, and reaffirm that they can address questions about the course, or about their writing practice in general. I also encourage students to email with questions or to discuss thoughts about their work, recognizing that some will feel more comfortable with written communication. It's important to recognize that building meetings into a course takes time— instructors with larger classes may be thinking about how feasible it is. From my experience, the quickstart meeting has proven to be a way to develop a rapport with students and gives me an opportunity to provide feedback and advice on their writing plans, and to reinforce my belief in their ability to succeed in the course. It is a way to speak to them about their writing practice, and to make a connection to their questions and thoughts with course material. It may be worth sacrificing a learning task to embark on these meetings–and reallocating the time you would spend marking to the task of meeting and talking with students.

Engagement is enhanced through intentional course design choices that alleviate some of the pressures students experience around time and deadlines. My courses are all offered in an online, asynchronous format. Students have lessons, optional and required tasks, reading, and assignments, but they largely come and go from the D2L shell as they please. Laying out lesson content in a weekly format with a 'quick start' guide at the start of each content block and making all of the course content available–rather than sectioning off access week by week–enables students to look ahead and gauge the intensity of activities. At the start of each course week, I send a brief email about what's coming up, answering questions that may have come up in discussions, and offering reminders about upcoming assignments. Every email ends with an invitation to post questions in a publicly available D2L discussion or to email me privately. The door always remains open.

I began teaching with Continuing Education during pandemic, when everything was unpredictable, the threat of quarantine and serious illness was very real. At the time, I decided to move away from late policies that created grade-based penalties. While our courses do not lead to a degree program, they are graded according to a standard scale, and so students have assessment expectations, and understand that their work will result in a letter grade; policies also allow for grade deductions and penalties for late or incomplete assignments. I chose to adopt a flexible policy that supported the learner without penalizing them for late assignment submissions. As expected, students in my course became ill or cared for sick family members, had their lives upended by isolation, contended with school or workplace disruptions, experienced layoffs or drastically increased workloads. We *all* contended with the trauma of living through a major, life-changing event. The open-ended extension policy was well-used, with roughly three quarters of my students taking at least one extra day on at least one assignment. The impact on my grading load, though, was minimal; assignments were arriving even while I was still grading.

As I continued to teach, my understanding of my students' contexts grew, and I began to better appreciate their intersecting identities and responsibilities and the need for flexible environments outside of pandemic contexts. I also began to recognize that I needed to provide structure to the discussions portion to encourage engagement—student feedback revealed the disappointment experienced when discussions had low participation.

The approach is fundamentally grounded in respect for the learner. Adult education inherently brings students from a vastly wider cross-section of the community and at different life stages (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). While I don't require an explanation, many of my students feel

compelled to give one, having been conditioned by past experiences to expect a measure of skepticism, expressing concern that I will think they're not working hard or diligently. This goes back to the internal script of self-doubt–itself a product of past experiences and future projections of ability (or inability). The way to mitigate is to validate students' decision to prioritize their needs, evaluate the plan for eventual assignment submission, and to provide additional mitigation by suggesting adjusted deadlines for subsequent assignments to provide sufficient time for students to work, but also for me to mark their work.

Figure 1: *Course outline statement*

Extensions can be requested at any time during the course prior to the assignment's due date–you don't need to give explanations or reasons for extension requests. Please contact me to discuss how we can accommodate your need.

However, to facilitate discussion and reflection on weekly topics, discussion posts must be completed by the last day of classes; no late submissions are permitted.

The flexible, 'no explanations' policy has been used by students working rotating shifts in the oilsands, students with young children, students celebrating important life moments, students evacuating from wildfires, and students dealing with personal tragedies. But it was *also* used by students who had hit on a streak of creative inspiration and wanted to keep going just as often as it was used by students who were physically or emotionally tired and want time to rest. It was also used by students who did not offer a reason because they know they did not need to. Hills and Peacock (2022) note that flexible course deadlines can and should be available to all students, rather than framing them as "accommodations for exceptional students or circumstances" (p. 2). Flexible deadline practices that do not carry grade or other penalties support diverse students, they argue, including 'additional and overlapping barriers' that may be disproportionately experienced by equity-deserving groups. It is, as they say, instructing from a place of collaboration than from control. Importantly, their research demonstrates that proactive flexible deadlines do not encourage procrastination–rather, students use them to develop better work, manage their time, and to support their own wellbeing (p. 12).

My experience is that when I offer flexibility in deadlines and make it available without requiring explanations, students participate more freely in classroom discussions–and the early steps I take to meet with and engage students personally helps to bolster their sense that they are

welcome and encouraged to enter the creative community of writers that they already belong to. It may well be that they're not faced with a sense that they need to explain why one thing (classroom participation) is possible but not another (submitting an assignment), and this follows Hills and Peacock's (2022) observations that lower-stakes assignments or expectations are less impacted (p. 13). Flexible policies deconstruct assessment practices, shifting a punitive approach to one that values and respects the lived experience of students.

Committing to EDIA action

Genre fiction has a problematic relationship with equity, diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility when it comes to character development and plot, and relies heavily on representative depictions of culture and race—in fantasy, for example, cultural appropriation is very common, with writers exoticizing aspects of cultures to create imagined cultures and people. In a similar vein, mystery and thriller writers overrepresent women and racialized people as victims and perpetrators. Writers entering genre fiction at an emerging stage adopt these patterns because it's so widely available across their reading; they do so without examining the unintentional harm this causes to those communities and cultures. When this appears in creative writing classroom settings, it has a silencing effect–particularly on students from equity-deserving groups (Nguyen, 2019). This disrupts the collaborative writing community we build in the classroom. In my own teaching, I include modules on issues of representation and diversity. It can be a contentious and uncomfortable to engage in discussions about privilege, bias, and diversity in fiction. Students can experience a range of emotions, from sadness and shame to defensiveness or outright anger. I carefully monitor online discussions, and reach out to students privately to offer support, meetings, and chances to explore what's happening in the course. I also make my position very clear to the entire class: that I am committed to principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Figure 2: *example from Wri 416 Writing Mystery Fiction.*

From an ethical point of view, you hold a responsibility to work against widely-held, systemic views that some people are less deserving of justice because of their actions, or that some people 'deserved it' in some way.

Victims do not deserve to be victimized. So many mysteries have fallen down on this point because our narratives—the stories we tell ourselves—reflect cultural beliefs that are widely held. As a writer, you are in a position to join others working to change the narrative and restore agency and dignity taken—stolen—from individuals and entire communities of people

We can do better. As writers, we must.

For me, it's also critical to discuss the 'equity tax'—experiences that members of equity-deserving groups encounter, which can include increased workloads (Henry, et al., 2017). Within creative writing courses, this includes moments where racialized or Indigenous students are either asked or feel compelling to explain aspects of their experiences, culture, or history, or to provide feedback on writing that touches on this...or, worse, workshop models that require students to be silent in the face of peer feedback (Chavez, 2021). It also encompasses what Salesses (2021) refers to as a kind demanded vulnerability, where writers are expected to make their experiences available or 'on display' in order to publish a story, noting that "it starts with our cultural expectation that people of color should submit themselves for public consumption" (p.84). Alternatively, this can manifest in a default view. Diaz (2014), recounting his experience in a creative writing MFA program, tells us that "we never talked about race except on the rare occasion someone wanted to argue that 'race discussions' were exactly the discussion a serious writer should *not* be having."

It's important to address these issues. In the context of community building, taking time to explore and discuss opens opportunities for students from equity-deserving groups to be heard and seen. For those who do not experience the same barriers, it's an exceptionally good time to listen–and I treat the classroom as a kind of intervention, focussing on communicating the challenges, the current debate and context, and inviting participation in discussion. I open the week with commentary about equity tax situations, my unequivocal support for students from equity-deserving groups and with intersectional contexts to *not* feel compelled or expected to explain or speak on behalf of others. Offering additional links to relevant resources such as Nisi Shawl and Cynthia Ward's *Writing the Other* (2005) and other resources on EDIA practices and definitions helps to hold this space: we offer knowledge, rather than expecting students to supply.

Building this into courses supports students' concept of themselves as being part of the collaborative community of writers. In offering instruction and space for discussion, and being available for students in offline (email or videoconference) sessions to work through questions, instructors can help to support the community forming in their classrooms. For every student that experiences the discomfort that comes with confronting positions of privilege, there are even more students from equity-deserving groups—particularly racialized students, Indigenous students, LGBTQIA+ students—expressing surprise and relief to encounter frank and open statements about diversity and inclusion practices in publishing but also in craft-level discussions of character and plot development.

As a teaching strategy, specific EDIA measures enhance the quality of learning and provide a safe and secure environment that upends complacency to support growth. It is a necessity for creative writers, who shape language, thought, and culture through their work, and helps to demonstrate the responsibility they have to the wider community of writers and readers.

Implications

As my teaching practice evolves, I have come to see that what we do—working in the margins to create the spaces for collaborative learning that draws students into the wider community of writers is enormously and tremendously important. As instructors, everything we do to make the creative writing classroom a welcoming, open space for students to learn and grow challenges internal dialogues couched in doubt–that helps them to see that they are productive and welcome members of the writing community. Building collaborative community takes time and effort, but the feedback I receive from students overwhelmingly supports the importance of creating and holding space for that to happen.

Recommendations

Creative writing classrooms benefit from deliberate, intentional steps that encourage students to see themselves as part of a wider writing community, but these actions can be applied across academic, professional, and creative disciplines. These steps can include:

- Recognizing that many students struggle to see themselves as legitimate members of the academic, professional, or creative discipline, especially when they are still in early stages of developing their skills and expertise.
- Taking time to meet with students to discuss goals and their scholarly, professional, or creative practice. In larger classes, this may mean prioritizing student meetings over other learning tasks–removing a smaller assignment can relieve the time burden on instructors.
- Developing flexible course policies to shift emphasis away from meeting deadlines to one that encourages focus on writing. Flexible policies will look different for larger classes, but can still create opportunities for students to exercise their judgement and agency when additional time is needed.
- Making online course content fully accessible to support various time management skills and learning styles.

- Exposing students to relevant and ongoing discussion amongst the creative, professional, or scholarly community on issues of diversity and representation, and making space for students to explore and discuss.
- Take intentional steps to build content about representation and characterization that explores unintentional and intentional harm that can be caused in scholarly, professional, or creative practice, exploring it as part of students' responsibilities to consider the ethical weight of their work.
- Continuing to reinforce the message that students *belong* and that they are part of a community by virtue of their studies and practice.

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Artmaking and transdisciplinary collaboration: A case for novelty

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Field/discipline: Communication and Media Studies/Cultural Studies

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Context

In Fall 2022, I partnered with Dr. Marjan Eggermont to offer students in Communication Studies and Engineering the chance to collaborate in a transdisciplinary project: the design and making of a *chindōgu*. A *chindōgu* is "an invention that (…) is of little or no use in the real world, typically created for fun rather than for practical purposes." (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.) A famous example of a *chindōgu* is the "selfie stick," that once commercialized lost its *chindōgu* status.

The partnership between COMS 591, a capstone seminar in Communication Studies, and ENGG 521 Art and Engineering had begun in spring 2022, when I first contacted Dr. Eggermont to explore ways of having students work collaboratively on a visual production project. I knew Dr. Eggermont introduced Engineering students to visual design, and I wanted COMS 591 students to develop their visual production skills. It also seemed a unique chance to introduce Communication Studies majors to transdisciplinary collaboration. The fact COMS 591 and ENGG 521courses were scheduled the same day, time and in adjacent classrooms solved many of the barriers that instructors face when they want to design curricular transdisciplinary partnerships. Our challenge was to design a project that required students in both classes to collaborate while receiving individual grades based on their own contributions, independent of their peers' performance. In

addition, the project had to be unfamiliar enough so that all students would have the same chance to contribute to it. The making of a *chindōgu* seemed the perfect "undisciplined" collaborative learning experience, as it would require both design and critical thinking skills.

The Calgary Institute for the Humanities defines transdisciplinarity as scholarship that involves an interdisciplinary team to assist in the resolution of complex problems that require solutions beyond disciplinary boundaries (Ellis et al. 2024). The promotion of transdisciplinarity as defined by The Calgary Institute of the Humanities has become a priority of the University of Calgary's *Strategic Plan* (2023-2030). The partnership between COMS 591 and ENGG 521 required artmaking, which is a practice that transcends the typical confines of Communication Studies and Engineering. While for Engineering students the making of the *chindōgu* challenged the meaning of functional design, for Communication Studies students it served as an arts-based research project that studied cultural practices and phenomena, such as cultural perceptions of time or the experience of physical labour. Arts-based research is the use of artmaking in "all phases of research," such as problem generation, data collection, analysis and dissemination (Leavy, 2019, p. 4).

Based on analysis of eight critical reflection journals from COMS 591[1], I argue that introducing artmaking—a new, "undisciplined" practice for both Communication Studies and Engineering students—promoted transdisciplinary collaboration by discouraging reliance on disciplinary approaches and encouraging innovative, collective problem-solving.

Rationale

COMS 591 is a senior communication studies seminar where students conduct an independent research project. Although led by different instructors each year, the class typically requires a final research paper, preceded by a research proposal and literature review. In Fall 2022, I shifted the structure to focus on an arts-based research project that met the class objectives while providing a meaningful collaborative learning experience.

Collaborative learning has been identified as "an area for improvement" in the Faculty of Arts (2020 National Survey of Student Engagement Summary Report, 2022, p. 4). While group work is common in Communication Studies classes, transdisciplinary collaboration is rare. Proponents

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1 Access to students' critical reflections was compliant with the University of Calgary's CFREB. Student participants were debriefed about the study and subject to a formal written informed consent process.

of transdisciplinary teaching and learning propose that the complex nature of social problems requires solutions beyond the narrow limits of disciplinary knowledge (Gibbs et al. 2018). Some well-documented benefits of transdisciplinary learning are the development of metacognition and critical thinking (Atkison-Toal, 2024). Most importantly, the collaboration required in transdisciplinary learning leads to transformational learning and relational thinking as participants become exposed to new ways of integrating knowledge that often put into question traditional disciplinary ways of thinking and doing (Klein, 2018).

The collaboration proposed in the context of COMS 591 and ENGG 521 relied on the unfamiliar and undisciplined nature of artmaking to facilitate the conditions for transdisciplinary collaboration. While COMS 591 students are relatively familiar with photo and audiovisual essays, the design and making of a *chindōgu* was a new challenge for them as it required design and building skills that many students felt they lacked. Similarly, Engineering students struggled with the idea of a designing an artifact that *had* to be dysfunctional, as this demanded a questioning of naturalized notions of functionality. In addition, both Communication Studies and Engineering students needed to complete the project to meet additional learning objectives. For COMS 591 students, the *chindōgu* was an instance of data collection to complete an arts-based research project, while for ENGG 521 students, the completion of the *chindōgu* demonstrated their ability to design beyond functionality. The existence of different expert knowledges that needed to be integrated to solve a problem set the basis for transdisciplinary collaboration.

Figure 1: *Example of a chindogu: Finger gloves to keep the fingers clean while eating snacks*
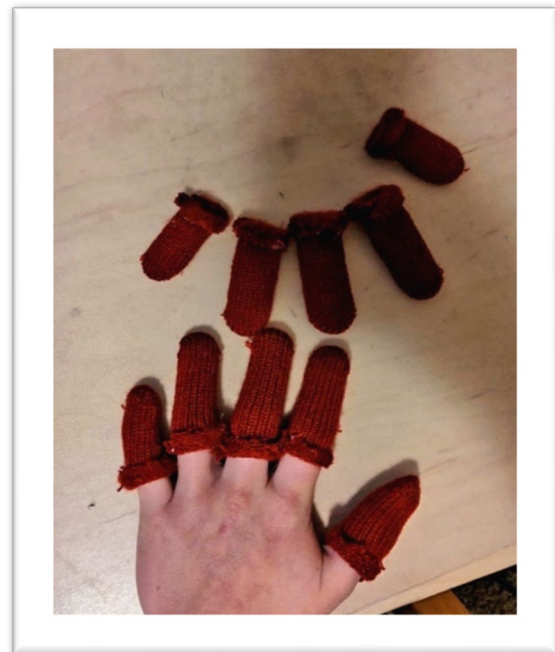
The pedagogical intervention

COMS 591 and ENGG 521 met five times during the term. These meetings happened once a week for two hours and fifty minutes during regular class time. Each of these classes was designed to provide structure to the transdisciplinary

collaboration and keep students motivated and focused. The following is a description of the classes as they unfolded during Fall 2022:

1. Group formation: During this class, teams of five Communication Studies students, who had formed research teams during the first day of class, met teams of four Engineering students selected by Dr. Eggermont. Groups were introduced to the notion of the *chindōgu,* discussed group roles and dynamics, and analyzed examples of *chindōgus*.

2. Concept development: During this class, students brainstormed concepts for a new *chindōgu*. Students also discussed different members' "creative types" by completing the results of a self-administered survey developed by Adobe Create Magazine. The activity was an icebreaker to get groups to discuss different roles and a potential division of tasks. During this class, groups members discussed their individual ideas for the *chindōgu*.

3. Prototyping: Students developed a model for a *chindōgu* in class.

4. Evaluation: Students discussed their prototypes before the class and collected feedback.

5. Final Project Showcase: The transdisciplinary groups introduced the final *chindōgu* to the class. Students reflected about the learning associated with the transdisciplinary project.

While students from COMS 591 and ENGG 521 met only five times during the Fall term, the assignment of specific tasks and deliverables helped foster ongoing collaboration among the groups. For instance, the third time both groups met, dedicated to prototyping, was followed by a group presentation. Groups that did not collaborate effectively during the third class found themselves unprepared for the presentation.

The fact students discussed their different "creative types" and individual visions of the *chindōgu* facilitated the identification of members' different knowledge and skills. The integration of these different approaches would become crucial to a successful transdisciplinary project.

After completing the five classes dedicated to collaborative learning, students in COMS 591 prepared an individual report with three parts: the documentation of the *chindōgu* design and production process, the analysis of the data from the transdisciplinary experience, and a research journal where they reflected critically on their collaboration. The critical reflection activity became a fundamental step for students to identify the learning associated with the transdisciplinary collaboration. The evaluation focused on the thoroughness of the documentation, the depth of analysis, and the clarity and breadth of the learning reflections. There was no evaluation of the design and production of the *chindōgu*.

Implications

In their final critical reflections, students unanimously described the transdisciplinary project as new and challenging. The making of the *chindōgu* challenged views of functionality and undermined deep-seated views of research methods and forced students into a new ground where disciplinary practices and strategies became less reliable. For instance, a communication student observed that the transdisciplinary *chindōgu* project "takes away from everything that grade school and university has established for me this far, which is to stay within traditional ways of doing things and working within my comfort zone." In turn, this unfamiliar basis promoted a more equal contribution of all group members as nobody could claim familiarity with the experience. A student captured this process in their reflective journal: "each member was surprised by what the rest of the group brought to the table. As we brought our ideas together, civil debate sparked and a very productive conversation was initiated."

Figure 2: *Example of a student-made chindogu: The "Reel" Golf Ball*
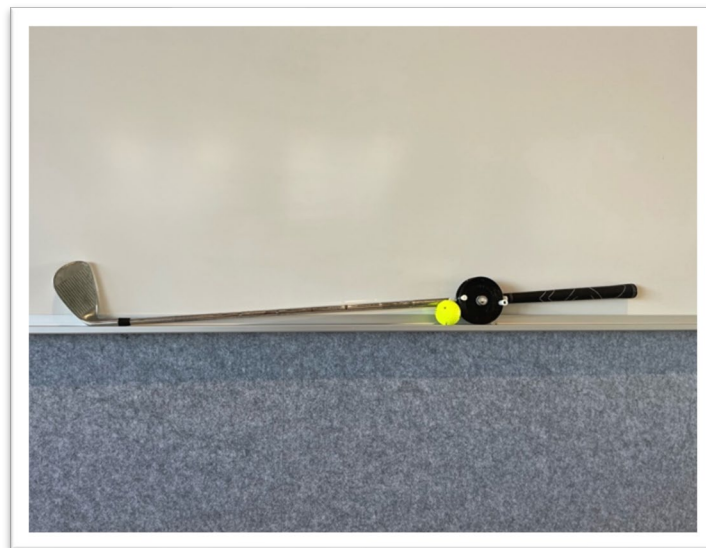
Communication Studies students identified learning outcomes in connection with the transdisciplinary experience. First, they attributed the transdisciplinary collaboration a newly gained awareness of their disciplinary biases. For instance, a student noted that "I feel as though we get so niched into our own disciplines and our own routines and traditions of doing things, causing us to lose opportunities that challenge us and allow the exchange perspectives, which ultimately contribute to greater growth." As the students' disciplinary knowledge was insufficient to

conceptualize and design a *chindōgu*, they relied on collaboration to work out the hurdles of building a *chindōgu*,prototype.

> *The transdisciplinary arts-based project became a powerful tool to promote more meaningful collaboration because it made students uncomfortable and, therefore, more watchful of every step they took. This heightened mindfulness resulted in students' increased awareness about personal and disciplinary biases that often get in the way of transdisciplinary work.*

A second theme in students' reflections is the discussion of openness and flexibility as necessary to engage in transdisciplinary collaboration. This suggests that the new and "undisciplined" nature of the arts-based project encouraged students to "move out of their comfort zones" and embrace new forms of thinking and doing. This state of mind seems to have contributed to relations of "positive interdependence" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009) between communication and engineering students. For instance, a communication student who discussed tensions in the early phases of the project concluded their reflection in a positive note: "Compromise is essential within trans-disciplinary groups, and through compromise, we gained a satisfying *chindōgu*, and continue to open ourselves up to various perspectives."

As an instructor, this experience taught me the pedagogical power of novelty, discomfort and difficulty in fostering collaboration. The transdisciplinary project promoted more meaningful collaboration because it made students uncomfortable and, therefore, more watchful of every step they took. This heightened mindfulness resulted in students' increased awareness about personal and disciplinary biases that often get in the way of transdisciplinary work. I recognize that 'undisciplined' learning experiences are demanding for both students and teachers, but they are worthwhile, as challenging experiences foster deep, transformative learning by prompting students to question their assumptions and consider multiple perspectives (Nelson & Harper, 2006).

Recommendations

For those invested in facilitating the conditions for meaningful collaboration, I offer the following recommendations:

- **Introduce novelty:** Make room for undisciplined experiences of any type to provide students with a new challenge. In the teaching and learning experience I described, the challenge was the introduction of artmaking, the design and making of a *chindōgu*. As students noted, the project demanded "to think outside the box," a disposition that contributes to make students more receptive to different ways of thinking and doing. Introducing a "new" experience that challenges disciplinary knowledge levels the playing field, making everyone equally able to contribute. This shared discomfort fosters collaboration, as no one is an expert, and all perspectives are valuable for problem-solving.

- **Embrace uncertain outcomes:** While flexibility is necessary in any meaningful collaboration, this is also required of instructors facilitating collaboration. Group work is messy and unexpected changes happen. If artmaking relies on dynamics and change by design, instructors and students must regard uncertainty and unexpected outcomes as learning opportunities in all types of collaborative experiences. As an instructor, explore the introduction of uncertainty and novelty in "low stakes" group assignments first to show students how experiences of uncertainty and discomfort build community.

- **Focus on collaboration as a learning experience**: A powerful way of communicating the importance of the collaborative process over the outcomes is to reward students' participation and make space for ongoing critical reflection. Deemphasizing a final project grade by scaffolding group work is beneficial because it provides groups with more frequent feedback and encourages regular and sustained member participation.

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Learning Context

The exclusion of African knowledge and approaches in education has perpetuated systemic anti-Black racism and fostered oppressive policies and practices, by neglecting African scholarship and the contributions of African Canadians in curriculum. In the field of social work, ignoring Africentric perspectives has resulted in social workers being ill-equipped to effectively address the unique challenges faced by people of African descent in Canada. The prevailing social work curriculum remains predominantly Eurocentric, offering limited scope for alternative epistemologies and methodologies. In response to this gap, we employed a team-teaching approach to develop, deliver, and evaluate a novel course on Africentric perspectives in social work in 2021, with an emphasis on the collectivist and humanistic values expressed through interdependence and interconnectedness (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). In this chapter we share our experiences team-teaching this course and the lessons we have learned. We also discuss the broader implications for engaging students in team-teaching and the overall curriculum development for social work education and other disciplines.

Focus

The SOWK 555 S01, Africentric Perspectives in Social Work course explored social work practice with people of African descent, emphasizing Africentric perspectives and critically examining experiences of anti-Black racism. This was an elective course designed to be delivered online for students in their final year of their bachelor's degree in social work. A very diverse group 13 students enrolled in it, including students from South Asia, the Caribbean, Indigenous, East and West African regions, and white born Canadians. Grounded in critical education theories, the course drew on Freire's (2000) concept of critical consciousness, hooks' (2010) engaged pedagogy, and Mezirow's (2002) transformative learning framework. The course content was designed to incorporate both historical and contemporary experiences of people of African descent, both on the continent and throughout the diaspora. Recognizing Africa as a vast continent with diverse geographies, cultures, histories, and lived experiences, the course highlighted both the unique and shared struggles of oppression faced by people of African descent. Through rigorous inquiry, we examined how slavery, colonization, racism, and systemic inequities have shaped the histories, traditions, and lived experiences of peoples of African descent. A team-teaching approach (Minett-Smith & Davis, 2020) was employed to enrich the learning experience, incorporating a variety of methods, such as lectures, expert guest speakers, and critical discussions of literature, films, podcasts, and case studies to engage students.

Collaborative and Interactive Learning Environment

Our team-teaching approach fostered a collaborative and interactive learning environment. We co-developed course content and assignments, attended all classes, graded assignments together, and conducted critical debriefing sessions. We consistently solicited and incorporated feedback from students to refine our methods, ensuring shared responsibility for course objectives, enhancing teaching proficiency, and promoting active student engagement.

The use of self was essential in this team-teaching approach, especially given the course's focus on the history of erasure of Africentric perspectives in education. We drew on our embodied knowledge, accumulated through years of learning from our elders and our own agency as lifelong learners. Our diverse cultural and geopolitical backgrounds as well as our distinct historical

> *A team-teaching approach fosters a collaborative and interactive learning environment and reflective practice.*

trajectories enriched our teaching practice. The first author's knowledge is shaped by her lived experience in Africa, where she was born and raised, as well as her academic journey in both African and Canadian contexts. The second author, born in the Caribbean and raised in Canada, completed most of her academic studies within Canadian institutions. As learners within Eurocentric dominated institutions, we used our agency to question the lack of comprehensive knowledge about people of African descent, past and present. Often, we had to seek knowledge outside the formal curriculum, driven by our curiosity and desire for self-understanding. Sharing these experiences with our students has been deeply enriching.

Reflective practice and the use of self were further enhanced by the expertise of guest lecturers who are pioneers in Africentric social work. These guest lecturers, contributors to the first book on Africentric social work in Canada, which also served as the textbook for the course, included a current high-ranking political figure, a former leader of an organization serving Black women, and a retired social work professor. Their contributions were highly valued by students, as reflected in course evaluations and their active engagement during Q&A sessions. For a course of this nature, it is crucial to be taught by instructors who have embodied experience and knowledge.

Teaching Philosophy and Strategies

Our teaching strategies were informed by the principles of critical consciousness, engaged pedagogy, and transformative learning.

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness is defined as the "the practice of freedom" (Freire, 2000, p. 34) and is used to cultivate different levels of consciousness in students to produce citizens capable to enact change (Jemal, 2016; Manca, 2020). These principles guided our process of unlearning and re-learning innovative approaches as we co-designed the course and immersed ourselves in African ways of knowing, value systems, and practices, rooted in the Ubuntu, a Bantu-origin philosophy, and African knowledge system, enriched by various disciplines. This allowed us to transform the classroom into a space of co-constructed knowledge where students brought their own perspectives and engaged in critical reflection. We shared articles, poems, songs, and artifacts from people of African descent, and developed assignments that fostered creativity and innovation in interpreting Africentric perspectives.

It is important to note that Africa, like any other continent, includes countries and regions that may be distinct in nature, and cultures. However, it is also a continent that has gone through

various phases that brought its people together through commonly shared experiences (e.g., colonization), exchanges of cultures, goods, and belief systems (e.g., spread of Islam) with mutual influences, while at other times they occupied different positions through wars, or the enslavement of sub-Sahara Africans by Arab countries. While we recognize these differences, this manuscript focuses on the commonalities rather than the othering aspects (Tissières & De Jager, 2002).

We incorporated teaching strategies that enriched the learning experience and intentionally amplified Africentric perspectives (Dei, 1994), including consideration of African history, culture, intellectual thoughts, ideas, and experiences of people of African descent living in Africa and in the diaspora. For instance, in one assignment, students created posters representing an integration of Africentric principles and values and their own worldviews (e.g., East-Indian, Indigenous) that would guide their practice with people of African descent. This work encouraged students to bring their unique perspectives to the learning process while challenging them to think critically and creatively. By interweaving diverse worldviews into a cohesive narrative, the process highlighted the richness and interconnectedness of complementary knowledges.

Engaged Pedagogy

Engaged pedagogy involved stimulating students' behaviours, emotions, and cognitions through diverse teaching resources and strategies. We intentionally integrated resources not found in normative textbooks to draw on different ways of knowing and arouse the senses of the learners, their learning styles, critical thinking, and engagement. These resources included peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and visuals such as movies based on true historical experiences (e.g., 12 years a slave, Selma) and various African proverbs. Engaged pedagogy was promoted using Africentric perspectives, including the principles of Ubuntu ethic (e.g., relationality, mutual support), and critical conversations to stimulate students to unearth and expand their knowledge and practice through experiential learning. For example, in a facilitated group exercise, students reviewed a case scenario of an Africentric therapist conducting an assessment with a young Black mother. They were asked to identify areas where the therapist drew on Africentric perspectives to validate the client's lived realities and to consider potential barriers if these perspectives were ignored. The resulting discussion unpacked assumptions and biases and moved beyond Eurocentric approaches and strategies.

Our team-teaching model prioritized agentic engagement. Wang and Degol (2014) define agentic engagement as students' "direct and intentional attempts to enrich the learning process by

actively influencing teacher instruction" (p.138). Reeve (2013) adds that agentic engagement is proactive and involves behaviours that may alter or enrich the flow of learning and teaching by amplifying learners' constructive and transactional contributions. According to hook (2010), teachers applying engaged pedagogy "must discover what the students know and what they need to know," engaging students beyond a surface level through mutual learning that enhanced the practice of learning and knowing together for the common good.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning moved beyond the acquisition of information and allowed students to question their assumptions, engage in critical reflection, modify their frame of reference, and develop a course of action. Transformational learning, involved deep, constructive, and meaningful learning that supported critical ways in which learners consciously made meaning of their lives (Simsek, 2012). This paradigm shift facilitated a fundamental change in worldview, led to reflective and conscious learning experiences necessary for true emancipation. McGonigal (n.d.) highlights the following conditions or processes of transformative learning:

1. An activating event that exposed the limitations of students' current knowledge or approach;
2. Opportunities for students to identify and articulate the underlying assumptions in their current knowledge or approach;
3. Critical self-reflection as students considered the origins and influences of these assumptions;
4. Critical discourse among students and with the instructor to examine alternative ideas and approaches; and
5. Opportunities to test and apply new perspectives.

A team-teaching model transcends cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement to target agentic engagement.

Students emulated these conditions through student-led presentations and discussions that sparked curiosity and promoted independent learning and shared responsibility. For instance, students were required to write an opposite the editorial page (op-ed)[2] assignment addressing a specific topic concerning people of African descent. This assignment involved creating a proposal, writing the op-ed, and selecting media outlets for potential publication based on the investigated

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2 Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines an op-ed as "an essay in a newspaper or magazine that gives the opinion of the writer and that is written by someone who is not employed by the newspaper or magazine."

issue. This process promoted reflection on the moral responsibility of knowledge dissemination with a broader audience.

Course Impact, Takeaways and Recommendations

Students as partners: The impact of our teaching strategies was evidenced by students' feedback and engagement. One student was inspired to pursue further studies in Africentric social work. Many students expressed a desire for the course to be mandatory for all social work students. They indicated that the course profoundly changed their approach to social work and allowed them to see their practice through a completely different lens, emphasizing cultural humility and the impact of systemic racism. In response to students' feedback, we explored the integration of more interactive elements, such as   virtual reality experiences that simulated the lived experiences of people of African descent. This technological innovation provided an immersive learning experience, allowing students to engage more deeply with the material. We also considered developing workshops and seminars that extended the learning from the course, making it accessible to social work professionals and community members. We later enhanced the course by collaborating with other faculty members to incorporate more diverse perspectives and expanding its delivery to a broader student body across multiple regions. Instructors could actively solicit and integrate student feedback throughout the course using various methods, such as anonymous surveys.

Engaging in Critical Self-Reflection: We encourage both instructors and students to engage in continuous critical self-reflection; this was an essential component of our teaching philosophy. We regularly engaged in reflective practice sessions, separately and then together, assessing the effectiveness of our teaching methods and their impact on students. This allowed us to identify areas for improvement and adapt our strategies to better meet student needs. We also encouraged students to engage in self-reflection, providing tools and frameworks to critically examine their assumptions and biases. Instructors can implement reflective journaling assignments that prompt students to document their thoughts, feelings, reflections on course themes, and their biases and assumptions about social work and systemic racism. These journals served as a safe space for students to explore personal growth and challenges.

Fostering a Supportive Learning Environment: Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment was central to our teaching approach. We recognized that discussing topics such as anti-Black racism and systemic oppression would be emotionally challenging for students. Therefore, we prioritized creating a brave and accountable classroom atmosphere where students could express their thoughts and experiences. We established clear guidelines for respectful and constructive dialogue, ensuring that all voices were heard and valued. We also provided resources for students who needed additional support, such as access to counseling services and peer support groups. Recognizing the potential for trauma when discussing sensitive topics, we offered debriefing sessions and space for students to process their emotions. Instructors may wish to adopt this holistic approach by developing clear guidelines for respectful dialogue and establishing norms that promote a nurturing and empathetic learning environment.

Emphasizing Active Engagement and Facilitating Critical Conversations: A key goal of the *Facilitated Class Discussion* assignment was to promote the active application of Africentric perspectives by engaging students in meaningful classroom discussions. We designed the assignment to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical facilitation skills. Students worked in small groups to prepare and lead discussions on assigned weekly readings, fostering collaborative learning environments where they could apply critical Africentric perspectives to real-world issues. For example, students were tasked with developing thought-provoking questions to guide their discussions and facilitate conversations that challenged existing viewpoints on race, identity, and social justice. This approach encouraged students to engage critically with the material and helped them develop practical facilitation skills by leading discussions, using active listening, and summarizing key takeaways. By collaborating with their peers and using creative strategies, students gained practical experience in facilitating critical dialogues that are essential in social work practice, especially when addressing systemic oppression and issues affecting people of African descent. Instructors could implement practical assignments, such as facilitated class discussions, where students are tasked with engaging with Africentric principles in real-world contexts. This would provide students with the opportunity to apply the concepts learned in class to critical discussions, helping them develop facilitation skills while gaining deeper insights into the experiences and needs of Black communities.

Continuous Improvement and Innovation: Our commitment to continuous improvement and innovation in teaching Africentric perspectives led us to refine and enhance the course over time. We regularly reviewed and updated the course content to ensure it addressed contemporary issues relevant to people of African descent. We actively sought feedback from current students and alumni to better understand their experiences and identify areas for improvement. To promote critical thinking and deeper engagement, we revised assignments and incorporated more interactive elements. We also explored the possibility of developing an online version of the course, which would include virtual discussions and interactive modules to make Africentric perspectives more accessible to a broader audience. Additionally, we focused on creating a network of social work practitioners and scholars within the field, strengthening the community of practice around Africentric social work. Moving forward, instructors may consider the development of online modules or workshops to extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom and foster continued engagement with Africentric principles.

Conclusion

Our team-teaching approach to Africentric perspectives in social work has emphasized the importance of critical consciousness, engaged pedagogy, and transformative learning in promoting equity and justice. By integrating diverse ways of knowing and fostering a collaborative learning environment, we have equipped students with the tools and perspectives necessary to address systemic oppression and effectively support people of African descent.

The success of our course has underscored the need to continue incorporating Africentric perspectives into social work education and beyond. Witnessing our students' growth and transformation has been deeply rewarding; their increased awareness and commitment to anti-racist work inspire us to continue refine and expand the course.

Our vision is for Africentric perspectives to become a foundational component of social work education, shaping a new generation of social workers capable of addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by communities who are marginalized. As of September 2024, this course is now compulsory for all incoming Bachelor of Social Work students at the University of Calgary. We aim for Africentric perspectives to remain integral to social work practice and advocacy both at the University of Calgary and globally.

Beyond the classroom, our team-teaching efforts have extended into the broader community. We collaborated with the Faculty of Social Work's Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) redesign

committee to update the course make it a required part of the curriculum. We were also invited to provide feedback on how elements of Africentric perspectives could be integrated into other BSW courses. Additionally, we shared our knowledge with other faculties through a podcast and offered expert advice on anti-racism initiatives to various organizations and researchers, demonstrating the course's broader impact on advancing equity and social justice. For example, we were both invited on a research project by a professor at MacEwan University exploring the Afrocentricity paradigm for social work education and practice.

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Chapter 8:
Decolonizing Social Work Education: An International Group Study Program in India

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Context

International social work has become increasingly relevant to contemporary social work practice provided the heightened interdependency between nations and ensuing political, social, economic, and environmental complexities that have arisen globally. The social work profession has a particular fortitude for addressing global issues, given its contributions to "equality, social justice and development and the role of social work in the context of poverty alleviation, globalisation, migration, human rights and climate change" (Palattiyil et al., 2019, p. 1044). To expose social work students to international education and practice, various study abroad opportunities have been developed and implemented with the goal of cultivating the necessary knowledge, skills, and awareness to effectively navigate the dynamic landscape of our increasingly global world (Moorhead et al., 2021).

In this chapter, we share the model of an interdisciplinary short-term international group study program (GSP) in India. We first review the relevant literature, describe the pedagogical model, offer some insights into the strengths and challenges of the GSP, and conclude by outlining

implications for social work educators interested in offering sustainable, inclusive, international education.

As social work educators from the Global North we sought to challenge hegemonic Eurocentric and colonial frameworks that produce unequal relationships between the Global North, typically the sending country, and the Global South, most often the host country. To disrupt "colonial notions of knowledge that privilege Western perspectives and models" (Villarreal Sosa & Lesniewski, 2021, p. 719), we partnered with academics, members of non-governmental organizations and other local community members to develop and deliver some of the GSP content and determine methods of delivery. For example, academic experts presented lectures on key social issues in India, non-governmental organizations provided opportunities to engage in local practices, and community members shared their insights during walking tours of historical, religious, and cultural sites. In prioritizing the development of intercultural capacities, we provided intercultural opportunities and place-based experiences to further equip students with a critical lens. Although not without critique in perpetuating coloniality (Walsh et al., in press), the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, United Nations, 2024) framework, which has been proposed to address urgent social and environmental challenges (Cordoba & Bando, 2022) and the inequities uncovered and exacerbated by the global pandemic, was well-suited to frame students' inquiry in the GSP. Students were invited to examine the SDGs and family issues in both the Canadian and Indian contexts to build the "transformative knowledge for social justice, as social action, and as a possibility and hope for a socially just future" (Lee & Johnstone, 2023, p. 1) as global citizens.

We also sought to disrupt the traditional power dynamic in the relationship between learner and teacher by employing a student as partner (SaP) approach, defined as "a relationship in which all involved – students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers, students' unions, and so on – are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together" (Healey et al., 2014, p. 12). GSP are ideal settings for disrupting the inequalities inherent in traditional educational settings and in promoting reciprocity in learning for all participants (O'Shea, 2018). Educators and students alike shared in the developing knowledge of the host country and were mutually confronted with the many challenges in the field as they share activities, meals, and living quarters.

Students not only learned from members of the host community, the GSP offered opportunities to share their developing knowledge and insights with local community members. In

addition, aligning with the SaP teaching philosophy, students were free to focus their assignments on the SDG and relevant family issue of their choice and future practice aspirations and had the ability to convey their learning through a variety of approaches, including multisensory and arts-based modalities.

Focus

Prior to developing the GSP, the two lead authors, social work course instructors conducted two field visits in India to develop partnerships across multiple sectors, understand ways to embed the GSP in the local context using a decolonial approach and establish its suitability and feasibility. Over the two-year engagement we partnered with two local academics, the third and fourth authors, who were central to meeting the intra-cultural GSP objectives in their role as program assistants. Subsequently, we chose to deliver a short-term GSP (15 days in the field) consisting of two interconnected undergraduate elective courses. Integrated both substantively and pedagogically, the GSP was delivered in the field simultaneously in Spring 2024. Each instructor was responsible for the creation of their individual course: determining the course content, assignments, and grading while also collaborating to ensure integration of learning. Given the clear direction from the literature for the need for international education and the salience of the SDGs in social work education to address social inequity among other social justice pursuits, we aimed to deliver the GSP with the learning objectives of the SDGs as our framework to understand to social and family issues in India and more globally. With the broad aims and objectives of the course, we hoped to attract students from a range of disciplines. Ultimately, four students were from social work students, and four from other disciplines (health and society, international relations, and open studies).

An overarching intention of the GSP builds on students' abilities to work inter-culturally with the opportunity to explore, in collaboration with Indian academics, members of non-governmental organizations, and community members. The Inter-Cultural Practices and Sustainable Development Goals course aimed to develop students' understanding of the SDGs as they relate to key social issues in India and Canada and the Community Practice in India: Children, Youth and Families in Context course sought to foster a deeper understanding of children, youth and families within a global context. The specific course objectives related to collaboration, community-building and decolonizing aims are noted in Table 1.

Table 1: Course Objectives

Decolonization Goal	Inter-Cultural Practices and Sustainable Development Goals	Community Practice in India: Children, Youth and Families in Context	Student Testimonials
Enhance collaborative learning	Develop reciprocal learning and exchange methods with social work students from Central University of Himachal Pradesh and Jamia Millia Islamia.	Develop reciprocal learning and exchange skills with social work students from partner institutions within India.	*The group work added a shared learning with individuals outside my field of study. My personal life and how I work with/understand different cultures was highly influenced.*
Increase inter-cultural capacity	Enhance their knowledge and practice to work inter-culturally.	Demonstrate an understanding of the links between micro, mezzo, and macro social work practice and how they all work collaboratively to create change.	*Getting to interact and learn from the local people had the biggest impact on me. I felt like I was able to organically learn about Indian culture and ways of life in a more nuanced manner than what I could learn from textbooks or on the internet. I developed some very strong relationships with both the locals and my peers that I hope to maintain for years to come.*
Disrupt North/South hierarchies	Apply their knowledge of SDGs in relationship to Canada and India.	Apply knowledge of child, youth, family, and community practice in both local and international settings.	*The experience had a professional impact on me as I was able to see how social work can be done in different countries and cultural contexts.*
Imagining a socially just future	Understand tools and approaches used to address the 2030 United Nations SDGs (e.g., human rights and environmental sustainability) at a local level.	Utilize practice skills used to overcome systemic barriers, and to promote human rights and social justice within diverse contexts and with diverse groups.	*The biggest impact was learning about different social issues, what government initiatives or non-governmental organizations are doing to combat that issue, and how that translates*

to the Canadian context. As someone interested in public health for my future degree, this helped me learn about different health issues and what is being done.

Each of the courses had three assignments. The first, due prior to entering the field, was comprised of two-part self-reflections designed to prepare students to enter the field, understand the relevant Canadian context, and engage in group work. The second assignments involved small group presentations delivered in the field, which invited students to collaborate and convey their experiential learnings using a range of media. The final assignments, due about a week post-field, required students individually to consolidate their research, practice, and experiential learning. Course assignment details and examples are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Course Assignments

Assignment	SOWK 557.44/ UNIV 501.72 Inter-Cultural Practices and Sustainable Development Goals	SOWK 557.45/ UNIV 501.73 Community Practice in India: Children, Youth and Families in Context
1	Part 1- Reflection on your identity and international experience (10%) Part 2- Discussion post on your selected SDG (10%)	Part 1-Reflection situating how your family of origin has informed your current worldview (10%) Part 2- Discussion post on interest related to family in Canada (10%)
2	Multisensory research group presentation depicting the chosen social issue and SDG (40%)	Arts-based project to 'give voice' to an issue in India and Canada illustrating child and family centred social policies (50%)
3	Choose media to outline the social issue in relation to the SDG challenge in India and Canada (40%)	Create a policy brief (30%) OR Two blog posts on child mental health issues (15% each)

Implications

1. We initially developed an academic partnership between the University of Calgary and two universities in India to promote SaP through undergraduate student exchanges and intercultural co-learning. This proved not possible due to differences in scheduling, course timetabling and degree requirements. As a partial remedy we integrated two local academics into our field activities. Future GSP could look for other ways to integrate opportunities for co-learning among students of the Global North and South.

Figure 1. Multimedia Example- SD4 Qualit 1Figure 1. Multimedia Example- SD4 Quality Education

2. We experienced difficulties in obtaining travel visas for some students. Although we offered to integrate a virtual component of the course for students unable to travel, this was not taken up. In the future, this option could be fully integrated to reduce financial or mobility barriers (de Wit & Altbach, 2021) and respond to critiques related to the environmental costs of international mobility, while reaping many of the benefits of study abroad (Walsh et al., in press)

3. To reduce challenges due to cultural shock, environmental issues (extreme heat and pollution), minor medical issues (heat exhaustion and skin reactions to insect bites), personal safety, and hygiene issues related to water and food we engaged two local academics as advisors to the program. As a teaching strategy, while in the field we conducted daily individual and group check-ins to gauge students' physical and psychological well-being. Additionally, inviting the local advisors to meet with GSP students before departure as well as student ambassadors of previous programs might be useful to share concerns and develop mitigation strategies with GSP students prior to departure.

4. Availability of physical space, technology, internet access, and other material resources varies in field settings. We addressed these challenges through flexibility in the timing and mode of delivery of assignments, while being responsive to learners needs and desires.

Conclusion

The short-term GSP framed by anticolonial, experiential, and SaP pedagogies provided a powerful intercultural opportunity for collaborative learning. We overcame considerable challenges in developing and implementing the GPS and faced considerable adversities in the field. Nevertheless, collectively we experienced deep learning and joy in the field.

Recommendations

- International education premised on a decolonial anti-oppressive approach must recognize and educate students about the policies and practices of nation states which lie in opposition to these ideals.

- Despite exceptional cultural sensitivity and adaptability of the students, some planned activities were somewhat shocking and difficult to assimilate. Allowing more time for pre-brief sessions advising participants what to expect and providing a safe space for them to share their anticipated concerns was beneficial. This process also opened space for more critical reflection on the experience in the planned debrief activities.

- Offering maximum opportunities for cultural immersion between student participants, local non-governmental organizations, educators, and community members with mutual exchange not only deepened learning about the Indian context and issues but provided insights into the Canadian context for members of the host community.

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Chapter 9:
Collaborating with Practitioners to Create Teaching and Learning Resources

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Context

Many educators report challenges when weaving Indigenous knowledges into their teaching, including difficulty accessing resources and presenting information in a way that reflects the diverse cultures of Indigenous nations (Danyluk et al., 2023). The newly implemented Teaching Quality Standard (TQS, 2018) requires that every Alberta teacher from K-12 must integrate Indigenous knowledges into their teaching.

This project sought input from in-service teachers to create resources that could be used by pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and by faculty attempting to weave Indigenous knowledges into their teaching. Pre-service teachers are those in a Bachelor of Education program, while in-service teachers are those who have completed their program and are employed within a school division. Pre-service teacher education takes place both in the university and in schools where pre-service teachers are partnered with in-service teachers for their field experience or practice teaching. In school settings, pre-service teachers take on increasing responsibility for teaching under the mentorship of an experienced teacher. The fifth competency in the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS 5) requires all Alberta teachers to develop and apply a foundational understanding of Indigenous peoples in the classroom. While some Alberta teachers had been

applying Indigenous knowledges to the classroom for many years (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017) others expressed concerns about their efficacy to do so (Burns et al., 2022; Scott & Gani, 2018).

In 2018, Scott and Gani found that teachers were reluctant to weave Indigenous knowledges into their classrooms for three main reasons. Firstly, they believed that because Indigenous communities were so diverse, they struggled to determine which Indigenous perspective to teach from. Secondly, they believed that only Indigenous educators could authentically weave Indigenous knowledges into their classroom. Finally, participants shared that as Canada is a multicultural society, Indigenous perspectives should not be privileged (pp. 172–174).

During the period following the introduction of the (TQS 5), schools boards increased efforts to provide training and resources to teachers to support their efficacy in weaving Indigenous knowledges into their teaching. Yet, (Evans et al., 2020) reported that although teachers were exposed to a variety of resources and training, they found it difficult to transition their learning into the classroom. In 2022, our research team consisting of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, concluded that these concerns extended to our own faculty and mentor teachers who expressed fears of doing the wrong thing and accidently being disrespectful (Burns et al., 2022).

Based on this, we identified the need to create an open access website that housed lesson plans and podcasts where teachers shared their ideas for weaving Indigenous knowledges into the classroom. Collaboratively, we created seventeen lesson plans exemplifying the integration of Indigenous knowledges into a series of resources, which include podcasts featuring pioneering educators sharing these strategies.

Process

Before reaching out to teachers, we began the process of obtaining ethics from each of the school districts. In total, 13 school districts across Alberta agreed to participate. The school districts were a mix of public, separate and charter schools with 75% of teachers who responded being from urban schools and 25% from rural schools.

Data collection and collaboration with teachers began in 2021, in the midst of COVID 19 lockdowns. COVID-19 learning loss, crisis and trauma work in classrooms as well as funding cuts has led to increasing rates of teacher burnout and compassion fatigue (Kendrick, 2022). These combined stressors resulted in fewer teachers collaborating then we had initially expected.

Our research began with a survey of Alberta teachers from the participating school districts.

Two hundred and forty-seven teachers participated in the survey. When asked about challenges they encountered when teaching about Indigenous knowledges, 24% reported a fear of making a mistake and or offending someone, while 24% indicated they struggled to choose the appropriate resource for

> **_Teacher Concerns About Integrating Indigenous Knowledges_**
>
> _Making a Mistake_
> _Choosing the Wrong Resource_
> _Engaging in Appropriation_

teaching and 19% indicated they feared engaging in appropriation (Danyluk et al., 2023). The process of co-creating lesson plans also began with the survey. One of the survey questions asked teachers to share a time when they had successfully woven Indigenous knowledges into their teaching. The research team reviewed responses to this question to identify those which might make a good lesson plan. We looked for examples that were consistent with the five Indigenous Worldviews as identified in Walking Together (Alberta Education, 2005, pp. 11-12).

Those five worldviews include:

- A holistic perspective
- The interconnectedness of all living things
- Connection to the land and community
- The dynamic nature of the world
- Strength in "power with" or shared power with students

Once potential lesson plan ideas were identified, we conducted interviews with over 30 of the teachers. In the interviews, teachers shared their lesson plan ideas and submitted consent forms permitting the team to use their ideas. Next, we expanded on the lesson plan idea to ensure they included examples consistent with the Alberta curriculum. The final lesson plans included curriculum connections, interdisciplinary concepts, activities, case studies, videos, slides, worksheets and assessments. They were designed to be user-friendly, making them accessible to teachers with a wide range of experience from pre-service teachers to those with several years of teaching experience.

Before making these lesson plans publicly available on our website, we sought feedback from an Indigenous Learning Leader. An Indigenous Learning Leader is a teacher who works with in-service teachers to help them weave Indigenous knowledges into their teaching. This collaboration

was crucial for ensuring that the lesson plans were not only accurate but also respectful in how they communicated Indigenous Knowledges.

In a spirit of reciprocal knowledge sharing, we shared the final lesson plans with the teachers whose ideas had been the origin of the lesson plans. We asked those teachers for feedback to ensure we had represented their lesson plan ideas respectfully and accurately. This reciprocal knowledge sharing was an important part of honouring the knowledge these teachers had shared with our team.

Finally, we invited teachers to share their ideas through a podcast where they talk about their lesson plan and why weaving Indigenous knowledges into their teaching was important.
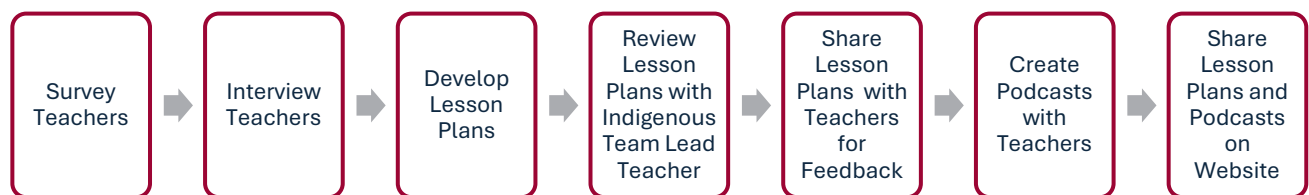
Survey Teachers → Interview Teachers → Develop Lesson Plans → Review Lesson Plans with Indigenous Team Lead Teacher → Share Lesson Plans with Teachers for Feedback → Create Podcasts with Teachers → Share Lesson Plans and Podcasts on Website

Figure: *Process of Collaborating with Teachers*

Grade 9	Grade 7
Conservation of Biodiversity	**Plants for Food and Fibre**
Grade 4	Grade 5
A Sense of Land	Wetlands
Grade 1	Grade 4
Indigenous Garden	Embracing Indigenous Stories Through Language
Grade 2	Grade 4
Wild Word Keepers	Nature Mosaic
Grade 4	Grade 1
Communicating Ideas About the Land	Métis Traditional Sashes
Grades K-5	Grade 5
Traditional Métis Plants	Art of Alex Janvier
Six Lessons	In English & French

Table 1: Lesson plans available on the website

https://combattingracismtowardsindigenouspeoples.ca/

Series Introduction	Empowering Students Through Indigenous Knowledge Integration
Exploring Indigenous Knowledge through the Lens of Broken Promises: An Educator's Experience	Enseignante engagée pour l'intégration des savoirs autochtones en Alberta
Braiding and Weaving Indigenous Knowledge – A Tool for Combatting Anti-Indigenous Racism	Nature's Classroom: Reimagining Education with Indigenous Perspectives
The Importance of Making Personal Connections with Indigenous Knowledge: A Music Teacher's Quest	Lessons on Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Science Curriculum
Embracing Indigenous Pedagogy: Lessons from an Educator on a Central Alberta Reserve	From Métis Plants to Classroom Plans - One Teacher's Journey
	Series Conclusion

Table 2: Podcasts available on the website

Pulling it All Together

The lesson plans, research publications, models and podcasts are open access and are currently being used by pre-service and in-service teachers as well as faculties of education in Alberta. We were able to work with a French teacher to create one of the lesson plans and podcasts in French. As Indigenous education resources for French teachers are scarce, we continue to work on creating new lesson plans and podcasts in French for the website.

Pre-service teachers can use these lesson plans to build their confidence and as exemplars of what lesson plans should contain. Pre-service and in-service teachers have the option of using the lesson plans in their entirety or choosing from the components. For example, a teacher might decide to use an assessment activity from the lesson plan and not teach the lesson plan in its entirety.

The podcasts can be used by teachers to ground themselves as a form of self-directed learning or to provoke discussions in the classroom or in teacher learning groups. For students,

reflection on the podcasts may help prepare them to be better positioned to be future allies. Below are discussion prompts for each of the podcasts.

Podcast Title	Question Prompts
Exploring Indigenous Knowledge through the Lens of Broken Promises: An Educator's Experience	**For students:** What was the purpose of the Indian Act of 1867? **For teachers:** How can teachers overcome a lack of efficacy when weaving Indigenous knowledges into their teaching?
Braiding and Weaving Indigenous Knowledge - A Tool for Combatting Anti-Indigenous Racism	**For students:** How does learning about Indigenous people help to combat racism? **For teachers:** What does relationality refer to when teaching Indigenous worldviews?
The Importance of Making Personal Connections with Indigenous Knowledge: A Music Teacher's Quest	**For students:** What are some ways we can show respect when learning about and performing music from Indigenous cultures? **For teachers:** How can the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in music education contribute to broader goals of reconciliation and cultural understanding?
Embracing Indigenous Pedagogy: Lessons from an Educator on a Central Alberta Reserve	**For students:** How does movement during the lesson help improve your learning? **For teachers:** How are you creating a safe space and connecting with your students?

Empowering Students Through Indigenous Knowledge Integration	**For students:** What is the role of relationality in wellness and learning? **For teachers:** How can incorporating nature and land-based learning into your curriculum improve student engagement and learning outcomes?
Enseignante engagée pour l'intégration des savoirs autochtones en Alberta	**For students:** Quelles sont les différences et les similarités entre les peintures murales que tu as vues dans ta communauté et dans l'Étoile du matin d'Alex Janvier? What are some differences and similarities between mural paintings you have seen in your community and Alex Janvier's "Morning Star"? **For teachers:** Comment pouvons-nous aider les élèves à distinguer l'appropriation culturelle de l'appréciation culturelle tout en favorisant le développement de leurs compétences artistiques? How can we help students understand the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation when they are creating their artwork?
Nature's Classroom: Reimagining Education with Indigenous Perspectives	**For students:** Why is it important to respect and give thanks to nature when taking items from it? **For teachers:** In what ways can heart-centered learning transform the classroom environment? What strategies could you use to encourage students to see the land as a teacher?

Lessons on Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Science Curriculum	**For students:** How are Indigenous people leading the way in biological conservation? How can partnerships with Indigenous communities enhance conservation efforts? **For teachers:** What are some examples of successful Indigenous-led conservation projects that you can share with your students?
From Métis Plants to Classroom Plans - One Teacher's Journey	**For students:** What did you learn about the importance of not taking more than you need from the environment? **For teachers:** How can teachers create lesson plans that highlight the importance of reciprocity and sustainability from an Indigenous perspective?

Table 3: *Discussion prompts to use with students and in teacher discussions*

Implications

The expanding nature of teacher duties in the post COVID 19 world had implications for this project that resulted in lower levels of collaboration than originally hoped for. Still, the data from teacher surveys and interviews pointed to many encouraging developments. Seventy-four percent of respondents indicated they had access to Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Teachers commented on the important role Indigenous Team Lead teachers play in enhancing the efficacy of their teaching around (TQS 5). Teachers shared a growing acceptance of continual learning and a willingness to make mistakes but learn from them. Teachers told us that weaving Indigenous knowledges into the classroom is an effective tool in combatting racism towards Indigenous peoples. They identified seven components that need to be in place to combat racism towards Indigenous peoples. Those components were: continuing to weave Indigenous knowledges into the classroom, talking about anti-Indigenous racism with students, celebrating Indigenous cultures, continuing to learn, continuing to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities, modelling respect and finally increasing Indigenous presence in the classroom.

Recommendations

While the lesson plans provide a variety of options for pre-service and in-service teachers, they also include recommendations for teachers wanting to weave Indigenous knowledges into their classrooms in a less structured manner.

From the podcasts, teachers recommended:

Teacher Identified Steps to Combat Racism towards Indigenous Peoples

1. *Continue to weave Indigenous knowledges into the classroom.*
2. *Talk about anti-Indigenous racism with students.*
3. *Celebrate Indigenous cultures.*
4. *Continue to learn.*
5. *Strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities.*
6. *Model respect towards Indigenous peoples.*
7. *Increase Indigenous presence in the classroom.*

- Begin by understanding yourself in relation to this work including examining your own biases and privileges and how this works to uphold the status quo.
- Develop your own foundational knowledge, that way you can integrate Indigenous knowledges in an organic way. The podcasts offer insight into foundational knowledge. Further information can be found in our Approaches to Reconciliation model (Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2019).
- Understand that you are going to make a mistake but doing nothing is leaning into the status quo.
- Start at the beginning of the year. One teacher shared, "I took them outside and said, welcome to our classroom."
- Get outside, ask your students, who do we share this learning space with?
- Find a community of people who are doing this and work together.

Note

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