



Learning to teach Indigenous history and culture

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Several days before facilitating a professional learning session on making curriculum and instruction more inclusive of Indigenous cultures, we sensed the need to confer. We had read a lesson

plan that one of the participating teachers would share at the session, and it raised some serious concerns. The presenting teacher had developed this lesson with good intentions after she identified a need for more representation of Indigenous peoples

in her school's curriculum. However, the lesson about the first Thanksgiving included inaccurate historical content.

As facilitators, we (Rachel, Laura, and Claire) discussed how to remedy the problems while still fostering a space of encouragement and support

for the presenting teacher. She had taken initiative to attempt course correction to a history of schools' minimal inclusion of Indigenous cultures. We know that this can be isolating and challenging work.

Although educators have been acknowledging the need to honor and include the cultures of diverse learners for years, the instructional core has remained mostly unchanged (e.g. Banks & Banks, 1993; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; hooks, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Pewewardy, 2002). The current climate that includes direct attacks on equity-based and anti-racist educators and curricular resources makes the prospects for this work all the more tenuous and potentially even dangerous.

To support teachers to make this shift, we designed professional learning with a specific focus on developing learning activities that are both authentic and inclusive of Indigenous histories, cultures, and communities. We (authors of this article), along with others on the project team, are Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators who collaborated through a partnership between the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Indigenous Arts and Sciences and the Authentic Intellectual Work Institute.

Indigenous Arts and Sciences is an initiative of Earth Partnerships, a space in which university staff and members of the Bad River, Red Cliff, Lac du Flambeau, Lac Courte Oreilles, Menominee, and Ho-Chunk Nations collaborate for educational and environmental professional learning. The Authentic Intellectual

Work Institute works with schools to bring together interdisciplinary teams of K-12 teachers who collaborate to improve their classroom practice.

Our two-year collaboration (with funding from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education's Grand Challenges project and the National Science Foundation) aimed to support participating teachers' efforts to develop intellectually challenging, culturally relevant instructional activities for their classrooms. Starting with the goal of supporting educators in their efforts to better teach American Indian studies to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, we grappled with how to provide the professional learning required to disrupt deeply embedded inequities in curriculum and instruction.

We wanted to honor the complex, interdisciplinary nature of American Indian studies and include content about diverse Native nations and Indigenous cultures, as well as avoid reducing this rich content to a single unit at a handful of grade levels. Additionally, we wanted to cultivate the deep reflection and growth that must take place to unlearn entrenched, often unintended, biases in a society where Indigenous peoples have been romanticized, demoralized, and propagandized for centuries.

In this article, we focus on the foundations of our partnership and how we implemented our professional learning, as well as important lessons about facilitating teacher professional learning. A note about terminology: We mostly use Indigenous in this

article to refer to people, communities, and cultures. We also use Native as a political term referencing sovereign tribes or nations and American Indian studies to refer to the specific curriculum area in policy and in some schools.

COLLABORATING FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In designing our approach, we drew on two frameworks from the collaborating partners to provide focus and guidance. One was the Indigenous Arts and Sciences' place-based and relationship-based approach to learning. The other was a set of four guiding principles of implementation developed by the Authentic Intellectual Work Institute.

Indigenous Arts and Sciences: Place- and relationship-based learning

The educational framework of Indigenous Arts and Sciences prioritizes the specific place and context of the work. Indigenous partners teach about their nations' unique histories, cultures, languages, traditional stewardship practices, and tribal sovereignty. In this way, content is taught accurately and in culturally authentic ways throughout the curriculum.

Indigenous Arts and Sciences professional learning also prioritizes relationships. Participants learn about themselves, others, and how to take action for personal and shared responsibilities to the land and one another. Grounded in cultural humility, the learning nurtures mutual respect and reciprocity (Brayboy et

al., 2012; YoungBear-Tibbetts, 2013). Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can and should benefit from this approach to teaching and learning, as education becomes a means of self-knowledge, cultural competency, and service to one's community.

Authentic Intellectual Work Institute: Four guiding principles of implementation

The Authentic Intellectual Work Institute supports teacher professional learning to enhance construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school in classroom practice and student learning. This work puts into action four principles that can maximize success and teachers' continuous improvement (Newmann et al., 2016).

1. To make meaningful change, teachers must actively engage in sustained professional learning in which they construct knowledge through critical inquiry. This includes analyzing problems of pedagogic practice in depth, communicating their learning with peers, and applying that learning in their teaching.
2. Professional learning should contribute to collaboration and collective understanding of shared goals for learning, thereby nurturing a strong learning community.
3. Professional learning should be organic. Teachers bring artifacts from their own practice and identify important problems of practice from their own work to focus on. They should draw on their expertise and an understanding of students in their unique contexts.
4. Teachers should take intellectual and professional risks in their professional learning. A safe, nurturing culture with constructive feedback fosters individual and collective growth.

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Arts and Sciences and the Authentic Intellectual Work Institute supported educators in their efforts to improve curriculum and instruction. The two frameworks share a focus on the centrality of collaborative work to nurture strong relationships and learning communities to impact practice. The place-based approach that ensured inclusion of rich, culturally relevant Indigenous content complemented the four guiding principles for educator inquiry and design of instructional practices.

Integrating and enacting the frameworks is a work in progress. In our story, we share how we attempted to support one another and how professional learning can help teachers improve the instructional core leading to more inclusive schooling.

FORGING A NEW PATH

The initiative focused on collaborative sessions where we helped educators develop lessons to use in their classrooms. From the start, we prioritized opportunities for coaching and collaborative reflection on pedagogy. In 2019-20, the first year of our partnership, the team offered six daylong sessions, available at no cost to educators working in local K-12 public and private schools, colleges, and community-based sites.

Sixteen educators participated over the two years, with seven attending both years. Almost all had attended Indigenous Arts and Sciences professional learning, and others signed up through word of mouth or recruitment emails. We held our

in-person sessions on Ho-Chunk land, a place the Ho-Chunk Nation calls Teejop (Day-JOPE). March 2020 brought the end of face-to-face meetings as COVID-19 necessitated the shift to virtual meetings for the last meeting of year one and all six meetings in year two.

In year one, a typical session included an opening land acknowledgment and one or two Indigenous presenters who explored topics designed to build educators' knowledge around issues central to Wisconsin Native nations, such as tribal sovereignty and Ho-Chunk kinship. Then the group would shift into a dialogue about how teachers could apply the new knowledge they gained to their instruction.

These dialogues were grounded in Authentic Intellectual Work Institute's focus on construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school. During this first year, participants learned rich content, but we recognized that the dialogue wasn't building sufficient capacity for teachers to integrate their learning into their teaching.

During year two, the project team addressed this by prioritizing creation of a learning community in which teachers' work could be placed at the center and content knowledge could be shared as needed. Using the Authentic Intellectual Work Institute model for professional learning, volunteers brought an artifact of their practice such as a lesson plan, a project plan, or an assessment to the meetings, along with questions and discussion ideas for peer feedback.

Often, these artifacts were first drafts that participants had developed, based on their attendance at prior Indigenous Arts and Sciences professional learning, and wanted to improve. Some examples include: an Indigenous-centered campus tour with related activities, an Indigenous land acknowledgment curriculum for environmental educators; a debate concerning Native treaty rights

relating to water usage; and an outdoor classroom that emphasized native plant species and Indigenous agricultural and land stewardship practices.

These artifacts became the focus of our learning community's work during a given session, and the presenting teacher received feedback and suggestions from other participants, as well as from Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators. This approach allowed us to develop a collaborative community of educators dedicated to teaching more authentically and accurately about Indigenous communities.

However, this approach also posed facilitation considerations and challenges. For example, we noticed that participants' peer feedback often focused on suggesting additional resources related to the content. This was the case with the teacher participant we described at the beginning of this article, when peers responded by sharing alternative first Thanksgiving books and videos. This kind of feedback was only minimally helpful in improving the instructional plan because it only changed the details presented. The presenting teacher also said that the long list of resources generated by the group was overwhelming.

While important, accurate resources aren't sufficient to address how content should be taught. But in a group of primarily non-Indigenous teacher participants, there wasn't sufficient knowledge or experience of Indigenous curriculum and pedagogy to adequately shape some of the lessons shared. Even when participants did appear to recognize problems in artifacts their peers presented, they seemed uncomfortable naming the harmful inaccuracies in the lessons they saw. We hypothesized that they stuck with sharing resources because it felt like a low-risk form of support and feedback.

All of this put pressure on facilitators to point out inaccuracies and suggest strategies for addressing

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Rachel, a member of the Choctaw Nation, drew on her experience of supporting Indigenous students and families to guide educators in selecting accurate and authentic resources as well as making personal connections and building relationships with the Native Nations nearest their school grounds. Claire and Cheryl helped the team guide educators to authentic lesson plans by highlighting connections between Indigenous content and holistic ecological stewardship action through hands-on learning. To illustrate, in a subsequent session, participants analyzed an artifact of one school's integrated learning approach on the actual school grounds as students studied Ho-Chunk sovereignty on Teejop and how to care for the land through restoration and water stewardship.

Laura was acutely aware of the gaps in her own knowledge about the topics and how she might say something that either perpetuated stereotypes or was

unintentionally harmful. To advance the Authentic Intellectual Work Institute's focus on peer feedback, she identified herself as "not the content expert" and posed questions to nurture teachers' critical dialogue about the artifacts and inquiry into potential changes that were needed for a lesson. Like teachers, facilitators had committed to taking risks and showing up with authenticity, humility, and a willingness to learn.

FACILITATING THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

After the participating teacher presented the problematic lesson described in the opening, facilitators and participants raised important concerns. We worried that the emphasis on the first Thanksgiving myth within an ancient cultures unit would unintentionally minimize the history of European colonization. In using the term "ancient," the lesson portrayed Indigenous peoples themselves as characters in history, not as thriving, contemporary members of sovereign nations who continue to make important contributions within the United States. Finally, this lesson plan did not relate to ancestral or present-day Indigenous peoples in Wisconsin, so the lesson could not adopt the place-based educational framework that we had offered as foundational to indigenizing teaching and learning.

Thanks to their collaborative planning after receiving the lesson ahead of the professional learning, Rachel, Claire, and Laura facilitated the learning experience in ways to both honor the presenting teacher while also helping the group to raise and address critical concerns. We had already established a supportive culture of feedback within this group, and we knew we had to push participants beyond sharing more resources that the teacher could use. We decided that our facilitation needed to be grounded within Indigenous Arts and Sciences' focus on place-based learning. To

accomplish this, we first tried asking the group: “How do you grapple with inappropriate (or inadequate) curriculum that is mandated but does not include information on the tribes in Wisconsin?”

Furthermore, we created a more robust list of guiding questions that anchored the dialogue in our professional learning. These questions merged place-based learning and the Authentic Intellectual Work Institute framework, and we shared and discussed them before teachers introduced their work. We then asked each presenting teacher to identify which question they would like to focus on during the discussion of their instructional artifact. Some of the guiding questions were:

- How can this lesson help students better understand the local Indigenous history, culture, and current environmental issues?
- How can we help students apply this topic or concept to a contemporary problem or an important issue to them?
- What strategies ensure that students are developing deep, conceptual understandings rather than superficial or inaccurate understandings?
- What additional background knowledge might students need?
- Whose perspectives are (and are not) represented?
- Why were these specific resources or activities included? To what extent do these (and other) resources or activities offer a more balanced or accurate perspective that will engage students in rigorous thinking?

By explicitly articulating these priorities, we were able to engage participants, including the presenting teacher, in a nurturing, yet critical dialogue that fostered all members’ learning. This narrative illustrates, we believe, how teacher collaboration, even when difficult, can help transform professional learning and practice for more inclusive and authentic curriculum and instruction.

MOVING AHEAD

Prioritizing inclusive and equitable schooling — through teachers’ enacted curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices — was a main focus of our partnership. Teacher participants grew in their instructional capacity (including both content knowledge and practice) through collaborative inquiry that built on their expertise and immediate experiences in their settings.

Facilitators also grew by continuing discussion about their own roles and capacities and how our understandings and approaches would be open to change. By better understanding our own positions and educational philosophies, facilitators from both organizations are empowered to take responsibility for our own learning and lead by example in a relationship-focused, place-based educational space that prioritizes authenticity over expertise or content coverage and humility over compliance or fidelity.

Our project team still has many questions to address about supporting educators in the meaningful integration of American Indian studies in their teaching, but we see embracing this uncertainty and developing our deep commitment to examining our own perspectives and experiences as part of the process of supporting teaching and learning. Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators have distinct and important roles and responsibilities in this work. Our commitments to continue our own learning about what is called for from us as professional learning facilitators indicate that we are on an important journey toward inclusive learning spaces for educators and, ultimately, students.

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