

Popular Podagogy: Episode 14



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00:07 Speaker 1: Hello and welcome back to Popular Podagogy, a podcast brought to you by the Faculty of Education. We are fortunate to be joined today by Dr. Lindsay Morcom. Lindsay, how you doing?

00:21 Dr. Lindsay Morcom: Good, how about you?

00:22 S1: Good. Thanks for coming on the podcast.

00:24 LM: Thanks for having me.

00:26 S1: So the reason that we really wanted to get you on the podcast, is 2019, this past year, was UNESCO's Year of Indigenous Language. So I know that you have a little bit of a focus on indigenous language, just a little bit of background on that. So what has this year meant to you?

00:43 LM: I think it's been really meaningful that indigenous languages have been recognized as something that's important to human heritage globally. There have been a lot of opportunities that have sprung from having it, in terms of international conferences and abilities to collaborate with other people doing similar work. At the same time I think it's brought all of our attention to a lack of policy, a lack of infrastructure, and the tremendous amount of work that we need to do to ensure the survival of indigenous languages both in Canada and globally.

01:11 S1: So what are some of the ways that we can support indigenous languages and really support indigenous culture through those programs?

01:19 LM: I think the most important thing that we can all do is just learn them and speak them. So, we've been really lucky. In Kingston we've got a very active language community, so we've got the Kingston Indigenous Languages Nest, that runs programming for children and families. And then here we've also got programming that we offer in partnership, that's actually held here at the Faculty of Education at Queens University. And we invite people in to learn Anishinaabemowin,

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which is also called Algonquian or Ojibwe, every Tuesday night for free in the ATEP Lounge. And that's I think been a really great thing for the community I hope, so I'm really happy to be a part of that as well.

02:00 S1: Nice. And for people who are trying to learn indigenous languages, what are some of the things that you might encourage them to do, other than coming to these types of events and participating in these activities?

02:12 LM: Well, there's actually a wealth of resources for language learning and language teaching, so there are great books. One that I would definitely recommend is the Oshkaabewis Journal which is out of Bemidji State University. They have created this wealth of knowledge online, so they have written texts that are all in Anishinaabemowin and then also in English, but they've recorded them so you can use them as a language learning tool to hear fluent speech. There are apps. Wikwemkoong First Nation has a great app for learning language, they've also got a resource development cell there. They're churning out great resources. The same with M'Chigeeng First Nation, on their website they've got some great things, some really nice videos that are really fun. Yeah, so there's no shortage of resources. I think we do need to keep doing development, but there's lots to start with. But we need to make those more accessible and make them more widely known so that more people can pick them up and start learning language.

03:07 S1: Nice. So you talked a little bit earlier and you mentioned it briefly, but the ATEP Lounge and the ATEP program here at Queens, can you tell us a little bit more about that and what actually that encompasses?

03:19 LM: Absolutely. So, the ATEP program is the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, and it's actually been running out of the Faculty of Education since 1991. We have over 400 indigenous graduates as well as non-indigenous graduates from that program. So I was the coordinator of that program for the last six years. And now it's Deb St. Amant, who's also our Elder in Residence, and she brings a wealth of knowledge and wisdom to the program. So, we offer it both in community, right now on Manitoulin Island in partnership with communities there, as well as here we have a campus based iteration too, which is open to both indigenous and non indigenous students, where we talk a lot about teaching for reconciliation.

04:01 S1: And what is some of the value about having that type of program for teachers both in the community and in the program here at the University?

04:11 LM: Well, I think that we're at a crossroads in Canada now. We're coming through a period where we're starting to realize that what has been done on this land to indigenous people is genocide, and that the education system had a lot to do with that, was actually a perpetrator of genocide. And I don't think any of us who are teachers, who love our students so much, are comfortable with our profession having engaged in genocide. And so for indigenous people, we really see the impacts of that on our communities, and for non indigenous people, I think that being complicit in that and having benefited from that in terms of access to land and access to resources is something that we need to question as we move forward.

04:51 LM: And I feel like teachers are in a really good place to do that, because they have the potential to engage with children, engage with learners, and help the whole country move forward in a good way. And I also feel like because of the history of our profession, it's incumbent upon us

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to do that. At the same time, indigenous people are not our genocide. This is something that has happened, but our history on this land extends from millennia and so our cultures contain wisdom, knowledges, ways of teaching and learning that are wise and territory connected, and they're beneficial I think to everybody. So it benefits indigenous learners and non indigenous learners.

05:30 S1: I'm really happy that you brought up that last point as well, because I think that, especially at this point in time with reconciliation and the TRC calls to action, a lot of teachers have... There's obviously still a lot of ways for us to go and a lot of teachers have started to actually realize and understand the significance of what has happened, to the extent that is even possible. I mean, there's so much that has happened. But, one of the things that you mentioned is the way forward, and how can we continue to move forward towards an education system that is properly incorporating indigenous knowledge and indigenous languages and indigenous culture in the education system in a way that's true and authentic. So, a lot of your research has talked about decolonizing the education system and looking at a decolonized model, so can you explain a little bit more about that for the audience?

06:00 LM: Yeah. I think that's gonna vary depending on where you are. So a lot of our work focuses on reserve education, and I think there, the answer really does lie in self-governance and self determination. It's certainly time that we recognize that indigenous communities have the capacity to run their own education systems and educate their own children. And that indigenous cultures have all of the content that is necessary, can be taught through that lens. And so to conclude that now and say, "Well, if that's the case," and it is. "Why is it that the federal government still has so much oversight over indigenous education in indigenous communities? Why is it that indigenous education in those communities is still so woefully underfunded?" There's gonna be an increase in funding apparently through the new Indigenous Languages Act, which I still need to look into a little bit more. But it's not gonna be enough to bring things up to par with funding for education off reserve, and I think that that's really problematic. If we say, "Okay, we're gonna fund this appropriately and then leave it to indigenous communities to ensure that their children are appropriately educated as they have done for millennia." That is a huge step in decolonization in those contexts, and that naturally involves education respecting language and culture.

07:50 LM: Off reserve things are more complicated but still necessary because about 70% of indigenous people actually live off reserve in Canada. And so our children, and I include my son in that, have the right as well to access their language and culture through the education system, and that's going to necessitate, first of all, increased hiring. So we need to increase the number of indigenous teachers that we have in provincial school classrooms. We need to increase access to things like language learning opportunities, which are increasing, so we've done some work locally with the Limestone District School Board with respect to that. We've got great liaisons in the local school boards and we need to see more people whose job it is to help teachers decolonize their classrooms as well. And we're very lucky locally that we've got support in our school boards, but not every school board is that lucky. And so I think that those are things that need to be deeply considered in order to meet the needs of indigenous students and also to ensure that non indigenous people are aware of the fulsome history of the country in which they live.

08:47 S1: Right. If I was a teacher in today's classroom and I was trying to find out more information of how I can make my class more inclusive for indigenous students, where would you recommend that I go?

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09:03 LM: In every school board in Ontario there's somebody within the school board who's tasked with overseeing indigenous education. Sometimes it's the only portfolio that they carry, and that's why I say we're lucky here in both Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board and Limestone, we've got somebody in each board who it's their whole job to help teachers decolonize and indigenize their classrooms. And so they would be my first point of call if I was a teacher, because they have access to all of the resources that that school board has. Beyond that, there are resources within universities. We get called a lot actually in ATEP by teachers who are looking for resources and who are looking for guidance. And there are things like Friendship Centres. There's some great resources online. There's the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Association of Ontario. But there are resources that are really plentiful for teachers to do that kind of work. I think it's really important though that the teachers make sure that they're getting things from reputable sources, particularly indigenous authored resources, so that they know that they're teaching authentic things.

10:06 S1: So another thing that I wanted to talk about is the fact that you have recently been named a Canada Research Chair, so congratulations on that.

10:15 LM: Meegwetch.

10:16 S1: I just wanted you to speak a little bit more about what that actually means and what you'll do from that position and how that works in regards to research for people who may not know.

10:28 LM: Alright. So what that means is that more of my time will be focused on research instead of some of the teaching and admin that I was doing previously, but I'm still gonna be doing those things as well. I don't think I could give up teaching. That's just the best thing.

10:42 S1: Yeah, and it's really important.

10:44 LM: It is.

10:45 S1: And you're playing to our audience right now, so that works out quite well too.

10:48 LM: Fair enough. Well, that's the thing with things like this, where we recognize that research and teaching in our field are just inextricably intertwined, and so we teach what we learn through our research in our classrooms and our classrooms are also places where we learn and contribute to our research, so that's really lucky. So, back to the CRC. It means that I'll be spending more time doing more invested research, and I'm really grateful for that because that means that I can do what I can even more to help revitalize languages, particularly in Anishinaabemowin, which is my heritage language. And also contribute to other areas of research like reconciliation and decolonization, so I'm very, very grateful for the support that I got from the University to apply for that.

11:35 S1: Yeah. And we're very happy that you were able to get it here at Queen's, and I know that everyone's pretty honoured at the fact that Queen's has taken a step towards supporting research in this area and making it so that we can help move towards a decolonized education system and improving the learning of indigenous languages across Canada. So that it makes, it makes me really happy at least, on a personal level to have heard about that, so congratulations again.

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12:07 LM: Thank you.

12:08 S1: We're just gonna take a quick break, but we'll be right back with more Lindsay Morcom.

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12:18 S1: Are you an occasional teacher looking to improve your job prospects? Are you an experienced teacher trying to reach the next pay scale? Are you interested in improving your overall teaching practice? Queen's Continuing Teacher Education has you covered. With easy to access online courses, you can log on to your course from anywhere you have access to the internet. Courses offered by CTE range from special education to technological education to safe and accepting schools. Queen's CTE courses work with your schedule, have supportive expert instructors that want to help you succeed. Registration is fast and easy with no commitment to pay until the Friday before the course starts. What are you waiting for? Visit coursesforteachers.ca for more information or to sign up today. That's coursesforteachers.ca.

13:14 S1: And we're back with more from Lindsay Morcom. So, Lindsay, one of the things that I know has gone on at Queen's recently and has been going on at a couple of different universities around the world for the last few years is the Matariki Network of Universities. Can you tell me a little bit more about that program and what we did here at Queen's recently?

13:33 LM: Absolutely. That was one of the best teaching experiences of my career. So we worked with the International Office and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, to contribute to the Matariki Indigenous Student Mobility Program. So the MISMP, as we call it, has been going on for the last four years, and it started in New Zealand at the University of Otago, and then went to University of Western Australia in Perth and then Dartmouth College in the United States. And then it was our turn, so we had students from all three of those universities as well as Uppsala University in Sweden. We had a person who is actually an indigenous person from the Philippines, but he's doing his doctorate there come.

14:18 LM: So we had a really great diversity of indigenous people from multiple nations. From New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines/Sweden, and the United States and then Canadian students as well. They were here for two weeks and we did a tremendous amount of travel throughout Eastern Ontario, and we looked at what does indigenous research mean? How is it presented? How is it not like Western research? So we did very little in terms of sit down lectures. We engaged land-based education, we spent three days at Elbow Lake Environmental Education Center, which was, I think, probably the best part. It was a great bonding experience. And then we explored urban Kingston, some historical things, like we did a tour of the prison here and we talked about things like Children's Aid and the implications that those organizations have on indigenous people and families. We traveled to the Petroglyphs, Petroglyphs Provincial Park, Curve Lake First Nation, Tyendinaga hosted us on numerous occasions. We're really grateful to have gotten welcomed in by the Longhouse community in Tyendinaga. So yeah, it was a huge initiative in the three areas, us, International, and Indigenous Initiatives worked really well together I think, so I'm really proud of it.

15:36 S1: Yeah, it sounds like an amazing program and it's really quite incredible. And one of the things that really struck me, and we talked about this a little bit on the break, but when you have indigenous education you're often thinking localized or provincial or national. You don't really get

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to think about international perspectives, but there are indigenous people that are all around the world and they've all had different but also similar experiences. And so, what were some of the things that you learned from these other groups of individuals that were coming from different places all around the world, and how they compared to the Canadian experience of indigenous people?

16:16 LM: Well, I think he was really interesting to compare what impact settler colonialism particularly have had on indigenous people. And we really see parallels because all four countries, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada, were colonized by the British. And they were actually comparing notes through that colonial process, and so similar things were enacted upon indigenous people in all four countries. So it was very interesting to compare how colonization had been enacted in each settler colonial state. And also what indigenous people were doing to decolonize and indigenize within their communities and to reclaim their land. At the same time, I was really glad that we had student as well from the Philippines, where it's not so much a settler colonial state, so huge impacts, multiple colonizations, but the outcome is not the same as it has been in those countries where settlers have remained. So, I think we learned a great deal about how colonization looks in a non-settler context, so I was very, very grateful to have that.

17:25 LM: I think that we also had the unique opportunity to create a deeply indigenized space for all of the students. They're all universities including Queen's where the overwhelming population is non indigenous. And so for a lot of them, it was the first time that they had found themselves outside of their own community in an educational space that was purely indigenous. We only had I think one student participant who was not an indigenous person, she was very well educated in the subject. So it was just a heavily indigenous space, where we could all just really be ourselves. There's something to be said for being surrounded by other people who are seeking knowledge at a post-secondary level, but who also understand the world from an indigenous perspective. And you didn't have to explain yourself and you could just talk, and I think that the students really appreciated that. By the end of the two weeks we had really bonded as a community, so that was a really beautiful thing to watch.

18:22 S1: And the program continues as well, so it's not over at the end of this two weeks. It continues on and will continue to move forward at another university next year, correct?

18:32 LM: Probably not this coming year. Right now we're looking at restructuring it, because it's been so successful. But we also feel that it has untapped potential, both to contribute to research and authentically indigenous research on a global stage, but also to contribute to education within our respective institutions. So, for this year we're looking at doing some exploration with our Matariki Network of University partners, to see what that might look like and how we can enrich it and make sure that it's something that's sustainable, and something that really contributes to the intellectual lives of the participants.

19:09 S1: That's awesome. I hope that it continues to not only make it so that it's purposeful for the people that are involved in the network and gathering these experiences, but that you can share that with others as well so that more people can learn and grow from that experience.

19:12 LM: Absolutely.

19:12 S1: So, I'm gonna move to a little bit more difficult of a topic now, and we've talked today a

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lot about all of the amazing things that are happening, and the really good things that are happening at Queen's as well, but there have been some troubling things that have happened in the last little while. So particularly with some students at Queen's and some messages that had been sent to a couple of different communities at Queen's, so I just wanted to see what your thoughts were on that and if you wanted to share those today.

19:12 LM: Yeah, so what happened was that in one of our residences in a common area, in a floor occupied by primarily indigenous students and members of the LGBTQ community. A really hateful note was left, a violent, hateful note. I think we were all taken aback, I certainly was. I feel like I'm very lucky to be in a position where I can help other indigenous people really flourish. I came to university not understanding who I was as an indigenous person and I learned that through my time at First Nations University, so I understand what great potential we have to help people here. And I was really saddened because I've been spending the last six years telling my students like, "If you're a member of the LGBTQ+ community, you can be yourself here. You can use your pronouns in my class. You can be safe, you can be open."

20:57 LM: And telling my indigenous students that it was a welcoming place for them, my indigenous white coded students that they could be openly indigenous here. And then that happened, and I was angry and afraid. I've never been afraid to come to work before, and I was afraid to come to work that day. And like actually physically afraid, that it wasn't a theoretical kind of fear, it was a very real, very violent, physical fear. And I think we all felt that way and that wasn't something I thought would be a part of my experience in this institution, but it was. The university responded. I think that the most impactful response that we saw was when a thousand people gathered and marched through the streets of main campus, to show that that does not reflect us as a community, but there certainly is now, we are aware, present in our community. I think that that's something that we're going to see as marginalized communities increasingly demand rights and recognition. And that's true for both the LGBTQ+ community and the indigenous community, that for a long time a lot of us have had to keep our identities secret, regardless of which of those communities we belonged to, or face persecution. And now as we demand those rights, the people who have been in power, some are going to react very viscerally to that.

22:28 LM: I wish that wasn't the reality and I wish I could tell my students that they weren't gonna see it, but they are. And so that's where we also need to decide as not just university community but a community at large, how are we gonna respond to that? And how are we going to ensure that that kind of backlash does not halt us from demanding equality and demanding rights. And that is incumbent upon all of us to keep questioning and to keep doing exactly what we're doing. I will not be afraid to come to work. And I hope that my colleagues who belong to those communities and to other racialized and marginalized communities within Queen's will not be afraid to continue demanding to be seen. But it did indicate to us that we still have a lot of work to do. We've made great progress. There are things that are present in the education of young people today that I could not have dreamt of when I was 20 and at university, but certainly we have a lot of work to do and we can't get too comfortable.

23:22 S1: Yeah. And I think you summed that up quite well and thank you for sharing your opinion on that, and I don't feel that I can have much more to add, other than the fact that it was really sad that day when I found out the news about that. And I know that a lot of the people that I worked with and just talking about it felt also very sad. But it is, you're right, an eye opening experience that that sentiment and that feeling, even though you see all the progress, and you see teachers like

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yourself who are doing everything they can to make it so that students feel welcome, and were putting in place institutional policies to make students feel welcome. And we have things like the response that you talked about, it's still important for us to remember that doesn't mean that these other things don't exist. And so, I really am thankful for all the things that you're doing, and thankful for the things that are moving that forward, but you're right, it's important that we continue to think about those things because we're not done.

24:32 LM: No, and I think that's where continued education comes in as well, right? I'm not the only one in the building, certainly there's a lot of us who do social justice education. And doing that kind of work and doing greater education for equality in all of our courses across this campus, I think that indicates to us how important that is. Because if we allow ourselves to become complicit and allow ourselves to continue promoting a status quo where that sort of thought is able to perpetuate, then we're still gonna have those kinds of issues. So we need to think about how we're going to decolonize our campus as a whole, and how we're going to educate all of our students to ensure that we are producing not just people who are fit for a job market, but people who are a fit to develop the future that we all wanna see.

25:24 S1: And I'm gonna take that hopeful note at the end and move that as the message moving forward, is that we wanna find the world that we wanna see. And on a lighter note, we're gonna move now to our last segment of the podcast which is usually our classroom confession segment. And I think that you have a great story today that reminds people of what the power of education actually is, because it's not just about going out there and being perfect and doing everything you can, it's about being willing to put yourself out there. Maybe you make a mistake from time or two, but it'll be good in the long run, so would you mind sharing that story?

26:06 LM: Yeah. So this is when I first started teaching which was ages and ages ago, almost 20 years ago actually. I was teaching at First Nations University. So I was teaching linguistics and one of our goals there was to try and indigenize our content as much as possible, so I had used an example from Cree which is an indigenous language from the territory where I was working. And I thought that I was giving the example of my coat, which is a noun in Cree that's always possessed. So I was talking about inalienable possession, giving this example over and over again, probably 20 times in the course of my one hour lecture. And afterwards a student came up to me who was a fluent Cree speaker, and he said, "So when you say that word, you really need to lengthen the a." I'm like, "Okay." And he had me say it over and over and over again. I'm actually not gonna say it here, just in case. And I said, "Why? What was I doing?" And he was like, "Well, the word you were saying sounded a little bit more like masculine genitalia than coat." [chuckle] "So just so you know, that's what you were..." I'm like, "You sat there the whole class while I was saying that over and over?"

[laughter]

27:18 LM: I was grateful that he had the grace to come and teach it to me. And that's the thing, right, I learned that day. I wasn't dragged out into the street. He was very, very gracious about it and I was super grateful for that, but it was a learning experience. And I should have checked, I should have gone to one of my... I had numerous fluent friends and I could have asked and I really probably should have done that. But at the same time, I had taken a risk and I learned from that risk, so I think that that was my takeaway, was that it's a way to take risks and it's okay to make mistakes in the classroom, especially when you're an early years teacher. Everything gets so much easier the

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longer you go.

27:54 S1: Right.

27:56 LM: So, yeah.

27:57 S1: And really just like anyone, that's how you learn and grow as an educator, as a student, anything. So you put yourself out there and gave it a shot and now you know definitively that you need to elongate the a.

28:12 LM: I do.

28:13 S1: So now we're good.

28:13 LM: And it's just like Ms. Frizzle, right? Take chances, make mistakes, get messy. It's true for teaching and language learning.

28:20 S1: I don't think I can end it any better than Ms. Frizzle. So Lindsay thank you for coming on today. That does it for another episode of Popular Podogogy. If you like what you hear, please remember to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Google Play, and Stitcher, or you can see us on the Faculty of Education and CFRC websites. Have a great day.