



# Teaching and Learning in Times of Transition

Disease, Survival,  
and Our Munsee  
Language

The Importance of Teacher  
Presence in Online Learning

International  
Teachers' Voices





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Learning is moving outside more than ever. Sistema Kingston, a community music program based at the Faculty of Education, worked hard all summer to ensure they could continue music instruction in the fall. For student safety, all fall programming moved outdoors to a park near the school where the program is usually offered (weather permitting, of course). Safety measures were put in place including masks, frequent hand sanitization, and using hula hoops to ensure physical distancing. All fall, students and Sistema Kingston staff have been playing, singing, and learning together after school. The creativity, innovation, and perseverance of Sistema Kingston students inspires us!

# THE KNOWLEDGE Forum

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# Letter from the Editors

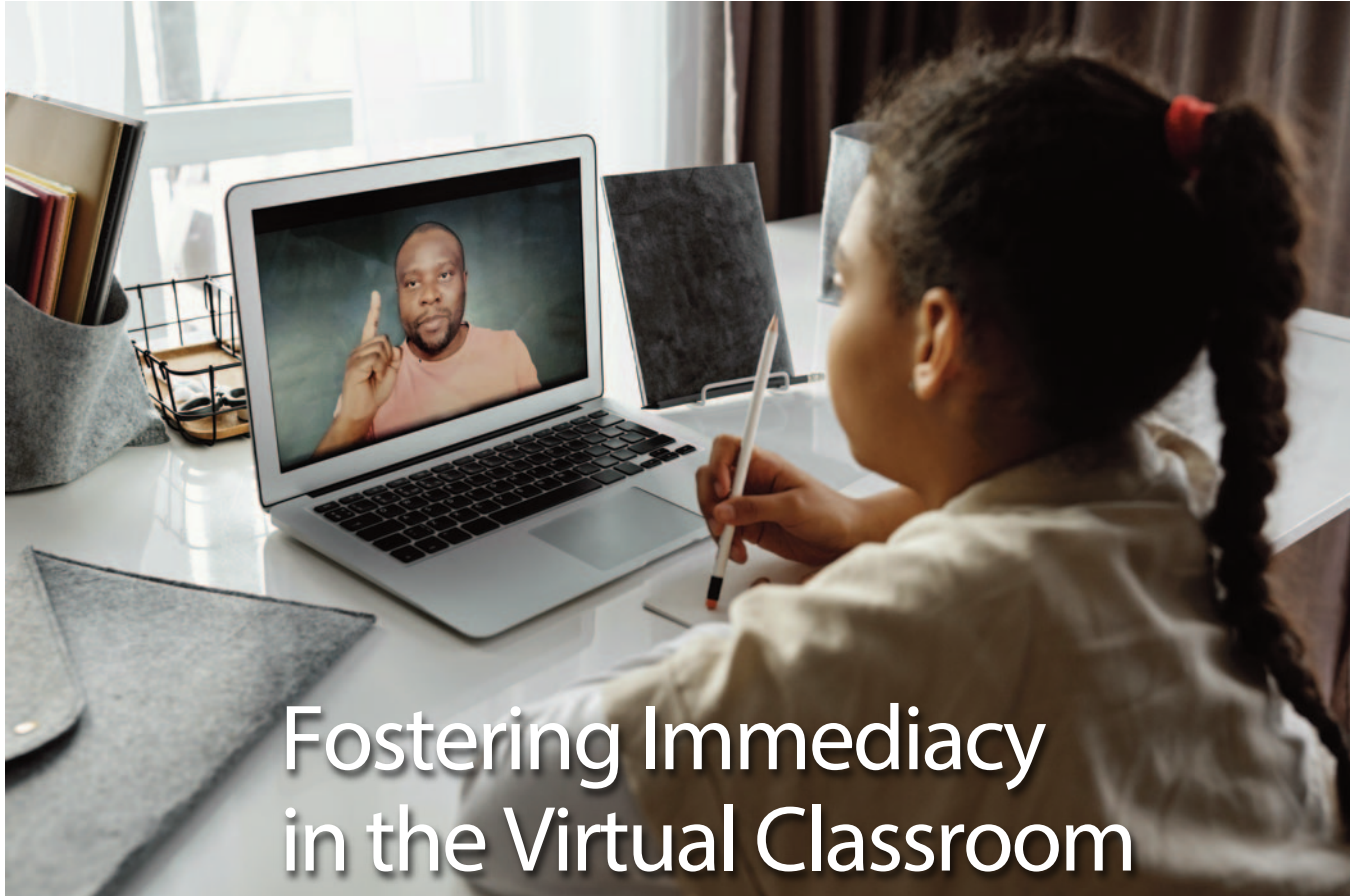
In this third iteration of *The Knowledge Forum*, we opened our call for submissions to include creative contributions. In this issue, you will read personal reflections and academic essays, enjoy poetry, and examine photography that asks you to see the world from a new perspective. When deciding on the topic of teaching and learning in times of transition, we wanted to create a space to reflect on how we've had to adapt to teaching in these extraordinary circumstances. The challenges that educators have faced since COVID-19 forced schools across the world to close has been enormous. We were asked to teach and learn in new formats, routines were disrupted, and many young learners lacked access to communities and programs in schools that had been their safe spaces. These articles explore teaching and learning in a pandemic; they ask how best to engage students online; and look at how we are building new online communities when our ability to interact in person is limited.

Upheaval has not been limited to the classroom this year. The murder of George Floyd and the protests in Wet'suwet'en to protect their land brought ongoing battles for equity, recognition, and reconciliation into focus – reminding us that social responsibility in education is as critical as ever. In this issue, Jessica Ho and Revlon Stoddart share deeply personal experiences about this responsibility with us. We ask that you take time to read and reflect on their words and consider how you can act to support their calls for action. If you aren't sure where to start, the Faculty has anti-oppression and anti-racism resources curated by Dr. Alana Butler available to all: [educ.queensu.ca/community/teaching-resources](http://educ.queensu.ca/community/teaching-resources).

The diversity of topics in this issue reflect the distinct perspectives of the authors. With contributions from graduate students, faculty, and alumni – one thing all these viewpoints have in common is a student-focused approach and an unwavering belief in the power of education to bring people together and make change.







## Fostering Immediacy in the Virtual Classroom

CHARLIE TAYLOR

*Online learning was already a rapidly expanding phenomenon before the pandemic... for now it has become ubiquitous.*

Imagine a teacher who walks around the classroom while teaching, making eye-contact with the students, relaxed body posture. The behaviours this teacher is exhibiting help to reduce the perceived physical and psychological distance between a teacher and students—a quality referred to as “teacher immediacy.” Students respond positively to teachers with high immediacy, and as a result their motivation, attitudes, and compliance improve, their anxiety is reduced, (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000), and they enjoy better academic performance (LeFebvre & Allen, 2014; Witt, Wheelless, & Allen, 2004).

Now imagine that same teacher forced to teach on a webcam due to a worldwide pandemic. No longer can the teacher wander around the classroom or make eye-contact with students. All the learning benefits that are associated with these behaviours could be lost as well. The lack of teacher immediacy could be amplified by other potential consequences of distance education. Studies have found that students in online environments can feel isolated or neglected by teachers (Croft, Dalton, & Grant, 2010), and Moore’s (1973) Transactional Distance Theory even suggests that the physical separation of distance education can create a psychological gulf between teacher and students that can result in miscommunications. Given these potential hazards, the time is ripe to have a conversation about how teachers can display immediate behaviours in environments where physical proximity is impossible.

While the research on immediacy in physical classrooms is substantial, there is significantly less on immediacy in virtual environments, or “e-immediacy” (Al Ghamdi, Samarji, & Watt, 2016); however, some researchers have begun to look at the effects of teacher immediacy online. Traditionally, immediacy behaviours have been classed as verbal or nonverbal (Gorham, 1988), and both of these have been found to increase students’ participation and satisfaction in virtual classes as well (Al Ghamdi, Samarji, & Watt, 2016).

Verbal immediacy behaviours can be transferred comparatively easily from a physical classroom environment to an online class. For example, teachers can address students by their first names, share personal anecdotes, use humour, praise students, offer feedback, or encourage participation (Gorham, 1988) as easily in writing, or via video chat, as they can in person. Conversely, conveying nonverbal immediate behaviours in a virtual environment can require more ingenuity on the part of the instructor. This disparity could pose a problem because verbal and nonverbal behaviours work together to convey intention (LeFebvre & Allen, 2014), so eliminating one could have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the other.

Online learning can take many forms. Some online teaching exclusively involves written work, whereas others can consist of videotaped lectures that are pre-recorded, and still others take place in real time and can involve video interactions. All these various contexts will need different strategies in order to convey a sense of teacher immediacy, and scholars have been researching how immediacy can be used in both synchronous and asynchronous online teaching systems. For example, in a class where most of

the communication is written, the speed with which teachers respond to student queries can lend a sense of immediacy (Al Ghamdi, Samarji, & Watt, 2016), with delayed response times contributing to student feelings of isolation (Croft, Dalton, & Grant, 2010). Some researchers have gone so far as to suggest written forms can replace nonverbal immediacy behaviours. For example, a smile can be substituted by an emoji, and avoiding a monotone voice can be done by way of ALL CAPS or *italics* (Al Ghamdi, Samarji, & Watt, 2016).

In the online video chat format, teachers also must focus more on verbal behaviours than was the case in the physical classroom. Although some nonverbal immediate behaviours can carry over into a video chat, such as smiling, gesturing, nodding, and leaning forward, others, like walking around the classroom or maintaining eye contact with students will presumably be casualties of the digital format.

Online learning was already a rapidly expanding phenomenon before the pandemic and will likely continue to be so after, but for now it has become ubiquitous. Undoubtedly many teachers (and students) are looking forward to a time when they can safely return to brick-and-mortar classrooms, but perhaps we can view the current situation as a learning opportunity. With so many teachers being initiated to the world of e-teaching, many new strategies for fostering e-immediacy have been conceived, and these ideas should be shared with other practitioners and researchers via fora like this. E-learning will inevitably be a part of the future of education, and in cases where physical proximity is impossible, teachers must find ways to bridge the gap by emphasizing psychological closeness.

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# Cultivating Community Through the Transformative Power of Art

BECCA EVANS, CHARLOTTE GAGNIER, MADDI ANDREWS, MICHELLE SEARLE, JENNY GE, AND SHANNON BROWN

**W**hen the pandemic hit our local community, placing limits on in-person interactions, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University responded to the urgent need for connection. Recognizing the transformative power of art, the Agnes team launched a free Virtual Art Hive @Agnes program, inviting people from our local community, across the country, and in some cases across the globe, to explore artistic processes through creativity, experimentation, and play. In the spirit of collaboration, reflection, and continuous improvement, the Agnes team, led by Shannon Brown, drew on its existing partnership with Dr. Michelle Searle from the Assessment and Evaluation Group (AEG) at the Faculty of Education to reimagine the existing in-person Art Hive @Agnes as a virtual program that could overcome physical constraints during pandemic closures. Using developmental (DE, Patton, 2010) and collaborative approaches to evaluation (CAE, Shulha et al., 2015) a small group of evaluators worked with the online Art Hive program team to identify core questions, devise a plan, and collect data. The information collected through this process was used to inform ongoing learning as the Virtual Art Hive sessions unfolded. This article shares our experience fostering community and promoting wellness online.

Art Hive @Agnes, along with the new virtual format, was built upon Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos' Art Hive Model, which aims to foster community-building through artmaking. Art Hives are "third spaces" for creative expression, conversation, and skill-sharing between diverse peoples with varying backgrounds, cultures, and abilities (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015). Art Hive @Agnes was inspired by these principles, but it also sought to provide a safe space for wellness. The development of Art Hive @Agnes is deeply connected to the therapeutic arts. Emerging research reveals how artmaking positively impacts mental and physical health by reducing stress and providing opportunities for self-expression (Malchiodi, 2013). In its new online version, Virtual Art Hive @Agnes sought to provide a safe and welcoming online space to support wellness in adults; offer art-making experiences that nurture the dignity and well-being of all peoples; foster opportunities for connection and exchange across diverse audiences; and explore the transformative power of creative expression. These goals focused efforts and guided sessions and reflections.

Virtual Art Hive @Agnes sessions were held weekly on Zoom. To ensure the virtual space was secure and felt safe to everyone, pre-registration for the program was required and capped at 30.



*Participants engage in artmaking under the guidance of Agnes staff, a facilitator, and volunteers.*



*Virtual Art Hive @Agnes supported wellness during a particularly challenging period of the pandemic by bringing people with different backgrounds and abilities together to make art.*

The weekly hour and a half sessions were run by a small team consisting of Agnes staff, a facilitator, and volunteers. Each week, the facilitator led a thematic project; however, participants were also encouraged to work on their own projects if preferred. Staff and volunteers supported the facilitator by welcoming participants, time keeping, moderating the session, and providing technical support. Activities were designed to use materials that participants were likely to have at home in order to reduce the need to unnecessarily visit stores during the pandemic. The sessions followed a similar rhythm from week to week and always wrapped up with a reflection activity inviting all participants to share one word that described how they were feeling at the end of the session. This reflective sharing gave insight into participants' experiences and often underlined the therapeutic elements of artmaking in community building.

To provide a high-quality program with community-centered goals, it was important to integrate evaluation throughout the process to reinforce success and generate purposeful changes along the way. To do so, the evaluation and Art Hive teams developed a close working relationship to enhance the quality of the evaluation process (Searle, Merchant, Chalas, & Lam, 2017). This developmental approach allowed the team to facilitate the evaluation process as a collaborative effort, where both teams took on participatory evaluative roles. The Art Hive team adopted

evaluation responsibilities, such as running the post-session reflection and consolidating participant data and, similarly, the evaluation team participated in the art-making sessions and felt as though they were part of the Art Hive team. This meaningful relationship meant that evaluative thinking was integrated from program development through to post-program delivery. Team members participated in a documented post-session reflection activity each week, which meant that key learnings were implemented on an ongoing basis and sessions became increasingly responsive to the participants' needs.

Virtual Art Hive @Agnes' reflective approach to online artmaking was successful at promoting community and wellness. Many participants expressed explicitly that the artmaking experience promoted a sense of community. One individual stated that she enjoyed "...sharing [her] work and thoughts with others and celebrating each other's creative journeys." Others shared that they had learned or grown from the opportunity to make art: "A big thank you for... giving me the opportunity to discover things about myself that I never knew or took time for." Participants revealed that the experience was inspirational, relaxing, and meaningful and that they wanted to return. During the sessions, the Art Hive team emphasized the exploration of new techniques and the creative process, rather than the final product, which helped put participants at ease. Clear communication





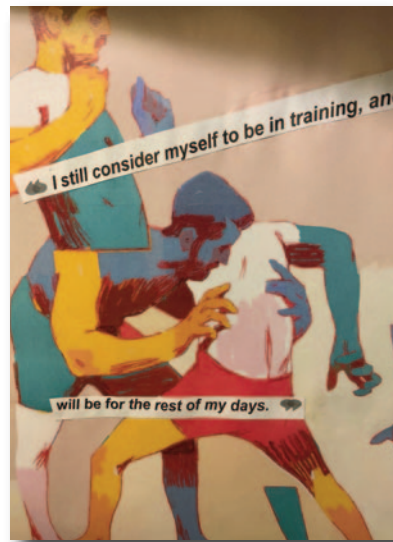
about suggested materials was important. In the future, Art Hive @Agnes will consider how it might expand to more diverse audiences in different contexts, such as retirement homes. The technology boundary poses challenges to accessibility and the Virtual Art Hive will look at how it can address this through continued and new partnerships. These key learnings and future considerations are captured in the interim and final evaluation reports so they can be integrated into future programs.

The journey into offering a safe and welcoming space to explore artmaking through creativity, experimentation, and play reveals how meaningful connections can be made across an online art-making platform. Virtual Art Hive @Agnes supported wellness during a particularly challenging period of the pandemic by bringing people with different backgrounds and abilities together to make art.

By adopting an evaluative mindset and deepening its relationship with evaluators from the AEG, the Art Hive @Agnes team used data throughout the programming cycle to inform learning as the program progressed. While we continue to live through these unprecedented realities of an ongoing pandemic, deliberately planned art-making experiences that support wellness and provide opportunities for collaboration are an invaluable way to build community and connection. We look forward to continued artmaking, evaluative learning, and ongoing collaboration in the future.



Participants use materials from around their home to engage in artmaking.



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# Meaning

## A Spoken Word Poem

JENNIFER BARTLETT

**A**s an Assistant Principal in Calgary, Alberta, I continued to work from my school as classes moved online and teachers worked from home. I experienced a roller coaster of emotions as I walked through empty halls, longing for the hustle and bustle to return. It was strange, to say the least, to work in a building usually occupied by 840 students and over 50 staff. Items were left discarded in the halls, next week's cafeteria menu was posted, and advertisements of our sold-out school musical hung on all the bulletin boards. I had even started packing for our grade 9 trip to Quebec. We never had closure, never had the chance to say goodbye or wish everyone well. Online opportunities just didn't feel the same. I missed the energy.

Having experienced my own feelings of grief and loss, I could only imagine what our students felt. I took pictures of my new reality in an empty school and wrote a spoken word entitled 'Meaning.' Written from a student's perspective, it was my way of reaching out to our student body to let them know that I understood and shared their sense of loss.

No one could have anticipated that a pandemic would abruptly halt normalcy. But, if anything, this pandemic has taught us to value that which we used to take for granted.

Jennifer's spoken word poem can be viewed here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqTbZH5urWY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqTbZH5urWY)



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# International Teachers' Voices: Navigating the Challenging Waters of Online Teaching

ESTHER BETTNEY AND JON NORDMEYER

## Getting Our Sea Legs

*"My teacher training did not prepare me for this type of educational experience." ~ Lindsay (WIDA community of practice participant)*

All teachers remember the wonderfully chaotic journey of discovery during our first year of teaching. We might recall little things like a weekend spent decorating a bulletin board or writing (and inevitably rewriting) a welcome message to students. We remember the anxiety of wondering if we were getting it right, eventually followed by the exhilaration of seeing that we were making a difference with one student, or one family.

For many teachers, 2020 felt like starting over again. Like new sailors at sea, we have had to learn to keep our balance while the ship keeps tossing and turning. We are still figuring out how to toggle through gallery views on Zoom, or new cleanup routines that keep students six feet apart. Yet, like a first experience at sea, teachers are learning to find balance in this new teaching context. Focusing on the horizon helps reduce the chaotic, seasick feeling from constant tossing and turning, and getting help from others builds new routines and ways of adapting to our unfamiliar environment. 2020 brought many teachers around the world together in a shared experience of initial disorientation or imbalance, followed by a deep sense of connection and powerful learning.

## The WIDA Global Community

The WIDA International School Consortium is a community of pre-K to 12 international schools committed to developing inclusive programs that build on the assets of all learners, while transforming the conversation about what multilingual students can do. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, educators and scholars in the WIDA global network of 500 schools across over 100 countries have collaborated to understand how to support multilingual learners in online and hybrid classrooms.

In order to build on the practical wisdom of experienced international teachers and identify promising practices for serving multilingual learners in virtual schools, WIDA initiated a community of practice (CoP) including educators from international schools worldwide. The initial CoP involved 60 international teachers creating videos describing the challenges

and opportunities they were facing in supporting multilingual learners in the context of virtual schooling. Teachers posted the videos to Flipgrid and responded through videos to their fellow community members. To date, the videos have been viewed over 10,000 times.

## Amplifying Teachers' Voices



Jon Nordmeyer

Through watching and analyzing the Flipgrid videos, we gained important insights into the challenges and affordances of online learning: the importance of creating community for students, parents, and colleagues, as well as best practices to support multilingual students as they engage in content and language learning. Within this context of innovation and professional growth, several themes emerged.

First, many teachers shared concerns about the emotional and social well-being of their students, noting developing a safe, online community as the most important piece of online learning. Teachers appreciated the new opportunities to schedule one-on-one virtual meetings with their students, which their in-person schedules did not allow. Educators recognized the need for opportunities for students to work in small groups and connect online. According to one participant: "this is really important to the kids because it establishes that connection that is so important."



Second, this need for connection extended to colleagues. In terms of developing a teacher community, participants noted ongoing opportunities to collaborate virtually. One teacher described an online meeting where teachers “gave each other positive reinforcement on the work that they’re doing with their students, recognized things that they could see in their colleagues’ courses that they wanted to take away and adapt to their own practice.” Clearly, while virtual schooling can create a sense of isolation, teachers found ways to connect and prioritize collaboration.

Third, in their consideration of the school community, many teachers noted significant concerns for families. One teacher shared, “I know many parents around the world are overwhelmed trying to manage their student’s learning and their own jobs, and I’m hearing parents have already, you know, kind of given up.” Others asked for advice on how to support and encourage families, recognizing the additional challenges faced by families who did not speak English, the most common language of instruction. One teacher wondered, “how we can best support the parents of our English language learners who are already dealing with many stresses but may have a hard time navigating the different platforms that we’re using in English?” Teachers connected through messaging or video platforms to support parents, as well as with students and colleagues.

Finally, teachers reflected on the current situation as an opportunity for innovation. One teacher posed key questions: “Do we move forward with the curriculum as we were originally planning, or do we take advantage of this time to use students’ home and immediate surroundings as assets? Do you think it’s more important to continue with the curriculum or do we try something different?” Later, this teacher seemed to answer their own question by stating, “This a unique opportunity to try something new.” Teachers were inspired by the creativity and resilience of not only students but also fellow teachers in the midst of such challenging circumstances, demonstrating a perspective which viewed challenges as opportunities for continued professional growth.

## Teaching Multilingual Learners Online

Since the WIDA network focuses on supporting multilingual students, many teachers’ videos discussed the shifting role of language in online schooling. Teachers saw new opportunities to draw on home languages. One teacher noted how students “will sometimes compose in their home language, put it through Google Translate, and then take that English translation and use it as the basis for their English writing assignment in Google Docs.” Another teacher provided students with electronic access to certain complex texts in their home language and English to support their learning.

While teachers discussed many ways to leverage home languages, they also struggled with re-conceptualizing language evaluations in online classrooms. While teachers can determine the supports provided to students in-person, online learning blurred many boundaries with more open access to electronic resources and parental support. Teachers also believed the needs of multilingual students were overlooked within online schooling, and worried about students facing the dual challenge of learning content and language simultaneously and online.

Like focusing on the horizon at sea, the ongoing conversation of teachers about what they have learned during COVID-19 has provided teachers with balance and focus. Teachers recognized the value of a space to discuss the new challenges and opportunities in serving multilingual students.

We invite readers to join the conversation with other international educators through our Flipgrid community and to learn more about the WIDA global network.

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**Jon Nordmeyer** is a researcher and International Program Director at WIDA. His research focuses on teacher collaboration and global learning networks to serve multilingual learners.



# Do You See What I See?

## Place-Conscious Teaching and Learning

ERIN WOODFORD

**P**lace-conscious teaching and learning allows both learner and teacher to examine, question, and dialogue in relation to their own place, peering into connected environmental, cultural, historical, and geographic contexts. This selected collection of macro photography demonstrates different ways of examining a single rock. Many aspects are seen differently, some

elements may go unnoticed, and thus relates to how we can re-examine our own teaching and learning during unprecedented times and even re-imagine our vision.

Below is an example of inquiry that demonstrates how examining one rock can reveal many facets that could have gone unnoticed.



*Figure 1. Growing observations to expand the learning edge*



*Figure 2. Following the journey*



*Figure 3. Teaching and Learning Mind Map*

A Métis educator, researcher, and former Principal, **Erin Woodford** is currently an instructor in Indigenous Studies at the University of Lethbridge and Queen's Continuing Teacher Education.

# Don't Give Up on Me

REVLON STODDART

The school entry bell opens out a cry:  
 Welcome to another start to the grind,  
 Where I lean into my dreams to pursue teaching our youth  
 Inclusion for all becomes my first YouTube;  
 Channel the pursuit for happiness and love,  
 Wholesomeness in a society often filled with mess – perils and stress  
 God, what can I do to really get to the text;  
 Engage and let the curriculum speak for itself  
 Activate the minds of our future leaders to test  
 The sky's the limit and never think of it less  
 Told that I couldn't be more than a number on a jersey;  
 Science and math is a story, that you could never  
 Pen your dream to become anything you want to be  
 As I look into the mirror to overcome the stereotype, and stigma  
 Of the society bombarding my creativity  
 The colour of my skin seems to be an ailment  
 Pangs and arrows of outrageousness,  
 Restrains become my main frame and aches in my heart  
 Gives me such disdain – why?  
 Do we just speak to group X and not Y  
 Black boys placed in a sect just based on their hyperactiveness  
 Challenge the anthem rather than move to the beat of the drum,  
 Which gauges the path to and from  
 Oh! the flow of integration...  
 Topics that drive their interests  
 Passion and pride seen in a movie  
 Plot twists and turns staring down the lens of hurt  
 Why am I different from everyone else?  
 Being labelled a problem based on aggression  
 Sense of belonging and self-regulation  
 Become my tribal song in a world of ups and downs  
 Never give up on your dreams, beliefs and please;  
 Excuse me, as I wipe the tears from my eyes  
 Our black boys deserve an equal right to be  
 Given the access to education based on their brains  
 All filled with hope, and wonder while  
 Boosting their courage to become men of honour  
 Intensity with diversity and much pain;  
 Oh can it be, a goal to mold the lives of our  
 Future – doctors, teachers, researchers  
 Plumbers, engineers, and human rights lawyer  
 Learning to collaborate, create and aspirate  
 Finding their voices amidst the systemic hate  
 Barriers in jail houses or should I  
 Suspect, give me another chance  
 See me for who I am;  
 See me for where I stand,



In a reality filled with positivity to achieve, all that I can.  
 With a gentle voice tender to inclusion, equity and justice within  
 A passion to teach is one that can always be won  
 Curriculum embedded with expectations and methods  
 Speculations of their identity, stories and history  
 I am often persuaded to take the dear interests of our future aces  
 To achieve greater heights and deeper depths  
 Beyond their wildest dreams;  
 Hands-on experiences build new ways of climaxing to authentic streams  
 Ways to connect and build our foundational conspiracies,  
 As we adapt to the many cultures that we speak to daily  
 Out of many, we are one, vision  
 Hope to a future filled with potentiality  
 Capacity, capabilities, and tendencies to push  
 Go big or go home, oh yes!  
 Persevere despite the hate and rigid democracy  
 Let's not forget one over the other  
 Lest we oppress another by the gradient of our skin colour,  
 This melanin speaks to varied shades and spades of our  
 Heart united to suppress unkindness and strive  
 It's not the colour of our skin,  
 Simply, it's the content of our character that leads us to victory  
 Lead us to that promise land, oh yes!  
 Where I am not forsaken by the head  
 Take up the challenge and not to fail is often what I repeat to myself  
 Bold to win, bold to move, bold to become something other than a fool  
 Wisdom is quite the understatement to a student without knowledge  
 It all depends on where we come from



Chasing a goal as our parents chose to make Canada home  
 I think to the hope that paved the way  
 Education is key to maintain our sanity as we thrive to be  
 The best that we can be no matter the minority  
 Report, of whether we aced the course  
 Just so that we can be great,  
 Making way for opportunities to pave the way  
 Pursuits of happiness that dictate our future atrocities  
 Fate of our will and power in a tug of war  
 To emancipate ourselves from mental slavery  
 Troubled by the constant battles and strive  
 Days that get too caught up in how,  
 Drowned out by the negativity that consume our mentality  
 Give me an opportunity to be free;  
 Free to walk and dance as I sing wholeheartedly  
 This is the home of the strong and the free  
 My parents dream is now a reality  
 Don't give up on me and  
 Please don't speak against my ancestry  
 Race is one part to the equation  
 Next to being seen as a student who aces  
 His literacy and trigonometry rather than make  
 A goalie swerve in for a penalty  
 Don't hold me down  
 Don't hold me back  
 Brace yourself I am a whole snap,  
 Chat, reading those texts to make a way  
 Beating the odds,  
 Waking up to this song, that is not based on my colour  
 Simply based on my will to live  
 and be something, None other,  
 That is unbelievably me,  
 Don't give up on being,  
 More than you always want me to be

*Note from the author*

This poem emphasizes my rationale for entering this noble profession of teaching, and passion and drive to impact young lives. As some of our youth may face stereotypes and discrimination based on their skin colour and types/levels of behaviour, this piece encourages students to strive and believe in their goals and dreams – making strides by applying themselves daily. It is important for all our students, especially BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour), to have safe and brave spaces to share their stories and be taught the importance of self-awareness and identity to improve confidence and self-esteem.

**Reylon Stoddart** (Ed'13) is an educator, special education specialist, and advocate of inclusion and social justice programs for young people.

**Suggested further reading:**

Palfrey, J. (2018). *In Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces: Diversity and Free Expression in Education*. MIT Press.



# Disease, Survival, and Our Munsee Language

IAN MCCALLUM

## Munsee-Delaware and the Lunaape Language

**T**he Munsee-Delaware Nation, or Nalahii, one of two Lunaape First Nations in Canada, is located southwest of London, Ontario along the Thames River. The Lunaape are originally from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania and were one of the first Indigenous groups in eastern North America to have lasting and devastating contact with Europeans. The Munsee-Delaware Nation consists of a land base of 2,600 acres and has approximately 600 citizens, with 150 of those citizens living on-reserve.

Lunaape history in Canada is largely unknown. In addition to the loss of our history is the loss of our language, which UNESCO has warned is “critically endangered” – the most vulnerable category of language endangerment. It has been argued that understanding one’s past and present contributes to health and good relations. This is best done in a community setting. Sharing knowledge about language, history, and culture is essential to developing fair understandings of the world around us, and to this end, reaffirms relationships to land, environment, and other people and supports Indigenous self-determination.

## Language Programming Prior to COVID-19

A group of Munsee-Delaware Nation band members and neighbours interested in the culture, language, and history of the Munsee-Delaware people stay connected through weekend-long workshops devoted to different aspects of our history and culture, studied in connection with our language. The workshops allow for the group to meet regularly in the community and to discuss and strategize priorities and how goals could be achieved. On average, there are five to six weekend sessions held yearly. Additionally, weekly language classes are run by Munsee-Delaware teacher, Karen Mosko.

COVID-19 has presented some barriers to language learning in the community. Language workshops were postponed as the community shut down access to off-reserve members and visitors in order to limit COVID-19 exposure. The community centre and other buildings are not available for use as gatherings must be limited to a certain size. Learning materials (books, activities, games) could not be distributed to learners at the planned face-to-face sessions. Weekly language learning needed to be postponed as well with restrictions to gatherings and use of facilities.



Examples from the Munsee-Delaware language courses

## Video Conferencing

To continue language learning, teachers Karen Mosko and Ian McCallum decided to give Lunaape language sessions using online video conferencing (Zoom). Invitations and connections were made through social media, email, phone, as well as people involved with the Language and History weekends. Due to high demand, three levels of classes were offered over the five-month period (April-August), supporting beginner and intermediate speakers. The participants were members of Munsee-Delaware Nation, Delaware Nation (Moraviantown), Ramapough in New Jersey, Stockbridge-Munsee Band in Wisconsin, and other First Nations as well as neighbours from the area. Participants were located at Munsee, Windsor, St. Thomas, Barrie, Toronto, Stockbridge, New Jersey, Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Nashville.

Offering the language classes over Zoom provided an opportunity to share the Lunaape language outside of our usual community. Attendees of the classes ranged in age from 20 to well into their 70s, some were academics, or in the education field more generally, and see Lunaape language learning as part of their professional work. As adults, the motivations for language learning are often part of a commitment to learning more about Lunaape ways of seeing the world, and an interest in Indigenous history, culture, land, identity, and spirituality. Many are concerned about preserving Lunaape culture and language.

## Preparation

When preparing to teach an online language class, there are factors which need to be taken into consideration. Learning materials need to be prepared in two languages (Lunaape and English) and phonetics. Consideration for level-appropriate material must be discussed amongst instructors to ensure that everyone in the class is able to participate. As with other Indigenous languages, resources are not readily available, and instructors take on the role of building curriculum as the course continues.

Prior to the weekly classes, the teachers sent language material for use in class to students via email. The materials were constructed in connection with the current month of the year. For example, May is “Ehahkiiheet Niiipaahum” or “Planting Moon.” Typically, sessions would involve interaction with the language and an activity, such as planting vegetables. Language lessons made connections with “land-based learning,” however with virtual lessons, this participation depended upon the student working independently (whereas the face-to-face weekend workshops offered the ability to work as a group).

Classes began with students introducing themselves in the Lunaape language. As the learning progressed, students were encouraged to learn how to describe the day, “Yoon kway kiishkwehk”, as well as how they were feeling, “Kii ha koolamalsi?” New vocabulary was introduced which usually reflected the activities that would occur during the particular month. For example, in Xwaskwiimiwi Niiipaahum, or Corn Moon (August), students would learn words and how to describe the corn plant. There would be language describing how to make simple things such as corn on the cob. New language was reinforced using the Zoom “chat” function for those who were taking notes.

In addition to new vocabulary, students were challenged to learn language by reading longer pieces. This included how to make or prepare something using a reader created by the Munsee-Delaware community. Students took turns reading parts of the material with support from the instructors. Most of the language material had phonetic spellings of the Lunaape words to support at-home learning. Gradually, only the Lunaape language was used in materials (especially for intermediate speakers) to promote dictionary use as well as “sounding out” the word during Zoom sessions.

Every language session included a game. Often, vocabulary specific to the month and from the prayer would be incorporated into a “Kahoot!” game. This game is a timed trivia where participants guess the correct answer. Points decrease for the length of time it takes to submit an answer. The questions were given in both Lunaape and English. Songs were also a part of the classes. Singing “Happy Birthday” in the Lunaape language as well as “Where is?” helped to reinforce learning. Zoom presented challenges with singing as there is a delay, meaning we often sang in 15-part harmony.

## Language Learning Between Classes

At the end of Zoom classes, different tasks were assigned for participants. This included simple video construction involving introductions as well as introducing family members. Participants had the opportunity to attend the other classes offered through the week if they had questions about a task or pronunciation. Inevitably, classes went longer than the time given, as there were lots of questions about language and Munsee culture and history. Support also came in the form of email questions which engaged learners to use the language through a different form. Texting in the Lunaape language also occurred, showing how Indigenous languages could be used in an everyday life.





## Learning from the Experience

Online communication tools heavily rely on effective internet access, which was not always possible for all class participants. For reserve and rural residents, internet connection can be problematic in terms of providing uninterrupted service to run multiple web tools. There is “lag time” in conversation and questions from participants can be missed or taken out of the context in which they occurred. In addition, the use of cameras and microphones can raise privacy issues as the ultimate control of the technology does not rest with the Munsee community but with American communications companies.

One important element of “Zoom Lunaape” instruction is that it delivers synchronous learning. Synchronous learning greatly enriches the experience as this allows students to provide additional information and context to words as the opportunity arises and for the teacher to expand on a point of interest. However, synchronous learning can present scheduling challenges, as participants must juggle other commitments and responsibilities.

## Future Language Programming

Online language learning will continue through the fall of 2020 as well as in-person learning opportunities including a three-day language weekend at the end of October. There will be development of new material to support the learning, as well as guest speakers discussing Munsee history and culture.

Providing language learning online presents opportunities for community members who live off-reserve and have expressed interest in attending weekend sessions. Considering most Indigenous people live in urban centres, this format allows people to connect with *home*. Online sessions allow for the instructors to adjust teaching methods as well as support students with material and video, in a method consistent with weekend sessions. In addition, more classes can be offered, so the continuity of language learning is not interrupted by the longer breaks associated between face-to-face sessions.

**Ian McCallum** (Ed’96, MEd’18) is a member of the Munsee-Delaware First Nation working with his community promoting culture, history and the Munsee language. As a PhD student, Ian is currently researching best strategies for Munsee language revitalization.

# Reflections

## The Importance of Teacher Presence in Online Learning

KATHY PICK

Since the advent of COVID-19 and its impact on program delivery, teachers and students have been thrust into online scenarios they did not choose. Leading Learning Management Systems (LMS) are user-focused, as they ought to be, seeking to ensure that the facilitator delivering the course is immersed in an environment which offers ease of use, meaningful analytics, and varying abilities to customize the design and delivery of content. This is all fine and good, particularly in the corporate world which LMS also serve. But having worked in the academic field for decades, I know that while online learning environments have evolved to engage learners, they have not evolved anywhere near as much when it comes to keeping teachers engaged. This is a problem for many of those now finding themselves required to teach online.

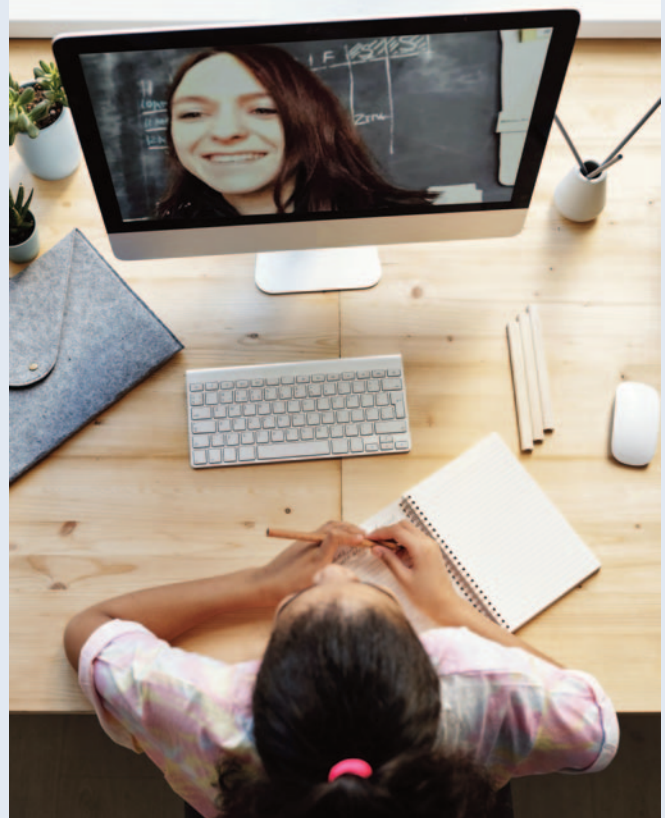
Learning is give-and-take and teachers want and need to be present in the process, to go beyond facilitating extant material. The teacher experience must be as valued as the student experience. Online learning should not be focused more on delivery from a technical premise than a meaningful exchange of information and ideas.

In 2001, I jumped from a face-to-face drama classroom into full time online teaching. This made me something of a pioneer, or a dinosaur, in the world of online education. I was excited about the future and proud to be part of a virtual secondary school within a public system. It all felt very cutting edge.

Within months my enthusiasm was draining fast. The workload was immense and consisted largely of marking. I was working within an LMS that was tedious and tiresome with course material I had not written. I also felt alone. Although I had plenty of students, I missed student contact.

That's when I realized that my isolation, and that of my students, existed and persisted because of the technological interface. I wasn't a part of my teaching and they weren't a part of my assessment of their learning. Instead, the information they saw on a screen was the teacher and the information I received in my Dropbox was the student.

Since COVID-19, and more than ever before, I have met teachers who have found themselves thrown into working exclusively online and feeling much like I did all those years ago. They may be feeling stuck idling in an LMS that is overly tedious to maneuver within; they may be limited in terms of their ability



to create or manipulate the course content within that platform; or they may have arrived online without an adequate support system. They are good teachers who are struggling to transfer what they know how to do into a different medium. They may feel isolated and frequently overwhelmed. What's missing? In some cases: adequate training and support. In most cases: the ability to truly connect with their students.

True for any teacher is the need to remain present in the process of their students' learning; in other words, to recognize the individuality of each learner in order to allow students voice and choice and thereby invite them to assume ownership over the direction of their own learning. In face-to-face classrooms, teachers share their personalities, go with the flow, change the direction of a lesson based on student response, and allow for spontaneity.



When these teachers find themselves teaching entirely online, the medium can overwhelm these experiential aspects. Good teachers often learn alongside their students but when that connection is interrupted, the results can be less than inspiring for both parties.

Educators understand the value of differentiated instruction. What can be baffling is how to provide diverse learning opportunities in an online learning environment. I have found that shaping the curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learning styles is possible by offering students creative options as often as possible, and several within any given lesson. I integrate components that are interactive to trigger critical thinking skills and I ensure that all material is inclusive, egalitarian, and universally accessible; what I don't do is narrate slides.

The good news is that LMS continue to evolve, radically shifting the *how* of both teaching and learning and underlining the tenet that in education technology is a portal rather than a slate.

There is a lot going on behind the glass, from neural networking to complex analytics, and all of it makes online education platforms an increasingly powerful medium for deep learning. However, the focus on the continued development and application of effective instructional design strategies is crucial. Those creating learning platforms need to recognize that successful online learning hinges on engaged online teachers.

The time will come, likely within the next decade, when learning comes off the screen and AR/VR will fundamentally alter the way in which most LMS function. As this comes about, it is imperative that teacher engagement not be lost to the role of lever-pulling (to borrow a reference from the industrial age) and that the role of teachers as necessary players in the bigger picture of authentic learning not be overlooked. Online learning experiences should be as engaging for teachers as they are for those they are teaching.

**Kathy Pick** (MA, OCT) has worked both in traditional face-to-face settings and online, specializing in instructional design, development, and delivery. She is an instructor for Queen's Continuing Teacher Education.



# A Letter to My White Teachers:

## A Reflection on Whiteness, Identity, and Antiracism in the Classroom

JESSICA HO

**T**o the white teachers who taught me, kindergarten through university:

If you had asked me to draw a rainbow before I started kindergarten, it would have gone like this: red, orange, yellow, green, light green, blue, purple. In Cantonese, that is the order of the rainbow. It was not *special* or *interesting* – it just was. Then at school, you taught me the order of the rainbow: “ROY G BIV”. After that, I drew the rainbow one way at home and another way at school. Eventually, I only drew it the latter way. At 5 years old, I was already reconciling home and school, Chinese and English, marginalized and dominant. I was raised to listen to my teachers, and in doing so for years on end, I learned a distinct way of being from you. I slowly abandoned parts of my identity without you noticing. This is not just my personal experience– this is a collective experience.

As immigrant kids, we noticed every difference between home and school. You never asked, so we never brought it up. We learned to compartmentalize opposing norms and parts of us as needed. My parents taught me to listen to you, and because I did, you believed the model minority myth. You internalized that kids like me were well-behaved and quiet – *a pleasure to teach* – and using this myth you simplified other marginalized kids along the way. As my teacher, you believed you were promoting diversity and inclusion. In reality, you presented *your* normal as *the* normal. In doing so – with no ill intent, but with plenty of negative impact – you subtly and repeatedly shamed parts of my identity.

You never described yourself as white. It was the elephant in the classroom – you did not look like most of us students, but you never said it out loud. You assigned us “My Culture” poster boards, and then we moved on. You taught us that residential schools were wrong, and then you never mentioned Indigenous peoples again. You taught us to be kind, but you didn’t teach us justice. You thought you were doing the right thing, but you did not see the racism you were perpetuating.

White supremacy is not just the hate groups, murders, and slurs. You taught us white supremacy every time you suggested that whatever was normal for you was also normal for us. We learned not to question the picture books, novels, and movies that told stories of white kids. We learned to see books as windows into others’ lives, never as mirrors reflecting our own. We reached so far to make the self-to-text connections you asked us for, not seeing the irony. You made racist jokes that we didn’t know to challenge; you pronounced our names wrong and we didn’t

know we deserved better. We mistook your kindness for justice and your silence for welcome. You didn’t empower us to expect better from you, and that is how you taught us white supremacy.

The most mundane parts of our lives are, in fact, our culture: the things so ingrained in us that they go unquestioned. The dominant culture is taken for granted as normal, and we are not taught to see otherwise. In North America, we learn and teach Eurocentric, white-centred perspectives as fact. As explained by the student-led group CHOOSE, “Our pathways to knowledge are racist...Take the example of primary sources: How were enslaved Black people in the U.S. supposed to record their own stories when literacy was made illegal? What about Indigenous peoples, whose own languages were made illegal, too? Many communities of colour preserved their stories through storytelling and oral traditions. However, oral histories – compared to written primary sources – are not as valued in education. So, voices are rendered silent. Narratives are erased. The knowledge we teach is itself incomplete.”



Figure 1. Image source: Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence (2005). Adapted: Ellen Tuzzolo (2016); Mary Julia Cooksey Cordero (2019); *The Conscious Kid* (2020)

(CHOOSE, 2020). As the adult in the room and a beneficiary of the dominant culture, it was your duty to learn to see and dismantle the biased power dynamic in the classroom.

Students like me become teachers like me: still reconciling dominant and marginalized parts of our identities. You expect me to make change by virtue of who I am and the time we are in, but you did not give me the tools. I want to do better for my students today, but you did not show me how. When I look at the world through an antiracist lens, I see that our curriculum, dress codes, behaviour expectations, and norms are still oppressive. I see that we keep so many Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students invisible by allowing them to be half-understood. You told me that I could change the world – I am trying to, and I am asking you to do your part.

Your BIPOC students and colleagues are not asking to be celebrated, just understood. What is more, you must seek to understand yourself. Learn about your whiteness and how it shaped you. Develop your antiracist lens so that you can see the world through intersectionality (illustrated in Figure 2). You do not need another documentary, workshop, or guest speaker. Not one more marginalized person should be required to articulate their pain for the sake of your education. The information and perspectives are already here if you would just look around.

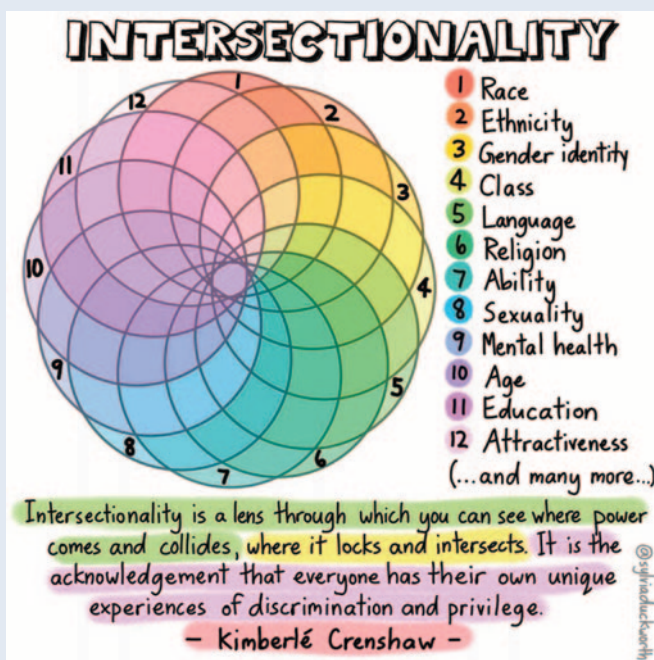


Figure 2. Image source: Sylvia Duckworth (@sylvia duckworth) Instagram.com (2020)

I have spoken to several organizations and institutions about systemic racial injustice. Just about every time, I am told to rest assured that the right changes are being made. So many changemakers in education are white and therefore have not lived the BIPOC Canadian experience. Yet the same people are convinced that students like me will be okay. How can they know? Lived experience brings a passion and urgency that cannot be replicated by any workshop. When institutions are truly safe for BIPOC, it does not need to be advertised – we feel it. And I rarely feel it.

In 2020, educators everywhere were promising to listen and learn about antiracism and were making bold claims about “doing the work”. Did you make this promise, too? If you did, and if you have kept this promise, your perspective, words, and actions today should be radically changed. As an educator, every choice you make has the potential to help or harm someone like me. You can commend me for being smart, brave, or resilient, but until you do your part fully, you continue to contribute to the conditions that leave me no other choice. You were my teacher, and now you are my colleague. Your work here is not done, so do not let me down this time.

Signed with high expectations.

Jessica Ho

**Jessica Ho** (she/her, Con-Ed '15) has a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Psychology and a Bachelor of Education from Queen's and is currently teaching at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

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