

# Indigenization in the ESL Classroom

## Author

Amy Abe

## Description

This 7-page article provides a rationale for Indigenization in the ESL classroom and suggestions for finding ways for ESL learners to engage in meaningful and transformative discussion of Indigenous topics.

## Salient Points

The author describes her educational institution's Indigenous strategy as one that attempts to make "the infrastructural, curricular, and pedagogical changes required to promote the balancing of Indigenous and Western worldviews, values, and ways of knowing as an act of Reconciliation." Despite the fact that ESL programs do not generally serve Indigenous learners, the author argues that they "should not be exempt from Indigenization" (p.27).

The author describes Indigenization in the ESL classroom as valuable for engaging both teachers and learners in a reflective and meaningful interactions. She has found that many learners are ready to engage both the subject matter of Indigenization, as well as the people and relationships of Indigenization: "relationships with our communities, relationships with our shared histories and the Treaties, relationships with the land, and how those relationships are communicated in language" (p. 30). After all, a good portion of ESL learners have their own experiences, stories, and histories of colonization and cultural oppression. As well, the author highlights a need for a 'shift in the teaching processes' when facilitating Indigenous discussion. One option is to facilitate productive tasks that focus on inquiry, and extend learner influence beyond the classroom and into the community. Other activities – such as storytelling, visual and experiential learning, reading to identify bias, and critical deconstruction of grammar and vocabulary – are relatively easy ways to incorporate Indigenous approaches into TESL practices.

As teachers learn more about Indigenous history and culture, they must do so in a deeply reflective way, as learners in a community of problem solvers, despite the personal discomfort inherent in this exploration.

## Questions for Reflection

As you explore this article, consider the following questions:

- The author created a "noticing instrument" to help instructors take a critical look at the materials they use in class (see p.31). Apply some of the questions on the noticing checklist to the textbook your students are currently using. Or

apply them to a selection of the materials and handouts you have used in your current class. What do you notice?

- The author describes one aspect of the “stuff” of Indigenization as including the content, or “the *truth* part of Truth and Reconciliation.” To what extent have you and/or your learners engaged with the *truths* mentioned on page 30?
- The author states that “indigenization should also mean a shift in teaching processes” (see p.31). She draws parallels between task-based language learning and an Indigenous inquiry cycle. She describes an inquiry process that took her learners outside the classroom to learn and question public art portraying Indigenous peoples, and public art by Indigenous artists. The learning included identifying systemic barriers, completing an authentic writing task, and the development of “participating citizen” and “empowered advocate” identities. Like this author, have you incorporated aspects of inquiry learning into your classes? Has this learning taken learners and learning beyond the confines of the classroom?
- Professional development does not always result in the desired changes to instructors’ beliefs and teaching practices. The author argues that training/workshops that focus only on knowledge and do not encourage self-reflection can result in “bigger blind spots”, othering, and appropriation (see p.28). She describes some reflective practices that she and her colleagues engage in (p.32). As you learn about Indigenous cultures, our shared histories, and holistic pedagogies, how can you engage in reflective practice?

## **Keywords**

*Indigenization, TESL practices, teaching process*

## **Reference and Links**

Abe, A. (August, 2017). Indigenization in the ESL Classroom. *TESL Ontario Contact Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://contact.teslontario.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Abe-Indigenization.pdf>