

POSITION PAPER

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**How Should We Teach and Learn from Indigenous Literatures?:
Position Papers by Non-Indigenous Educators, Students, and
Lifelong Learners**

Introduction by
Sophie McCall

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Introduction

“How should we teach and learn from Indigenous literatures?” This was one of the central questions guiding a graduate course on Indigenous literatures and film that I taught in the fall of 2019. I am a settler scholar and director of SFU’s Masters of Arts for Teachers of English (MATE) program at Simon Fraser University (SFU), on the unceded, ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil Waututh Nations in Vancouver, British Columbia. The aim of the MATE program, with its specialization in Indigenous literatures, is to help educators gather resources and engage with current critical debates in Indigenous literary studies in order to responsibly teach and do justice to the complexity and diversity of Indigenous literary arts in their B.C. school classrooms. Many of the students enrolled in the graduate course were part of the MATE program, and all the students were non-Indigenous, though of different cultural, racial, national, and religious heritages. As a class we deliberated the question of how to teach and learn from Indigenous literatures, through readings, workshops, and discussions with Indigenous scholars, and through the process of writing, editing, and revising the following position papers.

Ucwalmicw scholar Kicya7 (Joyce Schneider), who visited our class, shared some strategies on how to respectfully practice Indigenous (specifically Ucwalmicw) pedagogies and protocols in the classroom and beyond.¹ She stressed that acknowledging the territories under our feet, as a daily practice—“walking the talk,” as she put it—is one of the most important first steps. She introduced some of the twelve Indigenous Protocols that guide her own work, including respect, responsibility, relationship-building, reciprocity, humility, and humour. For Kicya7, Indigenous Protocols establish “ways of seeking, making, and sharing knowledge” in order to “disrupt and transform mainstream understandings of Indigenous education.”² As a class we approached the question of teaching and learning from Indigenous literatures by reflecting upon some of Indigenous Protocols Kicya7 shared through multiple writing and editing steps. What emerged was a series of papers blending our thoughts on our individual positionalities as non-Indigenous students and teachers with different cultural, racial, gendered, and national identities and affiliations. Perhaps more than in the specific answers we generated, we found value in the *process* of discussing, writing, editing, and reflecting upon this question and upon our own positionalities.

The following is a selection of the papers, the purpose of which is to model a method that non-Indigenous educators could replicate in collaboration with Indigenous educators in their local

¹ Kicya7, “Indigenous Pedagogies.” Keynote Address at the Indigenous Literatures Workshop, “How Should We Teach and Learn from Indigenous Literatures?” (English 870). Simon Fraser University, Vancouver B.C. 25 October 2019. I am grateful to Kicya7 for giving me permission to cite her lecture (based on my notes).

² Educators familiar with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)’s “First Peoples’ Principles of Learning,” a key building-block of British Columbia’s curriculum, will note some parallels to Kicya7’s Protocols Please see www.fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning/.

institutions and in their classes. Each paper begins with a brief biographical statement as a way of highlighting a key tenet in Indigenous studies: our positionality is a determining factor in how we decode the world and, in turn, how we interpret texts. Our hope is that the discussions that these position papers provoke provide useful starting points for teachers, students, and life-long learners to engage with the complexity and diversity of Indigenous literatures.

SOURCES

First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). "First Peoples' Principles of Learning." N.d. www.fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning/

Kicya7 [Joyce Schneider]. "Indigenous Pedagogies." Keynote Address at the Indigenous Literature and Film Festival. English 870: Simon Fraser University, Vancouver BC. 25 October 2019.