

Braiding different ways of being and knowing

CO[IL] braids together Indigenous and intercultural ways of being and knowing within an international Indigenous-focused project. In this section, we will briefly explore:

- what it means to be Indigenous-focused
- intercultural fluency

What does it mean to be Indigenous-focused?

Being Indigenous-focused means weaving together various threads to create a tapestry of understanding. This begins with ensuring we are [Walking in a good way](#)



As indicated in the [Interweavings](#) section, rigorous and ongoing self-reflection. It means knowing where we are, where we come from, the stories that have shaped us, and how we walk 'in' and 'on' the world. It means being aware of our inherent connections to other beings and the unavoidable and significant impact we have on all beings around us. In her book [Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies - An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education](#), Chrona (2022) shares:

[o]ne important aspect of Indigenous Knowledge Systems is that they respond to, and honour context. Who I am, where I write from, and the land I am now on informs what I share with you. Knowledge and understanding are entrenched in relationship and connected to people and place" (p.1).

Reflecting on who we are as holistic beings shaped by story is an ongoing and iterative process, that goes hand-in-hand with understanding what it means to be Indigenous-focused.

NIC's [Working Together Indigenization Plan](#) defines Indigenization as:

naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems to make them respectfully evident in the places, spaces, and classroom environments of North Island College. This includes infusing Indigenous ways of knowing and being into coursework and programs so that they are seamlessly recognized, acknowledged, and respectfully treated as equal to all other perspectives reflected in campus curriculum. Indigenization requires recognition that Indigenous worldviews have been significantly affected or overlooked and therefore require restorative processes.

Indigenization goes beyond including Indigenous content and requires utilizing a different approach to learning entirely, one that is embedded in relationship to specific lands, cultures, and community (p. 13).

As instructors, it is not our role and responsibility to become the experts and disseminate knowledge of culture, intangible cultural heritage, worldview, or customs of others.

It is our role and responsibility to draw on the knowledge of our students, to facilitate their learning and discovery of one another.

Reflecting on decolonization

In simple terms, decolonization includes (and is not limited to), moving away from Eurocentric curricula content, pedagogies, assumptions, and biases and including more diverse ways of being and knowing. The process of decolonization of education is intimately connected to Indigenization. Click [HERE](#) for resources on Indigenization and decolonization.

Understanding our role in reconciliation

In the Canadian context, reconciliation usually refers to recognizing the history of harm done to Indigenous Peoples and working toward rebuilding relationships with Indigenous Peoples. Since each of us has a unique story, reconciliation will mean something different for each of us. The [Justice Institute of British Columbia](#) summarizes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's principles of reconciliation.

Honoring the local: Prioritizing the land we walk on

In its broadest sense, this means learning about the Indigenous community in which we live and work and ensuring that all that we do keeps the local Indigenous community at its heart. It means:

- acknowledging in meaningful ways the territories on which we live and work
- creating Indigenous community-centered collaborations

What is intercultural fluency?

If you search the Internet for a definition of 'intercultural fluency' (also called 'intercultural competence'), you'll find many different definitions. One definition commonly cited comes from [Deardorff \(2008\)](#), who defines it as:

effective and appropriate behavior in intercultural situations

Deardorff's (2009) [Intercultural Competence Model](#) identifies attitudes, knowledge, skills, and internal and external outcomes as the five key elements of intercultural competence, highlighting that it is a *process, not an 'end product'* that can one day be fully achieved.

Across the different definitions available, most researchers agree that intercultural fluency includes the ability to:

1. understand and respect other worldviews and cultures
2. actively listen and engage with diverse others
3. a willingness to tolerate ambiguity
4. develop cultural self-awareness and a capacity for self-assessment
5. develop an openness toward intercultural learning and empathy for people from other cultures

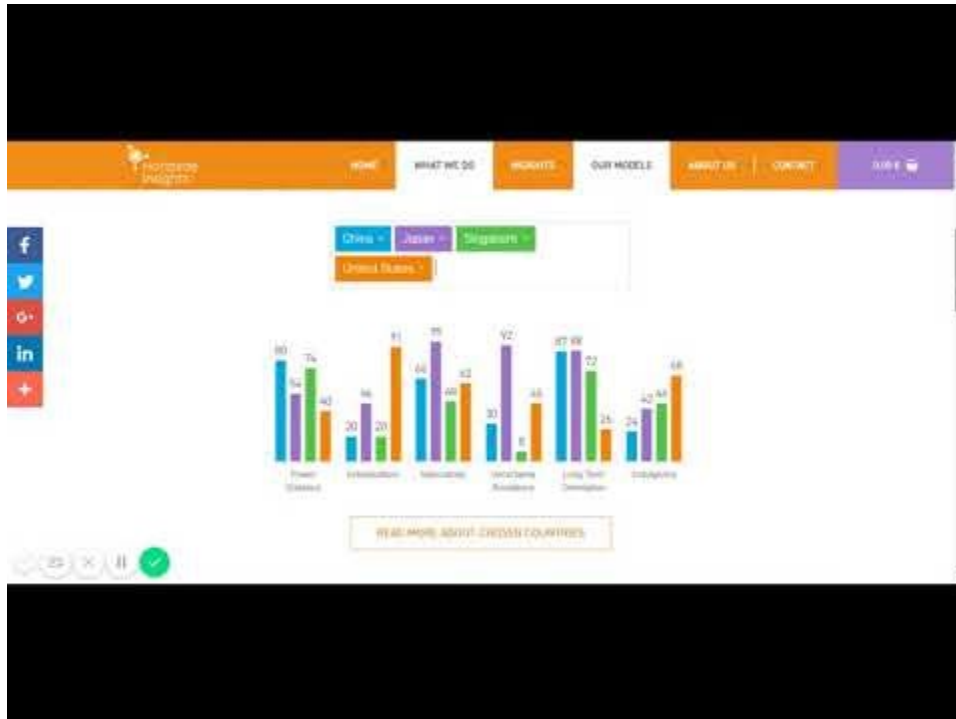
6. adapt to varying intercultural communication styles

Learning intercultural fluency is important for all students

Helping students to develop their intercultural fluency is important, regardless of whether they plan to travel, work abroad, or leave their communities. Every day we communicate with other humans, whether face-to-face or online, through email or conversation. And while we have our 'human-ness' in common, we are all unique in terms of our cultural identities, life experiences, and how we engage with the world around us. Understanding others may not understand and view the world the way we do, is a critical life skill for all students.

Intercultural Perspectives on Classroom Dynamics

While it's important to avoid overgeneralizing, exploring potential differences in how students have been acculturated in educational contexts within and outside of Canada helps instructors and also students to better understand the perspectives and behaviors of others. A useful starting point is Hofstede's [Country comparison tool](#), demonstrated in the [3-minute video below](#), which provides opportunities for discussion of broader cultural trends across different countries.



Hofstede's article referenced in the video, [Cultural differences in teaching and learning](#) (Hofstede, 1986), while several years old, remains a useful starting point.

Intercultural fluency and teaching

Our personal experiences of learning influence how we, in turn, teach - whether we reproduce how we were taught, or we do something different because we didn't enjoy our own experiences of education. Whichever choice we make, the context in which we live influences these choices.

In Sir Ken Robinson's 19-minute TED Talk [How to Escape Education's Death Valley](#), he invites us to think about education and the role of teachers.

As instructors, we continually reflect on '**how**' we teach, and the methods and activities we use. We think about '**what**' we teach our students. We ask ourselves, what they need to learn.

How often do we think about the '**why**' of what we do?

Understanding the values and beliefs that underpin the pedagogical decisions we make

Taking time to reflect on our cultural values and beliefs as they relate to teaching, supports us in creating learning spaces that value the cultural diversity in our classrooms, by:

1. helping us identify the specifics of how we see the role of an instructor (sage on the stage, guide on the side, etc.)
2. highlighting our (often) subconscious beliefs about the role of students
3. identifying our expectations of student behavior in the classroom
4. highlight our teaching biases/preferences that may inadvertently disadvantage some students

Braiding different ways of being and knowing

Collaborative Online Indigenous Intercultural Learning projects braid together the kaleidoscope of different ways of being and knowing across cultures. Such projects honor local Indigenous ways of being in respectful and reciprocal relationships and interweave diverse cultural perspectives from around the world, drawing on the stories of the students and instructors involved in the CO[1]IL project.