

Co-Designing Circumpolar Civic Education: Workshop 2 Report (June 2022)

Elaine Alvey, Mia Bennett, Victoria Qutuuq Buschman, Elena Campbell, Nadine Fabbi, Bree Kessler, Michelle Koutnik, Jodie Lane, Andy Meyer, Andrew Nestingen, Heather Nicol, Timothy Pasch, Chase Puentes, Kayla Stevenson, and Jason Young

This report describes the results of the second workshop of *Co-Designing Civic Education for the Circumpolar North*, a two-year project funded by a planning grant from the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Navigating the New Arctic Program. Results from the project's first workshop in March 2022, which explored the concept of civic education, can be found [here](#). The second workshop, which was held virtually over a two-hour period on 25 April 2022, shifted focus to a discussion on best practices and challenges associated with designing anticolonial and Indigenous approaches to circumpolar civic education. Participants included the authors of this report.

The University of Washington (UW) research team kicked off the workshop with a brief presentation of the Workshop 1 Report, and an invitation to participants to provide reflections and feedback on the findings included in that report. This was done to validate those findings and to facilitate continuity of conversation across the two workshops. The research team then introduced the new workshop topic and moved participants into small groups within breakout rooms. Within these small groups, participants were first asked to respond in writing to three prompts:

- When thinking about anticolonial or Indigenous-centered education, what are some best practices? On the flip side, what colonial practices do educators need to actively avoid?
- How have you incorporated anticolonial or Indigenous approaches, knowledge, or perspectives within your own educational work? Provide at least one specific example, and discuss challenges or successes you have encountered.
- If you had the necessary time and resources, how would you want to change your educational work to better incorporate anticolonial approaches or Indigenous knowledge? This could be a change to an existing class or program, the creation of new teaching materials, and more.

The groups then used those written responses as a launching point for conversation. At the conclusion of these discussions, participants were returned to the main Zoom room to share their group's major takeaways with the rest of the participants. The UW research team then wrapped up the workshop by sharing next steps in the project, including plans to hold Workshop 3 in the Fall. After the conclusion of the workshop, the UW research team transcribed audio recordings from the workshop discussions and performed a thematic analysis of these transcripts, the participants' writing responses, and written comments placed in the Zoom chat. Coding followed a two-stage approach, including an initial open coding stage focused on identifying and describing basic themes and an axial coding stage focused on identifying and describing relationships between these themes.

The remainder of this report describes the higher-level themes that emerged through this analysis. Each theme describes how a different set of educational practices can be performed to support anticolonial or Indigenous-centered approaches to circumpolar civic education. These include the support of a community of practice for Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators; the adoption of curricular best practices; the engagement of student emotions and identities; and the transformation of broader educational structures. Because the majority of participants were raised within Western academic frameworks and thus think about the system from within the system, much of this report focuses on ideas for reforming practices and curricula in "traditional" classroom settings. However, many of the thoughts brought up by participants during the workshop underscore the critical importance of non-classroom based learning as a counter to the colonial biases built into the Western educational system. The classroom is not always (or perhaps ever) the best place to teach civics, particularly in the Circumpolar North; land-based learning, experiential learning, educational simulation, storytelling, and even conducting "classroom" activities away from traditional schools could all serve to foster deeper and more meaningful connections and traditions.

The final section of the report then lists interesting ideas or questions that merit further exploration at future project workshops. Our hope is that these reports will support the development of

core ideas across the workshops, and also provide a record of key questions and ideas that could form the basis of future research efforts.

Building a Community of Practice

Participants argued that the practice of building relationships between educators¹ can be a key tool in supporting anticolonial and Indigenous-centered education. Throughout these discussions, participants highlighted several benefits of establishing communities or networks of educators, as well as times and spaces for those communities to come together to share knowledge and collaboratively work through shared challenges related to circumpolar education. First, and at the most general level, these collaborative spaces have the potential *to facilitate more sharing of curricular resources to improve teaching practices*. There was a recognition that some spaces already exist for these forms of collaboration and sharing – for example, through existing groups associated with the University of the Arctic. However, participants felt that many of these existing spaces remain limited. They said, for instance, that educational resources are not regularly shared within some disciplinary areas (e.g., teaching about international Arctic histories) and that many academic spaces currently emphasize research over teaching. There is therefore a need to grow opportunities for expanded resource sharing between educators across the circumpolar North, or at least to make existing opportunities more visible and widely accessible.

Second, establishing stronger communities of educators can *facilitate powerful teaching collaborations that are anticolonial in nature*. Participants expressed a need for spaces that have the explicit goal of bringing together diverse sets of educators. This should involve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, including both institutionally credentialed teachers and community-based holders of knowledge. Participants highlighted the importance of incorporating both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives² within the classroom. While Indigenous perspectives can and should be incorporated through writings or films from Indigenous authors, it can be even more powerful for students to interact directly with Indigenous guest speakers (in-person and/or virtually). This requires existing relationships between classroom instructors and community-based knowledge holders. Another approach discussed was the inclusion of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators as instructors-of-record for Arctic courses. This is particularly useful when classrooms contain both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, in the hope that all students can associate with the identity position of one of the instructors. However, there was recognition that not all universities have the staffing, capacity, or financial resources to support this teaching model. This once again highlights the potential of a larger educational network or

¹ Some such organizations with this primary purpose already exist; the UArctic Læra Institute for Circumpolar Education has published a [guide](#) to Circumpolar Studies curriculum development as a resource for faculty designing undergraduate programmes, is commissioning [courses](#) to illustrate the principles, themes and learning outcomes in the guide, and has received funding to include a bank of shared pedagogical [resources](#) on its website. The Læra Institute represents one of several excellent opportunities to expand upon these current educational networks in the circumpolar north to bring in and uplift more and diverse knowledge holders.

² The UW research team recognizes that throughout this report, we invoke a clear binary between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and educators. Our goal in strategically invoking this binary is to highlight the importance of Arctic Indigenous educators and students to this project. We want to recognize, though, that identity is complex and intersectional, and that binaries risk producing reductive understandings of the intersections between identity and power. Without minimizing the incredible hardships and colonial oppression that Indigenous people have faced and continue to face, we would also like to recognize that other groups have faced structural oppression within educational settings. For example, non-Indigenous first-generation students may also find the institutions of higher education to be challenging social spaces where they lack confidence or pride, are economically disadvantaged, and do not have the ability to succeed in mainstream culture or to move forward with assurity. As this project moves forward, we believe that it will be productive to explore intersections between colonialism and other sites of oppression within the classroom. In doing so, we hope to challenge neat categorizations that oversimplify and divide individuals and concepts according to only one identity.

community for bringing educators from different schools together to collaborate on or even co-teach classes. Additionally, developments within the field of civic education research can foster grant awards to projects that partner Indigenous and non-Indigenous PI's, including Indigenous PI's who are not institutionally affiliated with the traditional Western academic environment. Such collaborations are increasing in instance, and can strengthen circumpolar civic education efforts from the research side as well.

Finally, participants argued that these educational networks can help educators *to build their individual capacities to engage in anticolonial and Indigenous-centered teaching*. This is true for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous educators. For non-Indigenous educators, there is a need for more resources for learning how to be an effective ally in the classroom. For educators who are newer to thinking about issues of Indigeneity and colonialism, it can be particularly useful to have access to other educators who currently model good allyship practices. Participants also pointed out that it can be difficult for Indigenous educators to engage in conversations about colonialism. This can be influenced by the local context of their educational work. In Greenland, for example, colonialism is often treated academically, as a historical event with little bearing on the present. This leads to discomfort with the idea of teaching about colonialism as a force that is active in the lives of students. International communities may provide exposure to educational approaches that more explicitly engage questions of colonialism, to help educators reflect on and even change the cultural norms that currently constrain their teaching practices. They could similarly provide safe spaces to learn new vocabularies for talking about colonial issues, as well as teaching strategies for introducing these difficult topics in the classroom.

While participants did not explicitly use this language, they were in essence calling for the cultivation of an educational Community of Practice³ (CoP; see Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002) for supporting anticolonial and Indigenous-centered approaches to circumpolar civic education. Questions associated with such a CoP could be a promising area for future research. How can such a community be established, for instance, to encourage the inclusion of (institutionally unaffiliated) community perspectives? What processes should be established to facilitate international, interdisciplinary, and even interepistemological collaboration? What norms can help to facilitate constructive and affirming dialogue between educators that hold very different identities and relationships to colonialism? What kinds of infrastructure are necessary to facilitate collaboration and sharing of resources? How can such a community be scaled, while still cultivating trust amongst its members? These, and other, questions could help to structure an important research agenda for supporting more educational collaboration.

Establishing Curricular Best Practices

Participants also engaged in extensive conversation about how curriculum can be best designed to support anticolonial and Indigenous-centered pedagogy, both at the primary and secondary school levels as well as in higher education. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they suggested that a critical goal should be *to center Indigenous knowledge, agency, and needs within curricula*. Suggested practices for doing this included providing students with first-hand access to Indigenous narratives and knowledge; ensuring that this knowledge come from a range of different Indigenous perspectives; framing Indigenous knowledge as equally important to Western knowledge; drawing on Indigenous pedagogical approaches like land-based learning; and inspiring pride and positivity within Indigenous students. Participants also described the importance of paying attention to language as a tool for education and cultural empowerment. Many of these practices could be supported by the recommendation, described above, of growing stronger communities of practice for educators. For instance, participants suggested that a good technique for incorporating Indigenous knowledge and language into courses would be to co-design curricula with

³ In seeking to build a Community of Practice that respects and centers multiple forms of knowledge and learning, we acknowledge that defaulting to English as the primary language is inherently limiting. A truly inclusive circumpolar collaboration will not only permit but celebrate Indigenous languages, terminologies, and concepts to be used freely by participants.

Indigenous educators or Elders. Participants emphasized the importance of appropriately compensating Indigenous collaborators for their work and intellectual contributions.

Of course, many of these practices can be difficult to implement, and *participants identified several challenges to centering Indigenous knowledge*. In one group, for example, participants explored the difficulties of adopting land-based pedagogies within universities, since students are often stuck in a classroom without access to the land. Participants also emphasized that it is not enough to simply “add Indigenous content and stir”, or to take Western curriculum and translate it into Indigenous languages. To be effective, educators must think carefully and fundamentally about how to bring together the epistemic and pedagogical dimensions of Western and Indigenous educational approaches, so that curricula can effectively facilitate dialogue across different perspectives. Participants also emphasized that educators must be attendant to the ways in which Indigenous knowledge, culture, and histories vary across different Arctic geographies. This influences how courses can engage with issues of Indigeneity and colonialism.

In addition to centering the knowledge of Indigenous peoples, participants suggested that it can be useful *to center the existing knowledge of students themselves*. To do so, one anticolonial approach involves co-creation in teaching and learning, so that learning takes the form of a two-way exchange of knowledge instead of a Western top-down approach wherein only the teacher is designated as a knowledge holder. This co-learning approach can be used to facilitate youth-driven curriculum design that centers the knowledge, technical skills, and information that are most needed by the students themselves. However, participants also emphasized that educators should avoid putting students, and particularly Indigenous students, in uncomfortable positions. This could happen if they, for example, use students as token representatives of their culture, or if they shame students for their identity, language, or culture. The classroom should instead support student experiences, knowledge, and power.

Anticolonial teaching also requires educators *to carefully identify and remove pervasive colonial discourses* from their curricula and teaching practices. Participants suggested that circumpolar civic education should acknowledge that colonization is ongoing, takes many forms (e.g., physical, spiritual, and intergenerational), and varies across different geographic and historical contexts. Assimilation narratives, and other discourses that invisibilize and disempower Native peoples, must be rooted out of the classroom. Similarly, civic education must avoid fostering teacher savior mentalities or privileging Western knowledge over Indigenous knowledge, both of which reinforce the false notion of Western superiority within academic spaces. Educators should also remain critical in their adoption of Western tools (e.g., GIS, remote sensing, entrepreneurship models) to ensure that their classes do not perpetuate colonial practices or inflict harm on Indigenous students. Civic education should acknowledge and address difficult topics, such as the genocide of Indigenous peoples, forced relocations, residential boarding schools, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Courses should provide non-Indigenous students with tools to recognize their part in these colonial processes. At the same time, courses should celebrate the strength of Indigenous cultures, and when possible they should frame topics around Indigeneity rather than settler baselines. Participants emphasized that anticolonial teaching should not end with critique, but should support students in imagining, talking about, and collectively working toward decolonial futures.

Attending to Student Emotions and Identities

Participants also discussed both the importance and complexity of *attending to the emotions and identities of students*, so that they can fully and constructively engage with anticolonial and Indigenous-centered curriculum. They identified two tensions that are particularly important to navigate. First, there is a need to explicitly address the negative (and ongoing) harms of colonialism while also centering the strong and positive aspects of Indigenous cultures. Second, participants argued that there are many benefits to teaching circumpolar civic education with both Arctic Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the classroom, but that these two groups have very different emotional attachments to colonialism and Indigenous culture. Taken together, these two tensions create challenges for educators. Our participants described how important it is for educators to use their classes to inspire pride and

positivity amongst Indigenous students, while still not shying away from discussions of the negative impacts of colonialism. Educators need to figure out how to have difficult conversations about ongoing harm, while still encouraging Indigenous students to feel positive about their cultures and futures. This is particularly difficult because many Indigenous students may enter the classroom already not feeling confident in their Indigenous identity. This may be produced by any number of dynamics, from feelings that they do not look Indigenous to inability to speak their Indigenous language or belief in false and shameful colonial narratives about their culture. For non-Indigenous students, there is conversely a need to help them recognize their position as settlers without causing them to disengage from the class. This can help students to engage with their role in colonialism, while still positioning them to take positive and constructive steps toward becoming better allies. Curricular design can help with some of these difficult tensions – participants, for instance, described practices of alternating discussion between texts that center Indigenous culture and texts that center critiques of colonization. However, curricular design alone cannot fully address these dynamics – instructors also need to be carefully attuned to the affective and emotional dynamics of their classroom, as well as the identity positions of their students. One fruitful area of research may be to create more support for educators as they navigate these difficult issues.

Transforming Broader Educational Structures

Finally, participants described the importance of *reflecting on and challenging colonial biases built into broader educational systems*. Some of these colonial biases are so deeply normalized within the education system that they can be difficult to recognize. One fundamental example is the design of the academic calendar, which often does not take hunting seasons or community events into account. Centering education in classrooms and emphasizing knowledge within Western textbooks also produces difficulties in leveraging Indigenous teaching approaches, such as land-based pedagogies and the inclusion of the knowledge of Elders. The widespread use of English as the primary language of instruction in classrooms also negates ways of learning and knowing that stem from Indigenous and other languages. Common educational testing and evaluation techniques, such as standardized testing formats and the provision of final grades, can also reproduce colonial logics within courses. Participants pointed out that many of these structures can be quite difficult to change, though. Even if there is local will to change them, they are often controlled and reinforced by national organizations and accreditation processes. Participants did highlight some success stories in terms of transforming government educational structures. In Alaska, for example, the state has worked with Alaska Native communities to develop and adopt standards about how to include Alaska Native voices and culturally responsive teaching in classrooms. However, participants emphasized that these examples remain limited – they are starting points for further work, rather than ending points. More work can and should be done to develop effective strategies for transforming the broad anticolonial structures that frame educational practice, to open space for Indigenous pedagogies.

Additional Research Ideas and Questions

Finally, because this is a planning grant, we intend to track interesting ideas or questions that might be further developed in future workshops and/or as part of a future grant proposal. We identified the following for further thought:

- *How might [slow reading](#) and writing be incorporated into circumpolar civic education?* This could range from more frequent and longer visits to [communities](#) to spending more time watching expert [Alaska Native](#) educators work with students, and would encourage quality of learning over quantity of course material covered.
- *What Western technologies and [trainings](#) might be useful tools to support Indigenous educational approaches if leveraged well?* Indigenous [remote sensing](#) and [GIS](#) could [prove useful](#) in [empowering Indigenous communities](#) and educators to share unique [place-based knowledges](#) as well as rewriting colonizer maps and [narratives of Native land](#). Secondly,

atmospheric and environmental sciences could provide both greater insight into local changes as well as opportunities for youth training in the natural sciences (see the [Smart Ice](#) project). Programs to foster [entrepreneurial literacy](#) amongst Indigenous communities may also prove successful in supporting Native-led innovation in a variety of fields. Additionally, [educational simulation](#) programs have great capacity to [promote Indigenous and youth agency](#) while preparing students for potential careers.

- ***In what ways can social media be used to support Indigenous knowledge systems and teaching approaches?*** Social media networks could be reimagined to create and [share engaging](#) anti-colonial [resources](#) and [teaching materials](#) with greater accessibility than those housed within institutional repositories. Social media can also be used to [communicate science](#) with broader audiences.
- ***How might we learn from and implement teachings from the [Inuit History Power Curve](#) in circumpolar civic education?*** Give students [contextual information](#) about the history of colonialism, its impacts on communities, and self-determination efforts to foster [understanding](#) of how they were colonized so that they may take [better control](#) over their lived experiences

INUIT HISTORY POWER CURVE



