


# Indigenizing Internationalization and Internationalizing Indigenization: Insights From a Virtual Study Abroad to Ireland, Jamaica, and Aotearoa/New Zealand

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## Abstract

This paper aligns with the themes found in “The Transitions of Online Learning and Teaching” and “Sustaining Positive Change,” and reports on the collaborative work of a faculty member and an instructional designer from the University of Saskatchewan, Canada, where Indigenization and internationalization are leading institutional priorities. Here we consider possibilities for greater collaboration between these disciplinary and programmatic imperatives for mutual benefit, which the shift to virtual learning during the Covid pandemic enabled. We explore the capacity of Virtual Study Abroad course design to synthesize Indigenous and Western pedagogies and methodologies to conceive of innovative curriculum consistent with the negotiation of epistemological third spaces through the design of a Virtual Study Abroad course focusing on educational systems in Ireland, Jamaica, and New Zealand. Major themes emerging from the data include the capacity of virtual learning to enhance the democratization of knowledge and the potential of participatory pedagogies and innovative assessment approaches to decolonize postsecondary curriculum. Ultimately, we hope that this work will serve to inform new institutional models and approaches, whereby Indigenization strategies serve to decolonize internationalization programs, and Indigenization efforts benefit from innovative programming emanating from internationalization initiatives. Such a reconceptualization holds the promise of mobilizing Higher Education in the service of social justice and the ‘global good.’

**Keywords:** internationalization, Indigenization, higher education teaching and learning, study abroad, epistemological third spaces, decolonizing curriculum



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## **Introduction**

Institutional mandates around Indigenization and internationalization have proliferated recently across the Canadian Higher Education (HE) landscape (Garson, 2016; Heath, 2019; James, Cullinan, and Ali, 2013; Kristoff & Cottrell, 2021). These strategies are informed by a range of imperatives at local, provincial and national levels ranging from increasing international student tuition differentials as part of institutional enrollment and budgetary strategies, to implementing recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and engaging with local Indigenous communities, to improving institutional rankings, to meeting critical workforce skills shortages, to larger considerations of international diplomacy and soft power (CMEC, 2017; Tannis, 2018; Pidgeon, 2016). Motivated by different agendas and rationales, and often seen as nested oppositions (Heath, 2019), policy discourse around Indigenization and internationalization are often treated separately (Tannis, 2018; Wasibord & Mellado, 2014).

International education, especially Study Abroad, has often been criticized as elitist and exclusive since the cost of travel frequently excluded students from less affluent backgrounds. In the Saskatchewan context, a disproportionate number of these students are Indigenous and historically Indigenous students were under-represented among those engaging in Study Abroad courses (Cottrell, 2018). However, the shift to online learning resulting from the Covid pandemic has necessitated the creation of virtual international learning experiences, with the result that such offerings are now more accessible to Indigenous students who may have not otherwise had the resources to participate. This shift presents tremendous opportunities to create curricula which simultaneously advances learning outcomes associated with indigenization and internationalization to prepare Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates who are well-grounded locally and are equipped to flourish in international contexts.

## **Co-Developing Virtual Study Abroad**

Here we employ duoethnographic methods to reflect on recent collaborative work in co-designing a course that sought to synthesize institutional imperatives around Indigenization and internationalization. In our capacities as an Indigenous instructional designer and a non-Indigenous faculty member, the pandemic-induced shift to online learning prompted collaboration regarding the capacity of innovative Study Abroad course design to synthesize Indigenous and Western pedagogies and methodologies consistent with the negotiation of epistemological third spaces (Hulme, Cracknell & Owens, 2009; Roy, 2017; Seremani & Clegg, 2015). Co-developing a new Virtual Study Abroad course focusing on education systems in Ireland, Jamaica, and New Zealand in response to the pandemic allowed us the opportunity to intentionally construct such a course. Here we consider practical implications of this course design, and consider theoretical implications of synthesizing learning outcomes and assessment approaches for that course as a means of decolonizing Study Abroad teaching and learning (Absolon, 2010).

Despite huge variation in academic and professional content, instructional approaches, and delivery contexts, we found that a number of broad goals have been identified for students engaged in Study Abroad (Williams, 2005; Rubin & Matthews, 2013). These include intellectual growth, professional development, personal growth, inter-cultural competence, and understanding of one's own culture (Varela, 2017). Given the combination of objective and

subjective skills and attributes intrinsic in these desired outcomes, instructors, course designers, and researchers have struggled to develop appropriate assessment and evaluation approaches and tools to authentically measure the extent to which students actually benefit from those resource-heavy programs across a range of prescribed learning outcomes (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012).

Based on this knowledge, our premise in designing our course was that the typically trans-disciplinary nature of Study Abroad course offerings provided a unique opportunity to synthesize Indigenous ways of knowing with Western formative and summative evaluation approaches to develop robust and innovative assessment tools which empower both learners and instructors, and promote authentic and potentially transformative life-long learning (Clifford, McCalman, Bainbridge, & Tsey, 2015). Specifically, we drew on the following Indigenous epistemological concepts in conceiving innovative learning outcomes and assessment approaches: (a) learning as a profoundly relational phenomenon, in which humans interact with each other and with all elements of the universe; (b) learning as a holistic endeavor with mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions; (c) learning as a search for communal, as well as individual, wellness; (d) learning as a life-long dynamic of ever evolving into one's personhood or becoming; (e) learning as a process of becoming accountable for the impact that our human activity has on the earth and beyond; (f) and learning as a process of understanding one's own, and others,' learning preferences and gifts (Absolon, 2010; Battiste, 2013; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Claypool & Preston, 2014; Deloria, 1999; Little Bear, 2000). In addition to the academic knowledge to be evaluated, we drew on Indigenous authorities to include traditional, empirical, and revealed knowledge (LaFrance & Nichols, 2010). And we incorporated Indigenous assessment approaches which favour self and peer reflection and forward-looking assessments which help determine if a learner is ready to embrace a new challenge or activity by virtue of mastering a past challenge or activity. Lastly, we designed an assessment framework informed by Indigenous cyclical concepts of seasonality (spring, summer, fall, winter) and life stages (childhood, youth, adulthood, and elder) to denote evolving stages and states of mastery.

These foundational Indigenous cyclical concepts were connected with the standardized university assessment descriptions in a way to bring together Indigenous and Western perspectives. Our primary goal here was to conceive an assessment tool which would locate responsibility and ownership of assessment as much as possible with the learners, consistent with adult and experiential learning theories and Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies (Merriam, 2001).

### **Insights and Promise**

Data for this study is derived from the recorded reflections of the authors, before, during and after the design and delivery of the course. Major themes emerging from the data include the capacity of virtual learning to enhance the democratization of knowledge, and the potential of participatory pedagogies and innovative assessment approaches to decolonize postsecondary curriculum. Insights from this inquiry may ultimately serve to inform new institutional models and approaches, whereby Indigenization strategies serve to decolonize internationalization programs and Indigenization efforts are advanced through innovative programming emanating from internationalization imperatives and initiatives (Beck, 2012; Heath, 2018). Such a reconceptualization holds the promise of mobilizing higher education in the service of social justice and the 'global good,' in addition to the neoliberal focus on revenue generation and

wealth creation as the primary function of universities (Leask and de Wit, 2016; Vavrus & Pekol, 2015).

### **Author's Contributions**

This inquiry has been entirely collaborative throughout. KDC and MC met during an earlier Study Abroad and KDC suggested the possibility of employing virtual technology to enhance Study Abroad. Those conversations continued into the pandemic, leading to the design and delivery of a virtual Study Abroad and the Indigenous Assessment Framework. Duoethnographic methods were then employed to organize and analyse that data. We also collaborated in preparing this presentation.

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### **Ethics Statement**

Because we employed duoethnographic methods whereby data were created solely by the two authors in conversation with each other, an ethics review was not applicable.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors do not declare any conflict of interest.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data generated and analyzed during the study are available in link to the podcast <https://sites.usask.ca/studyabroad/>

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