



First Steps beyond the Land Acknowledgment



Helene H. Wagner¹, Tee Duke², Sanja Hinic-Frlog¹, John Crutch³, Monika Havelka⁴

¹ Department of Biology, University of Toronto Mississauga, ² Indigenous Initiatives, University of Toronto Mississauga,

³ Indigenous Initiatives, University of Toronto, ⁴ Department of Geography, Geomatics and Environment, University of Toronto Mississauga

3

How can we follow up and put this into practice in undergraduate science courses?

- Lead by example. Show how we are struggling with this, i.e., dare to be vulnerable.
- Make it relevant to the course content.
- Explain how it fits into the bigger picture. For me, that means relating everything back to the main goal of settler colonialism to get rid of the Indigenous Peoples in order to gain full control of the land and resources.

- Nudging students to go beyond their comfort zone to take action. Identify the biggest hurdles towards allyship and build them into the course.
- Create safe spaces for student learning.

I think it's really worthwhile to demonstrate humility and vulnerability to our students – to show that we are lifelong learners, that we are never too embedded in our intellectual positions to be open to new ways of thinking and seeing.

I think the LA is part of a larger and much needed discussion in the natural sciences about positionality, that can be used in any discussion of the literature (why is this particular phenomenon being studied? Who studied it, and from what perspective?).

Building trusting relationships with Indigenous people and embedding and valuing Indigenous knowledge.

What can science instructors do to raise awareness and contribute to Truth & Reconciliation in their courses?

Truth and reconciliation permeate all aspects of society. One mechanism of settler colonialism may consist of not teaching and learning about settler colonialism, the history of Indigenous-Crown relationships, and their relevance today. I think we have an obligation as a university to overcome this and to ensure that our graduates have a general understanding of the history of Indigenous Peoples and understand how this relates to their field.

As an educator, I want to create awareness and commitment in my students. As a scientist, personally, I'm committed to reflecting on ways in which I may be complicit in the ongoing process of settler colonialism, i.e., the process of erasing Indigenous Peoples from the land, literally and symbolically. This starts with thinking about the gaps in our textbooks, what we take for granted and how the way we conceptualize our field is shaped by a colonial perspective.

Because we are all treaty people! I understand there's complexities with this statement but I resonate with it the most.

Placing yourself allows reflecting on the push/pull factors that brought you and your ancestors to reside on Indigenous lands and how you and your ancestors have benefitted from the theft of Indigenous lands and resources.

I was shocked to learn that teaching about (the supremacy of) "the scientific method" has been instrumentalized to alienate Indigenous youth from their culture and identity. While this started in the residential schools, it is still ongoing.

2

Why should we consider making this a personal commitment?

My hope is that through reflection on pieces I have so far tried, students can explore what in these learning opportunities is most meaningful for them. Perhaps, they will be able to decide what an effective allyship looks like for them or perhaps, they will investigate hidden biases in ecology and other scientific articles. I also hope that this may create opportunities for students to learn to be more open and include different kinds of evidence in their conclusions.

Threading these kinds of discussions throughout the curriculum encourages students to be deeper and more nuanced thinkers, to be more metacognitive, more aware of biases, more aware of the context and privileging of certain knowledge and practices.

Students can be resistant at first, but when we are open about our own journeys, our mistakes, our preconceptions, I think they respond in kind.

I truly hope that this will bring **positive changes of moral courage and stronger ally ship.**

Relationship is key for student learning in this area. Relationship with Indigenous people, e.g. via guest lectures. Also videos can make it real. In addition, relationship with the instructor and finding buddies with whom to try out new perspectives, ways of thinking, feeling and communicating.

4

What change can this bring about, how will students respond and what will make their learning meaningful?

LA's should never be performative! Personally, I'm always looking for the sharing of a personal narrative and a commitment to action.

It is important to **place yourself**, acknowledging that your ancestors originated someplace else (the descendants of British Loyalist are settlers, too).

What does it mean when we acknowledge that we are in someone's home if our presence is bound up in a history of violence and destruction? What does it mean to express gratitude to be in a place when our presence is rooted in a history of theft and exclusion? What is the value of gratitude when injustice and violence is not only historical but ongoing?

I think about the LA as the necessary first step that happens in healing any relationship. The next steps require humility, listening more than talking, abandoning comfortable myths about ourselves, rebuilding our understanding of our relationship to the world around us – while these things are difficult, this is the core of education and growth.

Thus, the LA is the perfect portal for the type of personal transformation that is the hallmark of deep learning.

I like how this question is framed – that a Land Acknowledgment is not "ticking a (rote and performative) box" but an invitation to a commitment to change. Ecology as a discipline is fundamentally tied to place, so the LA is a perfect starting concept – what is our relationship to land, human beings, as communities, as settler colonists, as beneficiaries of injustice?

1

How can we make a Land Acknowledgment (LA) the start of meaningful change?

Background

In the fall of 2021, John Crutch and Tee Duke supported three science instructors (Monika Havelka, Sanja Hinic-Frlog, Helene Wagner) to go beyond the Land Acknowledgment and build modules relating to Truth & Reconciliation and Indigenous Knowledge into their courses (Restoration Ecology, Ornithology, Landscape Ecology). Here we reflect on these experience.

Examples of Student Learning

Feel free to check out these two videos from two students who reflected on what it means for them to be Treaty partners. Building on their course-based learning (see left), they produced these videos as part of a Research Opportunity Project.



My Role as a Treaty Partner
by Kyann Rentzelos:

<https://youtu.be/8w-UszbyHI>

First Nation Pedagogy
by Joel Durham:

<https://youtu.be/2EL50x6zNGW>



Links and Resources

1. Land Acknowledgments:

- Why acknowledge the land? Resources:
<https://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement/>
- ESA/CSEE 2022 Land Acknowledgment:
<https://www.eventscribe.net/2022/ESA/aaStatic.asp?SFP=QkRGUUVZUURAMTIwMDVATGFuZCBBY2tub3dsZWRnZW1lbnQ>
- Background and pronunciation:
<https://www.mcgill.ca/indigenous/land-and-peoples/learn-about-land-and-peoples-tiohtiake-montreal>
- Concordia University Land Acknowledgment:
<https://www.concordia.ca/indigenous/resources/territorial-acknowledgement.html>
- University of Manitoba Land Acknowledgment:
<https://umanitoba.ca/current-students/first-year/um-commons/territory-acknowledgement>
- Princeton University Land Acknowledgment:
<https://inclusive.princeton.edu/initiatives/building-community/native-american-indigenous-inclusion/land-acknowledgements#:~:text=The%20practice%20of%20land%20acknowledgements,Peoples%2FNations%20and%20the%20land>

2. Two-eyed seeing

- Two-eyed Seeing with Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJcflnUckc>
- Watershed Renewal Project:
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/amp/opinion/article-watershed-renewal-project-at-bc-first-nation-bearing-fruit-as-wildlife/>
- Being in Nature: What Indigenous Peoples Have Always Known:
<https://e360.yale.edu/features/ecopsychology-how-immersion-in-nature-benefits-your-health>
- Indigenizing Outdoor Play:
<https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/outdoor-play/according-experts/indigenizing-outdoor-play>
- Reflections on the Extraordinary Power of Slow Water
<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2022/08/05/news/reflections-extraordinary-power-slow-water>
- Indigenous Clam Gardens:
<https://ocean.org/blog/indigenous-clam-gardens/>

3. Further Topics

- Paper on visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy:
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1177180118785382>
- Decolonization is for everyone:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QP9x1NnCWNY>
- Tiktok about Land Back - how much land is needed?
<https://www.tiktok.com/@deannehupfield/video/7118432241042115846>
- Name is power: let's talk about decolonizing bird names:
<https://seattleaudubon.org/2021/08/19/names-are-power-lets-talk-about-decolonizing-bird-names/>