

Circle Work as a Relational Praxis to Facilitate Collaborative Learning within Higher Education: A Decolonial Pedagogical Framework for Teaching and Learning in the Virtual Classroom

Authors : Jennifer Nutton, Gayle Ployer, Ky Scott, Jenny Morgan

Abstract : Working in a circle within higher education creates a decolonial space of mutual respect, responsibility, and reciprocity that facilitates collaborative learning and deep connections among learners and instructors. This approach is beyond simply facilitating a group in a circle but opens the door to creating a sacred space connecting each member to the land, to the Indigenous peoples who have taken care of the lands since time immemorial, to one another, and to one's own positionality. These deep connections not only center human knowledges and relationships but also acknowledges responsibilities to land. Working in a circle as a relational pedagogical praxis also disrupts institutional power dynamics by creating a space of collaborative learning and deep connections in the classroom. Inherent within circle work is to facilitate connections not just academically but emotionally, physically, culturally, and spiritually. Recent literature supports the use of online talking circles, finding that it can offer a more relational and experiential learning environment, which is often absent in the virtual world and has been made more evident and necessary since the pandemic. These deeper experiences of learning and connection, rooted in both knowledge and the land, can then be shared with openness and vulnerability with one another, facilitating growth and change. This process of beginning with the land is critical to ensure we have the grounding to obstruct the ongoing realities of colonialism. The authors, who identify as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as both educators and learners, reflect on their teaching and learning experiences in circle. They share a relational pedagogical praxis framework that has been successful in educating future social workers, environmental activists, and leaders in social and human services, health, legal and political fields.

Keywords : circle work, relational pedagogies, decolonization, distance education

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