# Indigenous and Open Education: A Contradiction?

## Abstract

Open education narratives often emphasize increasing access to higher education opportunities for marginalized students. This session explores whether open and networked learning environments ought to be used to increase access to higher education and promote social justice for Indigenous students in Canada.

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## Objectives or purposes of the inquiry

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine whether there is a conflict between Indigenous ways of knowing and learning and the pedagogy of open, networked learning. If there is a conflict, then using open, networked technologies to increase access to higher education for Indigenous Peoples in Canada may actually reinforce culturally oppressive educational practices. However, if there is not a conflict, or if the apparent conflict can be resolved, then, in alignment with the recommendations of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, open, networked learning environments may be an ideal way to increase participation and attainment in higher education for Indigenous Peoples in Canada, especially for those who live in remote communities.

Understanding whether or not open and networked technologies are suitable for promoting social justice for Indigenous Peoples requires a clear understanding of each of three intersecting components, social justice, open and networked education, and Indigenous education. For this inquiry, social justice and open education are understood in alignment with Lambert’s (2018) description of socially just open learning environments which focus on “redistributive justice, recognitive justice [and] representational justice” (p. 227). Indigenous education is understood from the perspective of the 5R’s of Indigenous education: respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, and relationships as described in Tessaro, et al. (2018).

## Relation to the Theme

As a non-Indigenous scholar particularly interested in open and networked learning environments, I am acutely aware that my role is not to offer solutions based on my perspectives of the advantages of networked learning, but to listen and engage in conversation with Indigenous Peoples about an appropriate role of networked technology in Indigenous education.

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## Organization

The presentation will begin with a brief discussion of what some have understood to be a conflict between Indigenous learning environments and networked, or online, learning environments, followed by a brief discussion of why I think that this conflict is based on an understanding of online learning in forms that are more traditional, although still somewhat prevalent today. I will share how these passive, text-based online environments are being replaced with more effective and contemporary networked learning environments and will finish with a vision for how Canadian universities might move forward in conversation with Indigenous educators, Elders, and communities to harness the affordances of networked technologies to increase access to higher education for Indigenous learners in ways that may be better aligned with Indigenous principles of learning.

## Importance for Higher Education

Increasing access to higher education that is both by and for Indigenous communities is critical if Canadian universities are going to take seriously the call from the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to work towards justice and reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and settler society. Due to the enormous geographic distance that separates many Indigenous communities from currently centralized institutions of higher learning, networked technologies may play a significant role in answering the call, provided they are implemented in alignment with the 5R’s of Indigenous learning.

# References

Lambert, S. R. (2018). Changing our (Dis)Course: A Distinctive Social Justice Aligned Definition of Open Education. *Journal of Learning for Development - JL4D*, *5*(3). Retrieved from http://www.jl4d.org/index.php/ejl4d/article/view/290

Tessaro, D., Restoule, J.-P., Gaviria, P., Flessa, J., Lindeman, C., & Scully-Stewart, C. (2018). The Five R’s for Indigenizing Online Learning: A Case Study of the First Nations Schools’ Principals Course. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *40*(1), 125–143.