

3QTL: Three Questions about Teaching and Learning

Episode 4 – What is student-centered teaching and learning?

Guest: Adela Kincaid

Description:

Our social lives and community-driven projects were significantly affected during the pandemic, and it became especially difficult to organize innovative teaching and learning experiences within such a context. Our guest this episode, Dr. Adela Kincaid, has much to say about some of these challenges. An assistant professor in the University of Calgary's International Indigenous Studies Program, Dr. Kincaid has collaborated with students and community partners—including Indigenous Elders and knowledge-keepers—on some inspiring, student-centered teaching and learning initiatives. Join us for a conversation about land-based learning, student-led conferences, experiential learning, and the service-driven approach to community engagement that Dr. Kincaid pursues in her classes.

Bio:

Dr. Adela Tesarek Kincaid is an assistant professor (teaching) in the International Indigenous Studies program at the University of the Calgary. As a settler scholar, her passion is working with Indigenous communities and organizations as well as with NGOs. Adela is interested in community collaborations that create experiential learning opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students that honour land-based learning, our animal relatives, and Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, being, and connecting.

References:

Kincaid, A.T., Dueck, H.J., & Perehudoff, L. 2020. "Internship-based collaborative applied research model: Linking academic research projects, rural NGOs, sustainability, philanthropy, and funding." *The PhiLanthropic*. Year 2: 42-47.

Kincaid, A.T., Brulotte, M., Livingstone, S., & Brar, J. 2021. "Ways of doing, knowing, connecting and being." Canadian Philanthropic Partnership Research Network.

Kincaid, A.T., Livingstone, S., Li, G., Adeladan, H., Obiar, N., Kumar, S., Tirmizi, S., Anderson, M., & Hunt, I. 2022. "Towards reconciliation: Philanthropy, animal-human relationships, and community-engaged learning." Canadian Philanthropic Partnership Research Network.

Sound clips:

Keyboard:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/84669972238d1a1421ed7f928f7f38659a34a23cc0e5198e163e4690ca5403f1/->

Mouse Scrolling: <https://freesound.org/people/MootMcnoodles/sounds/426340/>

Water 1:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/9065d09df3c4e0e7aa562a0726c943d43f0d75afe9f86872e78770d8148f3cc3/->

Water 2:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/fce87d3b6f3fc6e785b8cc172ab39bb74ecc95cec1c42960df0ccc2dd7b09045/->

Garden:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/d500c6e03b334f8de1274e4c471e3be9b213fa32c95337d24163e5fcd365b2da/->

Birds:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/28f099cf032d6569a87bf12948c463c197975d235c1b16e18fa73b11c1e59dc1/->

Transcription:

DERRITT MASON: [00:00:01] Just a quick note to our listeners that since the time we recorded this interview, the name of the Wesley First Nation has been changed to the Goodstoney First Nation.

[Theme music in]

ADELA KINCAID: [00:00:21] A huge part of my teaching and learning is to be student-centered. And when I say student-centered, for me, what that means is creating learning opportunities for students, that are experiential, that are applied,

that connect to their lived experiences and where they have opportunities to learn by doing.

DERRITT MASON: [00:00:40] Hello, I'm Derritt Mason. Welcome to "3QTL: Three Questions about Teaching and Learning." This season, we're in conversation with post-secondary faculty from across disciplines, and our three questions focus on how the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped values and transformed classrooms, challenging faculty and students in extraordinary ways, while also sparking innovation. Our guest today is Dr. Adela Kincaid, an assistant professor in the University of Calgary's International Indigenous Studies Program. Dr. Kincaid has collaborated with students and community partners on some inspiring teaching and learning initiatives, many of which are outlined in a co-authored article published online by the Canadian Philanthropy Partnership Research Lab, and entitled, "Ways of doing, knowing, connecting and being: Connecting students to respectful Indigenous community research and projects." In this article, Dr. Kincaid references *ii' taa'poh'to'p*, which is the Blackfoot name of the University of Calgary's Indigenous strategy. She and her co-authors explore the strategy's commitment to transforming how land is centered in university policy and practices. As written in *ii' taa'poh'to'p*, "relationship with the land is critically important to Indigenous peoples. While settler cultures have often viewed themselves as living apart from or off the land, Canada's Indigenous peoples have a profound and spiritual connection to the land. For the University of Calgary to provide meaningful experiences," *ii' taa'poh'to'p* continues, "Indigenous and non-Indigenous people must see deep changes to how land is viewed and experienced." Prior to our discussion of her teaching and learning initiatives, in the spirit of *ii' taa'poh'to'p*, Dr. Kincaid offers an introduction that articulates her biography through her relationship to several formative land bases and communities. Welcome, Dr. Kincaid. I'm so delighted to have you here on 3QTL.

ADELA KINCAID: [00:02:46] Hello, Derritt. Thanks so much for having me.

DERRITT MASON: [00:02:48] I know a bit about your excellent work with students in the International Indigenous Studies Program here at the University of Calgary, and I know we will learn a lot about student-centred and community-based teaching practices during our conversation. But I understand you prepared a self-introduction, and I'd love to invite you to please share it with us now.

ADELA KINCAID: [00:03:09] I came to Turtle Island as a child, a settler and an uninvited guest and refugee from what was then called Czechoslovakia. And there is evidence of Moravian missionaries on Turtle Island around 1769. So that part of my

culture is implicated in the colonization of what is now called Canada. As a young newcomer, I grew up on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation in southwestern Ontario. And then, as an undergraduate student, I was grateful to study on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy and Treaty 7 territory, and home to the Métis nation of Alberta Region 3, at the University of Lethbridge. I majored in education there and was grateful to be hired by the Siksika School Board after graduation. And then I lived and travelled and taught in Japan on the traditional territories of the Ainu, people of the northern island of Hokkaido and the Okinawans, which are the southern island of Okinawa. And then, once back in what is now called Canada, I completed my postdoctoral studies at the University of Regina, which is located on the traditional territories of the Nêhiyawak, Anihšīnāpēk, Dakota, Lakota, and Nakoda. And it is Treaty 4 territory with a presence of Treaty 6 and home to the Métis nation, where I worked with and learned from a Cree community. And then recently, I moved to Mohkīstsis, or what is now called Calgary, from the unceded traditional territories of the Sinixt, the Syilx, the Ktunaxa and the Secwepemc peoples, and also home to Metis nation and known to some as the West Kootenays. So, I'd like to thank and acknowledge the people and traditional territories where I live, learn from, and work with community, and raise my children. These are the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy comprising the Siksika, Piikani, the Kainai First Nations as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation and the Stoney-Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. And the City of Calgary is also home to Métis nation of Alberta Region 3. So, I'm honoured to be able to do this work as a helper, and co-learner through community-based approaches that center working with Indigenous communities, and where I'm also fortunate to have the opportunity to work, teach and learn alongside Indigenous Studies students from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. And I also recognize that the more than human world consists of communities where animals, plants and the land take on many roles. And I hope to continue to strengthen my relationships with the land, the more than human world, traditional Indigenous Elders, Knowledge-keepers, and community members, as well as youth, and to create opportunities for others to do the same.

DERRITT MASON: [00:06:06] Thank you so much. Wonderful self-introduction. I wonder if you might say a little bit more about the courses that you teach here at the University of Calgary. What courses do you typically teach in a term? How many students are in those classes? What does that look like for you?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:06:19] I teach in International Indigenous Studies, six classes overall. I teach an introductory class to Indigenous Studies, which is an ISAP class.

That's the Indigenous Student Access Program. It's a one-year program that provides an alternate access route for eligible Indigenous students, including First Nations status and non-status, Métis and Inuit. This includes Indigenous students applying directly from high school, or upgrading, or university or college entrance programs. And it's also really beneficial for adult learners who may have taken a break in their studies and wish to complete a post-secondary degree program. It's an absolute honour to teach in that course because of the lived experiences that students bring with them; it is fantastic to be a part of. So that is one class. And then I teach a number of others. One is an Indigenous community-based research course. And the other is an Ethics and protocols class. And then there's another really exciting course, what used to be called Indigenous Studies 399. And that's an Animal-Human Relationships course. And that was part of my postdoctoral work, where we were encouraged to teach some of the knowledge that was shared with us by community.

DERRITT MASON: [00:07:31] Typically, how many students do you have in a given class on average?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:07:35] The first-year courses are anywhere from 60 to 100. For the ISAP group, it has grown since I started. I think it was quite small the first time, around maybe 20 [students]. And now I think the last semester was of around 40 students. The Animal-Human Relations class is the next most popular or populous course, and that one has about 35 to 40 students. And then the 500-level courses are quite small, so anywhere from 15 to 25.

DERRITT MASON: [00:08:05] Okay, so really, a wide range of enrollment. Let's dive into the three questions about teaching and learning that we ask on this podcast. I am curious to know about the core values that guided your teaching and learning practice before COVID, and how, if at all, those values shifted during the pandemic.

ADELA KINCAID: [00:08:23] So, I've prepared a few notes here. If you hear something in the background, that's me checking my notes. I'll focus on one value, and then maybe others will pop out as I am talking later on. I think the biggest value that has always been a huge part of my teaching and learning is to be student-centered, and to really focus on the student-centered teaching aspect. And when I say student-centered for me what that means (and there are many definitions), but what that means for me and in many of my classes is creating learning opportunities for students, that are experiential, that are applied, that connect to their lived experiences, and where they have opportunities to learn by doing, and also taking into consideration EDI [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion], and what that looks like in

the classroom and in the practice of teaching. There were some challenges. When I was hired, I came into the online environment. So, my first course started online, and I taught that way for the next two years. And then there was that bit of a blended approach where we came back, and now we are in person.

DERRITT MASON: [00:09:40] Given that student-centered teaching is such a core value for you, I'm eager to hear your answer to our second question, which is what best supported and what hindered your teaching and learning practice during COVID?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:09:53] Some of the challenges which tie into the student-centered teaching or to my values were that it was difficult for students to create meaningful relationships with one another online. [DERRITT MASON: Right] I think for me, from my perspective, I created meaningful relationships with the students, or I feel that way, because they are still reaching out, asking about reference letters or staying in touch about where they are going next. Maybe the only other piece that was a challenge for me was the students who didn't reach out and who didn't make those connections online or weren't able to. So that means, you know, the black boxes, or those who were not able to share their screens for various reasons, [DERRITT MASON: Right, right]. There were also challenges to learning on the land specifically and to learning from Elders and Knowledge-keepers in that way. And also, being new to the University of Calgary, creating the relationships that are an important part of that. But then, on the plus side, in regards to the land-based learning, we were able to connect with Elders in an online format, sometimes, if that was a possibility, directly from their communities. That was one benefit. And the other was that we could, at times, depending on what the health directives were, be able to connect outside. And that was really nice when I was teaching a course solely online when we had that opportunity to connect outside as part of the course and have the other teachers right on the land, that was fantastic.

DERRITT MASON: [00:11:18] I'm so curious to know more. I mean, I'm so intrigued by these amazing things that you are describing that you do in the classroom: land-based learning, experiential learning, community engagement. Maybe I'll ask you to define land-based learning. It is not something you necessarily hear, for example, as often as you hear community engagement. What is the difference between land-based learning and, let's say, community engagement?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:11:38] Well, I could highlight this through one of my courses best. It is called Indigenous Studies 506, land-based learning. And what that looks like is I work with a community member, and in this particular course, which

highlights land-based learning from Îyârhe-Nakoda perspective, from a Blackfoot perspective, and from a Tsuut'ina perspective, I've been working closely with a Îyârhe-Nakoda community member, Daryl Kootenay. And so, what that looks like is students are taught in a teepee. Elders, Reg and Rose, kindly helped with and led the raising of the teepee. And then community members helped with that as teepee helpers. And then we learned inside the teepee for the week from Daryl. He kindly brought community members to start us off with the pipe ceremony, and then continued to teach us some very dynamic and important concepts that are traditional and land-based. And then we worked with a deer hide. So, Daryl and I had discussed that previously. And he brought the deer hide to the course. And we learned how to work with that in a respectful way, and then made parfleches, which are basically pouches, at the end of the course. So, the teachings were interrelated, through land-based practices on multiple levels, as well as very much taught from a community perspective.

DERRITT MASON: [00:12:57] And did you find that during COVID... because, as you say, student-centered learning is so important to your teaching practice, did your approach to student-centered learning have to shift in the move online? Or did that remain or did COVID, in certain ways, kind of emphasize how important it is to put students at the center of your teaching practice?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:13:15] I think it did emphasize it even more so. And I think it nudged me towards making those connections and working harder towards those connections. Whereas in the classroom, in person, sometimes those things happen naturally because you are together and the students collaborate and work together throughout. So yes, I would say that it perhaps pushed me to think more carefully about how to structure those interactions within the classroom. And I hear from students sometimes that, you know, when you put them into breakout rooms, on Zoom, there were those awkward groups that wouldn't speak and engage. So, I learned through that where I had leaders, or then they reported back once they came back, which you would do in the classroom anyway. It was just adjusting, I guess, the way that you think about online learning and teaching.

DERRITT MASON: [00:14:05] Are there any other factors that, in your view, benefited or hindered your teaching practice during COVID?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:14:11] I think that the benefits were that there was less travel time. I think this was also the case with students, or from what they tell me. They now have a bit more difficulty with managing their lives and restructuring them again to accommodate being here in person. Also, I suppose for my classes, it was

interesting to bring in community members. For the community-based classes, students do projects in community and with community. And so, in some ways, it was beneficial to be online because they could reach and connect to community members differently through space and time, whereas now they might feel it might be good practice to be there in person. And so, there's that piece to contend with.

DERRITT MASON: [00:14:58] So, both, advantages and drawbacks to this shift online that we were all asked to undertake. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:15:06] I did want to talk a little bit about the shift from online literacy. So now that we are back in person, I think that Zoom is here to stay in some ways, and the way that we do conferences and the way that we work will continue to be online in the future. And whatever that looks like, I don't know, you know, going forward, I think hopefully, we try to work with that and make it as beneficial as possible for the students. But I think that the online literacy piece is a necessity. So that's why I've kept it in a lot of my classes.

DERRITT MASON: [00:15:38] And how do you imagine yourself going forward in this context?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:15:43] Most of my classes are blended, although most of the time is in person. But there is that element where I want to teach students and work with students to continue to build those, let's call it, online literacy skills, where they can deliver, let's say, a presentation at a conference or learn through, you know, online modalities. And sometimes that is difficult, especially for mature students. And I know, that was another difficulty and barrier, also, for accessibility reasons. Not everyone has access to computers and technology, and not everyone grew up with that. So, keeping all those things in mind, I think, was important then and will continue to be important moving forward.

DERRITT MASON: [00:16:24] So, moving forward, if there is one thing that you started doing for the very first time during the transition to online teaching during COVID, one thing that you are going to keep doing, would you say these blended components will remain part of your practice? And are there any other initiatives that you think you'll keep?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:16:40] I will keep the online blended components. Also, we do a student-led conference in the two higher-level Indigenous Studies courses, where the students put that together, and they present to the communities that they are working with and to the organizations. So, they are either working in their communities, or they are working with Indigenous-led organizations, or they are

working with organizations that have a mandate and that are trying to decolonize how they do things or work towards reconciliation, or whatever the case may be.

DERRITT MASON: [00:17:10] Can I ask just as an example, what some of these organizations might be?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:17:14] Yeah. So, one that is a fairly new partnership this semester is the Elbow River Watershed partnership. I believe they are called ERWP, and they are working with Tsuut'ina Elders, and working toward water initiatives from various perspectives and worldviews. That is one. And many others are from students coming from community that already have projects or that have ideas for projects and things that they would like to work with their communities on.

DERRITT MASON: [00:17:44] So, students will themselves establish these relationships with the community organizations?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:17:49] Sometimes, I come to class ready with a list every semester because some don't, and some are fairly new to this. And so, I do always have [a list]. It has been wonderful working with all the partners. I should have made a list. Here at the university as well, you know, the Taylor Institute, the Bio Geoscience Institute during COVID. I worked closely with them. We are working with CFREB right now. There might be might a project. I know one of the students is super interested in taking that on.

DERRITT MASON: [00:18:17] Just a quick note that the CFREB is the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, which is the administrative body that reviews and approves research projects requiring ethics applications.

I would love to know more about these student-led conferences that you are describing. How do you set them up and run them? I imagine step one is establishing these partnerships. Does all of that take place online or via email? How does it happen?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:19:00] It's ongoing. I think another important component to working with Indigenous communities or Indigenous -I don't necessarily want to call it research because not everything that the students do is research- it is, let's say, community engagement or Indigenous community engagement. And that's ongoing. It doesn't start and stop, you know, with some potentially extractive practices that have taken place in research. It's an ongoing partnership, ongoing relationship, and ongoing collaboration that way.

DERRITT MASON: [00:19:29] Are there logistical challenges in terms of university rules and regulations about getting these set up and maintaining these partnerships that you encounter? I'm just curious because I know community engagement is a huge part of what the university does, and I imagine they would want to support projects like this, but often, there are barriers and obstacles. I am just thinking of listeners who might be like: This is such a great idea; I want to set something like this up. What are some of the things that you would go back in time and tell yourself to be prepared for?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:19:54] Really good question, so much to unpack there. There have been some difficulties with funding, and there are some available experiential learning funding opportunities out there. But they don't necessarily align with university administrative processes. Because I think as a big institution, and as a big research institution, I think mainly, we are set up to do the Tri-Council funded research. And so, the funding that is offered for teaching in the class is much shorter. It is only three to four months of funding and has to be spent in a very short timeframe. To go through everything, every step that typically Tri Council funds have to go through before you do get the grant and are able to spend it in a timely way, it is a very lengthy process. And so that is really problematic when you get those funds. And then you have three or four months to spend them, to go through all of those steps, which I won't get into. But it takes a very long time. And then it has left me in a little bit of a pickle to try to get all the funds out in time before it officially closes. And then, you have to provide the report to the funder.

DERRITT MASON: [00:21:06] Just to clarify, for our listeners, when you say Tri-Council funding, you are referring to the three major Canadian research funding bodies: the Canadian Institute of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

So, you have the Partnerships the students are working with, they are working on a specific problem. And so, they work in collaboration over the course of the term with this organization towards solving this problem. And then, the term culminates in a conference where all the students present the work that they have been doing. [ADELA KINCAID: Yes, nicely said]. That sounds so wonderful! Are there one or two examples of some problems that students have worked on that stood up for you as being really compelling?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:21:49] Taking the strength-based approach, I think they are not always problems. They are just initiatives. They have worked on some really amazing things over the years. And there have been a number of articles written about them, which is exciting [D.M.: Very exciting]. Thinking of one student in particular, and I won't name them because I don't really have permission or the community [D.M.: For sure!] but they worked in their community on building a garden and a greenhouse and went through that consulting process. And learning from and having community members help with that, as well as a spiritual guide who helped them through that process. And this is going back a few years now. Recently, there have been so many exciting ones. And I am thinking of Tapisa, who recently put on a talk about Inuit Ways of Knowing for all of us, for the university community, especially for staff and faculty. She has been working on that and has some really fantastic ideas going forward.

DERRITT MASON: [00:22:44] You mentioned that many of your classes are now kind of a blended format, both online and in person. Are these conferences going to remain online? How are you imagining the shape of these conferences?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:22:55] So far, I am keeping them online. Because we work with so many different partnerships and partners on projects. I really want it, again, to be student-centered. So I want them to be able to choose what they think will make most of an impact and the best way, because it is a higher-level course, you know, to tie in and bring in everything that they have learned, and also bring in their lived experiences, and then to work on a project that they find meaningful and impactful, and that they hopefully will continue in some way and learn from going forward. So yes, I will keep that online because then the partners can all join us, and community members can join us online, they can pop in and out depending on where they are. It is a lot to ask for people to travel to the university, especially from Indigenous communities, to travel here to take an entire day. And, of course, you have to follow appropriate ethics and protocol for that. And we do that anyway, in terms of providing honoraria, and cloth and tobacco, and that is all organized prior and done in a good way. But I still think it is easier for people to attend online. So that is why I think I will keep that online. Although, we did have a feast at the end of one of the courses last year. And that was a really nice way to connect with everybody. At the end of the term, those who were able to join us could, but it was easier, I think, for them to listen to the results and what students were working on and towards online.

DERRITT MASON: [00:24:24] Maybe one final question about the online conferences, as I have asked about some of the hurdles that you encountered along

the way. But, if there are folks out there listening who are like, I love the idea of community-engaged conferences, community-engaged problem-solving, research, conversations, relationship building. But it seems so intimidating to build this kind of infrastructure that obviously, you know, takes so much work to develop and maintain over the years in accordance with appropriate protocols. What is the first step to getting started? How can someone get started who is kind of dreaming big? What do they do? What is the very first thing?

ADELA KINCAID: [00:24:59] I think it is all always relationships. You know, right from the beginning. We heard from Keeta yesterday who is part of IRST. That is the Indigenous Research Support Team. And she came to speak to our class. And she said that you know, on her card, she'd like to have: "It is never too early to start building relationships." Everything has come out of relationships. And it makes it very meaningful for everybody involved: the students, myself, and the partners or community members. So definitely, relationships, first and foremost, and having those conversations. I think, also, adopting a service model in many ways. It's a very different, I think, conceptualization of research, if that's what we are calling it, where it is more about the service that you can provide and the skills and strengths that each person, the students, you know, myself, can bring to the table and to help in various ways to move initiatives forward that our community identified and are community-based.

DERRITT MASON: [00:26:00] Dr. Kincaid, this conversation has been such a pleasure. Thank you so much for joining us here at 3QTL. I have learned so much about the incredible work you are doing with land-based learning and community connections and student engagement in all of your classes. Thank you so much.

ADELA KINCAID: [00:26:20] Thanks so much.

DERRITT MASON: [00:25:25] 3QTL is recorded at the University of Calgary, which is located on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3. This episode was produced by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz, edited by Tarini Fernando, and features additional editing and sound design by Eric Xie, who also composed our music. Our consulting producer is Stacey Copeland. Support for 3QTL is provided by the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary and a generous financial gift from the Flanagan Foundation. I'm Derritt Mason, 3QTL's host and executive producer. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you again soon.

[Music out]

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> and copyedited by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz and Derritt Mason.