

Academic Writing at the Confluence of Indigenous and Western Worldviews

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Project Overview

- A collaborative team from the Faculty of Social Work, including faculty, staff, PhD students, and Master's research assistants, explored how to harmonize Indigenous and Western academic perspectives and writing practices.
- The goal was to create a meaningful dialogue between these two knowledge systems, honoring both and recognizing the value of each.
- A hybrid methodology was used, combining scholarly data with lived experiences and teachings, rethinking literature reviews, and fostering a decolonization practice to ensure diverse voices were respected and valued.

Talking Circles

- The research team aimed to understand academic writing perspectives from faculty, staff, and students within the Faculty of Social Work.
- To gather insights, the team conducted three sets of talking circles, involving: Faculty and staff and students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) from the Faculty of Social Work
- These talking circles provided a platform for sharing experiences with academic writing, allowing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants to contribute.
- Each talking circle was facilitated by a team member and transcribed for analysis.
- Data analysis was also conducted through a talking circle format, where each research team member shared their reflections and insights from the research process.

Spirit Rock: Medicine Wheel

- After discussing emerging themes from the research, each team member painted four rocks, one for each colour of the medicine wheel (red, yellow, black, and white).
- The painting of the rocks was a reflective and creative activity, allowing team members to connect personally with the research journey.
- Each rock symbolized a different dimension of the collective research experience, incorporating both personal and group reflections.
- At the centre of the rocks, is the **Spirit Rock**, carefully created and brought forward to the group by Dr. Marlyn Bennett.



Two Trees: distinct knowledge systems, Indigenous and Western, that are independent yet deeply connected through their roots, symbolizing shared foundations of learning, growth, and understanding.

Heart: At the center, represents "debwewin" (truth) from an Anishinaabe perspective, emphasizing that learning comes from both the heart and the mind.

Roots: suggest that both worldviews, despite their differences, are part of the same ecosystem of knowledge, potentially nourishing each other.

Figure 1: The Spirit Rock

- The painted rocks and accompanying stories were presented at the Intercultural Capacity Grants Pipe Ceremony.
- The ceremony provided a sacred space to honor the research work, weaving together the stories and teachings gathered throughout the project.
- The presentation of the rocks symbolized the commitment, unity and diversity of the knowledge co-created during the research process.



Figure 2: Completed Medicine Wheel

Below is a summary of the group's perspectives on the medicine wheel and its connection to their learning processes throughout the research journey.

Yellow Rocks (East: Learnings and Transformation)

- Journey and Transformation: The process of writing is seen as a personal and academic journey, with themes of evolving, grappling with self-understanding, and learning through the act of writing.
- Collaborative Learning: The importance of connection and reciprocity in academic writing was highlighted, where collaboration is not only about exchanging knowledge but about creating something new together.

Red Rocks (South: Growth & Relationships)

- Growth through Relationships: The significance of relationships in the writing process was central, with reflections on how growth happens through personal and collective connections. This includes understanding and respecting diverse worldviews.
- Rooted, Reciprocal Connections: The need for deeper connection through shared intention and understanding, highlighting the importance of relationality in academic work and the collective foundation that guides the research.

Navy Rocks (West: Reflection)

- Reflection and Process Over Outcome: Emphasis on the value of introspection, where the focus is not just on the end result but on the ongoing, iterative process of learning and growth, accepting uncertainty along the way.
- Collaboration and Community Knowledge: Writing is a collaborative process that evolves over time, with the goal of capturing diverse voices and perspectives, especially those of communities whose knowledge is often marginalized.

White Rocks (North: Wisdom & Truth)

- Connection through Collectivity: The team reflections emphasized the importance of collaboration and the collective nature of the research, where different perspectives, teachings, and influences that land and community come together.
- Different Ways of Knowing: The theme of combining Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, with a focus on mutual nourishment and respect, was central. Truth, *debwewin*, was outlined as both a heart and mind process, blending wisdom and intentionality.
- Growing Process: Team members reflected on the non-linear nature of the research process, where the inquiry branches out, extends, and grows, much like the roots of a tree or a network of connections, indicating ongoing exploration and learning.

Moving Forward

To support this work, we have secured a SoTL grant from the University of Calgary Teaching and Learning Grants (2024-2027) to expand and enhance our initiatives.

The second phase of our project includes,

- The co-design and offering of Workshops & Conversations for graduate students and emerging scholars.
- Each workshop will focus on academic writing topics within the context of decolonizing writing conventions.
- These sessions will include facilitated peer mentor writing support groups, fostering collaborative learning and feedback.