



Cultivating Brave Space — An Indigenous Perspective

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Remember that feeling when you walked into a place and instantly felt at home? Or maybe the opposite—a place where you just didn't fit? What if every space could feel like that 'at home' place or that sacred place?

We aren't just talking about how spaces are designed; we are looking deeper. Does a room's layout, colours, or even adding things like plants and water (like many indigenous cultures do) make everyone feel included and safe? Well, I think it does! It's about bringing life into a space, connecting with nature and honouring our traditions, all of which create a sense of belonging and safety.

A simple smile, someone who really listens, or a shared laugh over a cup of coffee or tea can totally transform a space. Understanding how everyday interactions build a sense of community, creating what we call "brave spaces" where honesty, courage and the truth can flourish, leading to healthier relationships.

Why do "brave spaces" matter? These places help us grow and trust each other and work together better.

Creating brave space is critical in engaging with Indigenous peoples. Brave space welcomes vulnerability and honours voices without judgement. A space where individuals find peace, connection to nature and a deep sense of belonging.

Did you know that colonization led to the seizure of Indigenous lands and resources, disrupting our way of life? Silencing our languages, spiritual practices and cultural traditions. Forcing individuals into residential schools, where they were subjected to abuse, neglect and, for some, death.



Indigenous people continue to face discrimination in education, healthcare, accessing clean/safe housing, employment and the justice system.

Indigenous people often face barriers to educational success, including underfunded schools, culturally irrelevant curriculum and a lack of Indigenous teachers and role models.

Indigenous communities experienced higher rates of chronic diseases, mental health issues and substance abuse due to the impacts of colonization.

The trauma experienced in residential schools and through other colonial policies has had lasting effects on Indigenous individuals, families and communities.

These are some of the ways in which colonization has had a profound and lasting impact on indigenous communities and education.

How do I incorporate Indigenous perspectives and knowledge into the initial meeting?

Acknowledge the traditional territory of the Indigenous peoples that historically steward the land. This shows respect for their history and deep connection to this place.

If possible, invite an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper or Elder to be present during the meeting. Their presence can provide valuable insight, wisdom and guidance.

Offer a smudge. For Indigenous cultures, starting with a smudge isn't just a ritual, it's a sacred contract with the creator, bringing a level of comfort and openness that goes beyond regular hospitality.

Have resources available in your space that highlight Indigenous perspectives and knowledge, such as books, articles or websites.

Recommended Reading

Braiding Sweet Grass

- Robin Wall Kimmerer

Any research conducted by

Dr. Gabriel Weaselhead

(formerly, Lyndstrom)

The Seven Circles: Indigenous Teachings for Living Well

- Dr. Susan McLeod (University of Manitoba)





It's a responsibility of the organization or program to build relationships with Indigenous communities and community members. There is no framework or road map for this work. Be open, honest and willing to learn. You cannot apply a 'pan-Indigenous' approach to relationship building.

What role does self-awareness play in creating and maintaining a brave space?

Self-awareness is very important when creating brave space for Indigenous learners. It helps you understand your own biases, assumptions and cultural background, which can influence how you interact with others.

Being self-aware also means understanding your emotional triggers and reactions. This helps you stay calm and composed during challenging conversations and respond thoughtfully. It also helps us to be more empathetic and understanding towards others, creating a supportive and inclusive environment where Indigenous learners feel safe to share their experiences and perspectives. Self-awareness is key to fostering brave space where everyone feels respected, valued and empowered to learn and grow.

In what ways can the teachings of a Medicine Wheel support self-reflection, learning, and connection within brave spaces?

The medicine wheel can be used for exploring various aspects of Indigenous knowledge and is key in self-discovery practices. The four directions are symbolic of the four aspects of self (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual) and the intertwining of all things. This cultural practice can assist individuals in maintaining balance and wellness within their lives.

In what ways can plants be utilized to promote healing, mindfulness and a sense of well-being for Indigenous learners?

Incorporating plants into a brave space can foster a sense of calm and well-being, helping learners feel more grounded and connected to nature, which can encourage openness and vulnerability.

How can we continue to learn and grow in our understanding of Indigenous cultures and issues?

Read books, articles and blogs written by Indigenous authors.

Participate in cultural events, workshops or ceremonies. These opportunities provide direct exposure to cultural practices and perspectives.

Seek opportunities to connect with Indigenous people in your community.

Engage in respectful dialogue and listen to their stories and experiences.

Volunteer your time with an Indigenous-led organization, or something as simple as your voice to advocate for policies and practices that support Indigenous rights and promote reconciliation.

Each CALP program should be moving into 'Reconcili-ACTION', meaning actively seeking engagement opportunities with Indigenous communities.

Including the medicine wheel, smudge, traditional medicines, Indigenous art, Indigenous books, water fixtures and plants in our brave space shows our heart and dedication to honouring culture. This showcases our connection and understanding of Indigenous wisdom, creating connection and building meaningful relationships with our community members. The medicine wheel helps us remember to stay balanced and take care of ourselves in a good way, while the plants help us feel calm and serve as a reminder of constant growth.

Cultivating brave space is a deep promise to honour Indigenous knowledge. This simple act reminds us to be human, as we serve other humans. This is a beautiful thing, operating heart first. Lifting up the seven sacred teachings: Love, Courage, Truth, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility and Respect. This way of doing things assists us in our space and encourages us to think more about our friendships, what we're learning and how we're all working together to understand each other better. ✦

Know the history of the lands you are working, playing and growing on.

Reconciliation is not a one-way street. Indigenous perspectives thrive on reciprocation. Rooted in the exchange of knowledge, not the extraction.

