

Getting Started: Instructor Guide

Purpose

The goal of this *Getting Started* section is to bring participants together to begin establishing a sense of ‘beloved creative community’ with the safety and structure necessary for participants to be vulnerable enough to explore and learn together. The activities throughout this module rely on participants’ active engagement in their learning. They will be asked to share ideas and feedback with one another in an ongoing dialogue, and it’s important they feel encouraged and able to express themselves openly. By intentionally attending to the well-being of both individuals and the community from the beginning, you can position students toward a more positive, meaningful learning experience. Remember Miskwaadesi and the value of the environment and slow and steady progress.

Delivery

Carefully consider your method of delivery, whether online or in-person, synchronous or asynchronous, and how it can be used most effectively to connect with your participants. Not all activities transfer well from one method to another. Adapt with the purpose of connection in mind.

Modifications to Consider

Adjust the getting-to-know-you activities based on how well participants know one another. Even if you have students who are already acquainted, keep in mind there is always something new people can learn about each other.

We recommend that you allow enough time at the start of your learning together for a more extended activity as described in the Shared Creative Experience below and that you include a short getting-to-know-you connection activity at the start of each learning time together (e.g. *Words or pictures to describe* activity below). Participants come to expect and rely on these structured moments of connection.

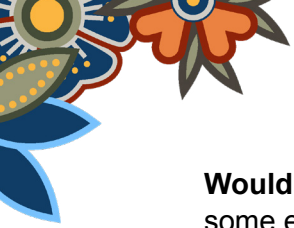
Scope and Sequence

1. Ideas for Getting-to-know-you Activities

Here are some ideas for activities you can use to help your learners connect with one another. Providing reliable ways for learners to check-in and find out about each other goes a long way to establishing the trust and interest needed for groups to learn well together.

Alliterative introduction: Share your name and an adjective that describes you and starts with the same letter as your name. Tell why or how it describes you. The instructor goes first to give an example.

Introduction via interview: Have participants pair up and spend a couple of minutes each to learn about each other, then the instructor invites volunteers to introduce who they met.



Would you rather...: Give the group a minute or two to think of a “Would you rather...” question. Give some examples (see below). Introduce yourself and ask the first person your question. They give their name and answer and then they ask the next person their question. And so on.

- Would you rather walk a short distance in the rain or in the snow?
- Would you rather ride a bicycle or a motorcycle?
- Would you rather walk on a concrete path or through the woods?
- Would you rather play Monopoly or chess?
- Would you rather speak to a huge crowd or hold a snake?

Two truths and a lie: Tell the group that each person will introduce themselves by stating two truths about their life and one lie. The rest of the participants will guess which statement is the lie.

Example: *Hi, I'm Mary. My hair was almost to my waist in high school, I talked to Cher in an airport coffee shop, and I speak four languages.*

River of life: Ask participants to draw their own life story using the metaphor of a river, to the extent they are comfortable sharing. Their drawing should explain how they got to where they are today. Participants can use elements like rapid waters, waterfalls, and boulders that represent obstacles to tell their story.

Words or pictures to describe... Invite participants to offer a word or picture (easier if done online, but using phones in-person works, too, for finding pictures) that describes what they are bringing with them today, or a gift that they want to give themselves (e.g., time, grace, comfort, rest), or a recent moment of joy.

2. Setting up Community Agreements

Community agreements work best when they are visible and reinforced. Revisit them at the start of each class session with the invitation to add or amend depending on what they are bringing with them each day and use them as collective guidelines to hold community boundaries.

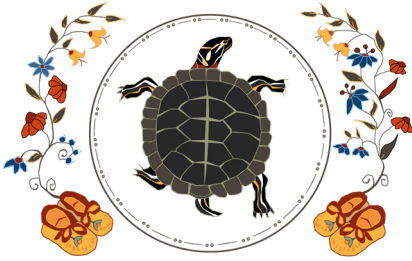
To help participants come up with community agreements, consider posing the following questions:

- Think about the best group in which you have participated, either in discussion or another endeavor. What made it satisfying?
- Think about the worst group in which you have participated, either in discussion or in another endeavor. What made it unsatisfactory?
- For each positive characteristic you identified, suggest two or three ways the group could ensure that these characteristics are present.
- For each negative characteristic you identified, suggest two or three ways the group could ensure that these characteristics are not present.
- Share your positive and negative characteristics. Together, draft a set of community agreements to which each member of the group can agree.

3. Shared Creative Experiences

Parts of a Whole (in-person activity)

In this activity your participants can express themselves with color and words. You will need an image of significance to your group. We have provided the image of the miskwaadesi, a painted turtle that is significant for the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe.



“The support of a turtle creates foundation for each of our steps. The lessons and gifts for every day and every moon that passes are carried protectively on the back of the turtle. The turtle may move slowly but each move is deliberate, intentional, and focused toward the future. A painted turtle will only eat its food while in the water, a testament to the importance of the environment to support the ability to engage. The turtle is a timekeeper, a teacher, and a knowledge and foundation holder” (FDLTCC, 2020).

We offer this image of a Miskwaadesi as a gift to help you align your work with these values. (For a delightful resource on the gift and meaning of Miskwaadesi see this resource from the [Toronto Zoo](#). Participants may add their own colors and words to their piece of turtle and see it together with others standing for their individual selves being part of a creative whole. We recommend not necessarily sharing with participants what the whole figure is before having them work on their pieces so they can feel some delight at seeing it come together at the end. This is entirely up to you. Do not worry if there are not the exact number of pieces for your group. You want to make sure there is at least one for everyone. If there are more pieces to the puzzle than participants, that’s great. Some won’t be colored in. This serves to remind us that there are other possibilities and other people who are not always present who influence our community of learning.

Materials

- Image of significance – Miskwaadesi. Have an image in B+W with enough line detail.
- Cardstock or large sturdy paper (11x17 allows for anywhere from 4 very large pieces to 24 small pieces. If your group is larger than 24, you may want to consider a larger size)
- Ruler
- Strong scissors
- Packing or duct tape
- Foam core same size as cardstock (optional for more permanent product)
- Coloring tools (markers, crayons, etc.) for students to use

Preparation

- Draw or have an image printed on card stock making sure there are marks to the edge of the paper and that they are firm and dark. If your image is round and you have sections without image, consider some added line making – put a wiggly border or starburst around the image.
- Depending on the number of participants, measure and mark out fairly square pieces on the back of the cardstock (e.g., 4”x4”, 6”x3”) so there are at least enough for each participant. In each square put a number going from top to bottom and left to right. This is the guide that will help you put the pieces back together in the right order.
- Cut the squares.

Procedure

- Welcome students and distribute drawing tools and pieces of cardstock.
- Invite them to choose colors and make marks that make them feel good and energized and what they want to bring to this class. Invite them to include any words or phrases that express who they are and how they feel about learning and belonging to this class. Allow for challenging feelings (e.g., fear, anxiety) as well as feelings of interest and joy.
- Encourage them to ‘drink up all the white’ so the pieces are saturated with color and design. Let them know they can draw over the lines already there or use them to structure their expression – just like learning, it sometimes aligns with what is planned and presented and often expands or contracts in surprising ways.
- Allow enough time for activity, at least 30 minutes including handing out and collecting materials. If you think they need more time than you have allowed, collect the pieces and bring them out again to finish in another class period. Do not rush.
- Once complete, collect the pieces and after class reassemble the image following the numbers you put on the back. Tape with packing or duct tape or mount onto foam core for a more lasting ‘poster’ you can hang.
- When you share with the students ask them, “What’s going on here?” and “what do you see that tells you that?” If they don’t see the original image, that is okay. You can point it out to them and emphasize that this is what learning together can be like. A design created by the instructor that each person brings their own colors and expression to.

Belonging Brainstorm (in-person and online activity)

Using a free online collaboration tool (e.g., Jamboard, Miro Board, etc.) set up a space that allows anonymous posting in a group space. Have participants respond to the reflective prompts below. It may help to divide the virtual space into Belonging-Not Belonging-What Can You Do. You can then facilitate a class discussion around this topic and the responses provided. It also provides a baseline group understanding that can be revisited and updated later in the course. This is also included in the fourth entry of the [Courage to Learn](#) journal.

Reflective Prompts:

Think about where or with whom you spend time (at home, at work, at school, in nature, with friends, with family, etc.).

Belonging

- Where do you feel the strongest sense of belonging?
- If you had to describe what it feels like to belong, what would you say? What picture, color, or design would that express that?

Not Belonging

- Where do you feel you least belong?
- If you had to describe what it feels like to not belong, what would you say? What picture, color, or design would express that?

What Can You Do

- What do you think you could do to create a stronger sense of belonging (to the activity, the group) when you start something new?

Visions of Teaching (in-person and online activity)

Using a free online collaboration tool (e.g., Jamboard, Miro Board, etc.) set up a space that allows anonymous posting in a group space. Or you can choose to make the activity very personal and expand into a hands-on activity where participants create a piece that represents their imaginings and wonderings in response to these reflective prompts. If you use a tool where participants enter text, creating a word cloud for both responses can provide great whole group discussion and may offer interesting insights if the cloud for one prompt is compared to the cloud for the other. This activity provides a baseline understanding that can be revisited as learners gain more knowledge and self-awareness.

Reflective Prompts:

- What does YOU being a great teacher look like? Feel like? Sound like?
- What specific practices do you identify with great teaching?

4. Video Playground

This is a great place to begin your journey with your learners into exploring, analyzing, and creating videos. Watching videos together can help establish the relevance of using practice as an in-road to becoming and being an effective educator. Giving learners an opportunity to ‘play’ - to be curious, to try out several different ones, to talk and laugh and wonder with others - is a powerful and FUN learning tool.

Have your learners explore a collection of videos posted in your LMS. Allow at least 20 minutes for them to watch several videos, talk with their peers about them, and have time for individual reflection. Provide enough videos so they have time to watch three or four and reflect on them. After they have played in the video playground for 20 minutes, using a discussion board, written, or live discussion have them share with others the video they chose and their responses to the following questions:

- What interests them about the video?
- What do they wonder about?

You can prompt students to put the video in their portfolio or you can record their selections for later use in the modules. This is not required but can provide an anchor of interest as they move through the activities and look at the video repeatedly through different lenses.



References

- Conroy, E., Wheatley, K., Harquail, A., Watson, K., Johnson, B. (2012). Walking with Miskwaadesi, Toronto Zoo Turtle Island Conservation. <https://www.torontozoo.com/pdfs/tic/misk.pdf>
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