



*The University gave me my parchment, but ATEP gave me my education. - Danielle Steele*

**RESEARCH CREATION**

Ethical spaces in education are designed to uplift the whole person, be it student, staff, or faculty, and to continually fortify and expand that space for those coming behind us. Operating since 2002 in collaboration with the University of Alberta, the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) is colloquially known as “the canoe beside the big ship” (Angela Wolfe, 2012); a community-based Bachelor of Education program running parallel to mainstream programming.

ATEP staff and leadership came together to co-create a research chapter on ethical spaces, drawing on our individual and collective experiences engaging in Indigenous education. In thinking about Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in postsecondary education, particularly within a large, traditionally colonial institution, we returned repeatedly to the metaphor of “the canoe beside the big ship” to critically examine our experiences. This metaphor has been a powerful analytical tool for each individual co-author, and we co-constructed the narratives below to arrive at four tenets that guide our work in higher education. Navigating a canoe beside a large and powerful ship is not unique to ATEP, and existing in good relation both with those aboard the large ship and adult learners who choose to call ATEP home for the duration of their degree who are building and navigating their individual canoes is essential to ensure effectiveness and longevity of any ethical space.

Beyond reflecting on the notion of ethical space, the creation of this chapter, including reflecting on the work of scholars cited therein, provided in itself an ethical space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues to come together in a productive way. We paused, breathed, smudged, cried, laughed, and learned collectively; the resulting reflections are resultant of an ethical space in action, as we seek to navigate our canoe towards sharing our experiences with the hope they reach audiences who also seek to uplift the brilliance of students (primarily Indigenous) through intentionally fortifying an ethical space.



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**TENETS OF ETHICAL RELATIONALITY**

**HUMILITY**

Cognizant of power imbalances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and systems, humility (predominantly on the part of non-Indigenous people who more likely hold systemic power resultant of their intersectional identities) can, in our experiences, allow people to relate on a more human-to-human plane. Humility includes setting aside our own egos and assumptions, anxieties, and goals, even for a brief moment, to open our hearts and minds to learn from one another.

**SAFETY**

We identify safety as a particularly crucial component of an ethical space with positive Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations considering the grotesquely unsafe histories of Indigenous peoples experience of formal education in Canada. Safety necessitates freedom to practice traditional ways of living and being, including using medicine, ceremony, and Indigenous values (primarily Cree and Metis, for our context) to inform day-to-day work. Within a colonial institution, there are many instances of unsafety and violence. It can be difficult to sit in multiple spaces in a state of continued anxiety, often with physical consequences for Indigenous peoples who endure unethical spaces on a continued basis. For ATEP collaborators, we continue to endure unethical spaces in service of Indigenous student success, but ultimately that is a short-term solution to deeply systemic issues.

**RESPECT**

Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and learning have not been historically (since European contact) respected on the lands we now call Canada. The persistent violence of delegitimizing Indigenous knowledges through colonial mechanisms has led to what one author calls a “colonized mind”. To break down these harms, a basis of respect must be reestablished that positions Indigenous knowledges as equitable to Western worldviews. One author states “You can’t have *māmahwohkamātowintowin* (working cooperatively) unless you respect the spaces people are in.” To have successful Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships is to prioritize *māmahwohkamātowin*, which inherently commands mutual respect.

**TRUST**

Fostering an ethical space, first and foremost, is too big a job for one individual. One crucial point we would like to explicate is that *mamisitotātowin* (trust) anchoring an ethical space must be whole and unconditional, and not inherently reformed in alignment with colonial familiarity to be validated. Our experience with institutional policy is that postsecondary education often perpetuates unethical practices in denying Indigenous wisdoms, experiences, and perspectives, and this is grounded in a paternalistic tradition endemic in colonial societies. In trusting Indigenous peoples within postsecondary education, the institution can begin to meaningfully reconcile and Indigenize (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) without recreating paternalistic harms that characterize entirely too much of Canada’s history.