TATP – TA TABLE - E4

[00:00:00] **Elliot:** Welcome to the fourth episode of the TA Table and our last episode of season one. We're your hosts Elliot Fonarev and Estefania Toledo. Today Estefania is talking to Amy Fox about how to personalize land acknowledgements and on decolonizing learning environments in the university.

[00:00:27] **Estefania:** Thanks Elliot. I love this conversation with Amy who's a colleague and as well as a PhD candidate in the [Department of Anthropology](https://www.anthropology.utoronto.ca/) and our social sciences coordinator here at TATP.

I particularly enjoyed how heartfelt this conversation was, especially because Amy and I talked about our personal journeys of decolonizing learning environments, as well as the learning and unlearning that is required to do this work. We reflected on being settlers and uninvited guests to this land, and I appreciated how she spoke about making mistakes and learning from our mistakes.

We also acknowledge the contentious relationship with colonization that exists in our disciplines and drawing from the work of Indigenous scholars in order to be more critical and question our environment.

[00:01:10] **Elliot:** It sounds like you had a great conversation. And in the university we're navigating both wanting to make sure people who are unfamiliar with [university responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action](https://www.provost.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/155/2018/05/Final-Report-TRC.pdf), understand the issues. And also we want to dig deeper, and as well, we want to leave people with pragmatic strategies in alignment with Indigenous pedagogies and guidelines.

[00:01:35] **Estefania:** There's a lot of ways that we can talk about this and Indigenous scholars have been talking about this. We'll focus today's episode on practical tips to support graduate students teaching here at the University of Toronto, drawing from promising practices that we talked about at TATP, and we'll add some resources in the show notes for further reading. So let's start by asking Amy, what's a land acknowledgement?

[00:01:58] **Amy:** I found a definition that U of T posted about the Land Acknowledgement. It's meant to be, “a formal statement recognizing the unique and enduring relationship that exists between indigenous peoples and their traditional territories”. Land acknowledgement, as a tradition, though, is done by Indigenous folks in many nations and communities, but I'm personally not familiar with those.

I'm speaking today about the land acknowledgments, that are meant to be an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory you reside on and honor the indigenous people who were here first and are still here.

The verbs in the land acknowledgement are not in the past tense or in a historic context. They relate to colonialism as an ongoing process and mindfulness of our participation in these colonial processes. So for settlers, like myself, and anyone who's benefiting from these colonial processes, the recognition and reflection of the land acknowledgement is a place to begin the truth and reconciliation process.

I wanted to go over the etiquette of the land acknowledgement. How often do you say them at the start of class? I'm not an etiquette expert, but in my experience. They're usually done at the beginning of the semester. It doesn't just mean for the class, however. You could do one in your tutorial, if that's a new space you're in, your first tutorial. As well, if you do a field trip, too, you're in a new space, so you could do a land acknowledgement.

In digital space is a really interesting topic. I've seen people do the land acknowledgement for the land they're physically on, or for the institution sponsoring the event. So if I was in BC and I was doing a U of T event, I might use one for BC or I might use one for the University of Toronto. In digital spaces also, the land acknowledgement can take a different form where everyone in a webinar can add to the chat or go on mic and say the territories they're coming from. So if you wanted to facilitate this, in a digital space, I recommend the [www.nativeland.ca](http://www.nativeland.ca) website in the chat where folks can check and learn where their, land is.

[00:04:02] **Elliot:** Right, and the [University's Land Acknowledgement Statement](https://indigenous.utoronto.ca/about/land-acknowledgement/) is written with guidance from the Elders Circle of the Council of Aboriginal Initiatives, and they suggest using this statement in your classroom. We often see it included as written in the university and recited, but we can also see this as a starting point for reflection.

[00:04:23] **Estefania:** I've also seen it on course syllabi and here at the TATP we encourage both TAs and CIs to reflect on this land acknowledgement and the land that they're on and relate it to their teaching practice. I asked Amy to help us unpack this and share her experience with personalizing the land acknowledgement as an educator.

[00:04:42] **Amy:** Personalizing the land acknowledgment, what this means actually is using the institution's land acknowledgment and discussing it afterwards in your own words. For an archaeological event, I took up one of the lines in the land acknowledgement afterwards that says that the land of U of T has been a site of human activity for over 15, 000 years. That statement is an archaeological statement. And the number 15, 000 is a hot archaeological topic, actually, because of the contrast between archaeological and scientific ways of knowing and Indigenous ways of knowing, describing people being here since time immemorial. So, some land acknowledgments use that language instead. And this was my attempt, this little lesson, at adding a little multi-vocality to the mix when tying it to the event that I was at.

For a TATP event where I was teaching about neurodiversity, what I did was go to the Truth and Reconciliation's [Calls to Action](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf), and I found three calls to action that, related to the neurodivergent community specifically that I was talking about. I connected these intersectionally to what I learned about the Indigenous experience with health care, mental health, and identity, that were all themes of our workshop. So feel free to use that strategy too for your own event.

[00:05:55] **Elliot:** I love that Amy drew on the TRC calls to action to inform her workshop. I'm curious what else you talked about when it comes to teaching strategies.

[00:06:06] **Estefania:** We talked about decolonizing learning spaces and how this relates to her own teaching practices. Amy shared what decolonizing learning environments means to her.

[00:06:14] **Amy:** For me, as a settler, where I start with this is listening to the Indigenous educators who remind us, like you said, that the Canadian University is an inherently colonial space and experience.And I start with positionality who I am as an educator. I'm a white settler, a queer female presenting person. So in my case, knowing my identity gives me power in these educational spaces. I use that power to decolonize. And the word decolonize, means land back. In the classroom, land back to me really means an embodied understanding that the Indigenous learners are from sovereign nations and communities and tailoring my teaching in ways that support Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

When teaching in classrooms of Indigenous and non Indigenous learners, not forgetting, about the Indigenous learners in my classroom. Because I feel like a lot of times, one of the first things that non Indigenous, well-intentioned educators will do is learn a few things about the Indigenous experience and be excited to share that with their classrooms in a tone that forgets there are Indigenous learners there who already know way more about this stuff than we do. And it's a balance between sharing what you've learned without taking a tone that might alienate Indigenous learners.

And also I wanted to plug some issues around indigenous data sovereignty too. Where does your knowledge come from? Does it come from these extractive practices? This is a big one in anthropology and I think the social sciences, but it's relevant for all disciplines.

[00:07:46] **Estefania:** In my own journey, I've learned from Indigenous scholars on the values of relationality and reciprocity, which informs my research and teaching. Amy also shared with us about the language which we use in our teaching and the decolonial connotations and meanings of words.

She recommended Gregory Younging’s [*Elements of Indigenous Style*](https://brusheducation.ca/brush-catalogue/p/elements-of-indigenous-style), a book by a Cree scholar written for a non-Indigenous academic audience, which we'll also link in the show notes. Let's hear from Amy on what she learned from the book.

[00:08:23] **Amy:** I have it on my bookshelf for when I write or teach about Indigenous issues, which as a North American archaeologist is most of my stuff.

For example, the word ‘artifact’ we think it's so synonymous with the discipline of archaeology, but when Younging looks at the word, it has connotations of being a finished or a done object, something from the past that is no longer relevant. But the cultural objects that I teach about, the Indigenous objects, are still relevant and important and some would argue even active agents in the community. So for North American Indigenous material culture, when I'm a settler, I talk about them. I don't use the word artifact. And that's one thing I've learned from the style guide and my research there.

Some other things, not to tokenize your indigenous students by singling them out based on their experience, and the examples you use in your teaching practice, especially, for me as an anthropologist, to make sure they don't perpetuate any negative stereotypes.

[00:09:09] **Estefania:** We also talked about learning from our mistakes and learning from discomfort. This is part of reflective practice, as well as social justice practice, which helps us understand our power and privilege, helps us cultivate cultural humility, and keeps EDIA principles at the center.

[00:09:24] **Amy:** So one place I think that I like to learn from here is discomfort. And one of my strongest educators is discomfort. I want to say, don't be afraid of discomfort and learn from it. This is one thing I learned from ‘Native Instagram’, actually, is what is our discomfort trying to protect us from? Is there something we need to unlearn? If you're white like I am, is my white privilege blinding me from someone else's different experience? Is it protecting me from some hard truth about the world? That's my, experience with a reflective practice in the classroom.

For me, a reflective practice really means actualizing on the teachings that Indigenous folks are sharing with us as non-Indigenous folks here in North America. Taking time to reflect is important because that's when you're internalizing the new information. And how my reflective practice affects teaching is letting me be really aware of my position of power in the situation in the classroom as an educator.

[00:10:23] **Elliot:** I like leaving this on reflective practices, which at the TATP we talk about a lot and provide tips for in our programming. This conversation is some starting points for our listeners to hear from our trainers on how they have implemented some Indigenous pedagogies in their teaching practice.

[00:10:41] **Estefania:** As Elliot mentioned, we actually have resources to help you develop your reflective practice here at TATP. I'm encouraging you to visit our website to check out our programming, as well as information about our EDIA certificates and any upcoming events we have over the upcoming weeks.

[00:10:58] **Elliot:** And we'll leave links to that in the show notes, as well as the other resources we mentioned.

[00:11:04] **Estefania:** A special thanks to Amy for this conversation, and we want to thank the listeners. We hope that you enjoyed our first season of TA Table.

[00:11:12] **Elliot:** Thank you and tune in for season two.

[00:11:15] **Estefania:** Wishing you a great semester. Bye!