



Cultural Learning Community

Overview

Every learner arrives in the classroom carrying a rich cultural world: languages spoken at home, family traditions, community knowledge, stories, humour, values, and unique ways of seeing and understanding. When teachers recognize that *all learning is cultural*, the classroom becomes more than an academic space—it becomes a place where students feel seen, heard, and empowered. Learning grows deeper, relevance increases, and students experience a stronger sense of belonging because who they are matters in what and how they learn.

This course guides you step-by-step in designing and implementing a **Cultural Learning Community**, a collaborative environment where students build and share their cultural profiles through multiple formats—visual, oral, written, digital, creative, and interactive. As the community grows, students strengthen their identities, learn from the cultural knowledge of others, and contribute to a shared, evolving repository of ideas, stories, and experiences. Through this process, they also develop essential academic and future-ready skills, including inquiry, writing, digital literacy, collaboration, and responsible use of AI tools.

Each week includes:

- **CONCEPTUAL framework:** A short explanation of the core ideas, theories, and foundations that will ground your work for the week.
- **Knowledge Check (Quiz):** A brief formative assessment to help you confirm your understanding and prepare you for the applied work.
- **Applied PRACTICES:** Hands-on, interactive, classroom-ready activities—supported by digital tools—through which students **contribute**, **connect**, and **co-create** cultural knowledge.
- **PERSONAL reflection:** Prompts to help you evaluate your growth, identify insights, and make intentional choices for your classroom.
- **Projection or NEXT step:** Guidance on how to carry what you learned into the next phase and sustain the development of your Cultural Learning Community.

Why Contribute, Connect, and Co-create?

Contribute, **Connect**, and **Co-create** form the core of meaningful collaboration because they represent how knowledge grows through shared participation.

- When students **contribute**, they offer pieces of their cultural experiences and identities, adding unique perspectives to the community.



- When they **connect**, they actively listen to others, build relationships between ideas, and recognize the value of different ways of knowing.
- When they **co-create**, they transform individual contributions into collective understanding by designing shared products, meanings, or knowledge spaces.

Together, these three actions show that collaboration is not just working side by side—it is a process of learning from one another, weaving diverse voices into a shared narrative, and building something stronger, richer, and more meaningful than any student could create alone.

WEEK 1 — What Is a Cultural Learning Community?

A Conceptual Exploration

A Cultural Learning Community is a collaborative educational environment where students and teachers learn with and from one another through the sharing of cultural knowledge, personal experiences, and diverse ways of seeing the world. To understand this type of community, it is essential to view culture not as a static or purely artistic expression, but as a dynamic and transformative resource capable of reshaping how learning happens within educational settings.

Culture encompasses far more than celebrations, food, language, or artistic practices. It includes the values families transmit to their children, the ways people communicate, the beliefs that shape daily decisions, and the lived experiences that give meaning to one's identity. When schools recognize culture in this broad and inclusive sense, culture becomes a powerful resource for educational change (Battiste, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2017). It enables educators to recognize diversity as a generator of innovation, to validate the cultural knowledge students bring from home, and to rethink teaching practices so that they become more inclusive, equitable, and relevant. In the Canadian context, this understanding is particularly crucial given the country's complex demographic reality and its commitment to both reconciliation and multiculturalism. On one hand, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015), especially those addressing education (Calls to Action 62-65), mandate the integration of Indigenous knowledge, histories, and perspectives throughout the educational system, recognizing the rights and sovereignty of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

On the other hand, Canada's classrooms reflect unprecedented cultural and linguistic diversity, with thousands of immigrant students arriving each year and many more children born in Canada to immigrant parents, bringing with them rich multilingual repertoires and diverse cultural practices (Cummins, 2021; Dagenais & Berron, 2001). This dual reality—honoring Indigenous sovereignty while welcoming newcomers from around the world—requires educational approaches that can hold space for multiple



cultural narratives simultaneously, validating the experiences of Indigenous students reclaiming their languages and traditions, while also affirming the identities of immigrant and refugee students navigating new cultural landscapes (Kymlicka, 2012). By doing so, schools broaden their collective worldview and create learning spaces that welcome multiple perspectives, challenging the dominance of any single way of thinking or learning.

This expanded conception of culture is inseparable from collaboration. Educational collaboration is not simply group work; it is a social and relational process in which teachers, students, and communities actively co-construct knowledge (Stoll et al., 2006). Because culture shapes how individuals communicate, solve problems, and relate to one another, it also shapes the nature of collaboration itself. The Four R's framework—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility—proposed by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) offers essential guidance for building authentic collaborative relationships in educational settings, particularly when working with Indigenous and culturally diverse learners. When learning communities encourage open dialogue, active listening, shared responsibilities, and the co-creation of knowledge—both through everyday interactions and through digital tools (Resta & Laferrière, 2007)—they cultivate deeper, more sensitive, and more inclusive forms of learning. Collaboration guided by cultural awareness enriches the learning process by bringing multiple ways of knowing into conversation.

Equally important is the profound relationship between culture, education, and identity. Culture informs how individuals understand themselves and how they interpret their environment. Education provides the space for students to reflect on these cultural influences, to make sense of their experiences, and to learn about cultural perspectives different from their own (James, 2019). Battiste's (2013) concept of “nourishing the learning spirit” emphasizes that education must recognize and honor the wholeness of each learner, including their cultural and spiritual connections to knowledge. Identity, in turn, is strengthened when schools acknowledge and respect the full range of cultural expressions—not only the visible or artistic ones, but also the everyday practices, languages, and values that shape students' lives. In Canada's multilingual context, this is particularly relevant as research demonstrates that supporting students' home languages strengthens both their identity and their academic achievement (Cummins, 2021). When culture, education, and identity are integrated, learning becomes more personal, meaningful, and authentic.

This understanding leads to the idea of a living curriculum, a curriculum that grows and adapts alongside the students and communities it serves. A living curriculum does not treat culture as an occasional topic; instead, it integrates students' lived experiences, linguistic diversity, family practices, and relational ways of learning into the ongoing educational process (Kanu, 2011). It recognizes that curriculum is not merely a document



but a dynamic and relational practice—shaped daily by the cultural contributions, voices, and perspectives of the learners themselves. This approach aligns with culturally sustaining pedagogies, which seek not only to affirm students’ cultural backgrounds but to actively sustain and revitalize them within educational spaces (Paris & Alim, 2017). In Ontario and across Canada, policy frameworks increasingly recognize the importance of equity and inclusive education, as reflected in documents such as Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan (2017) and the work of scholars like Dei and colleagues (2000) on removing margins and creating truly inclusive schooling.

Within this framework, a Cultural Learning Community emerges as a learning environment in which everyone teaches and everyone learns. It is grounded in respect, horizontal relationships, intercultural dialogue, and the collective construction of knowledge (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). In such a community, each member contributes their own cultural lens, enriching the community with unique interpretations, experiences, and forms of expression. Professional learning communities that embrace these principles have demonstrated significant positive impacts on both teacher development and student outcomes (Lieberman & Miller, 2011). Diversity becomes not a challenge to overcome but a source of strength and growth. Canadian research on teacher diversity highlights the ongoing need for education systems to reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of student populations, ensuring that all learners see themselves represented in their teachers and curricula (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009).

The integration of technology and digital collaboration tools can further enhance these learning communities when used mindfully to amplify diverse voices and facilitate intercultural exchange (Jacobsen & Lock, 2021). However, technology must be implemented in ways that respect and sustain cultural practices rather than imposing dominant cultural norms through digital means.

When culture is understood in its full breadth—beyond heritage, beyond artistic expression, and beyond stereotypes—a Cultural Learning Community becomes a transformative space. It supports academic development, strengthens identity, builds empathy, and fosters a sense of belonging (Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007). Place-based and community-centered approaches to learning, which connect curriculum to local contexts, lands, and Indigenous knowledge systems, offer powerful models for creating meaningful educational experiences (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014; Somerville & Green, 2015). Ultimately, such communities cultivate learning environments where students grow not only intellectually, but also as culturally aware and community-minded individuals prepared to navigate and contribute to an increasingly diverse and interconnected world (Kymlicka, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Teachers and researchers seeking to deepen their understanding of these concepts can explore them further through tools such as Connected Papers, which allow for the



discovery of related scholarship on intercultural education, identity formation, collaborative learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy. In doing so, educators can continue expanding their theoretical grounding and refining their practice, ensuring that learning communities remain vibrant, inclusive, and alive.

Week Outcome

During Week 1, students begin exploring the idea that culture is always present in learning. The goal is to help them express identity in simple, accessible ways and to start building a shared cultural space. Activities introduce personal expression, curiosity, and foundational collaboration, setting the stage for a learning community where cultural knowledge is valued and visible.

CONTRIBUTE

1. Identity Snapshots

Steps

- Ask students to choose three images representing aspects of their identity (e.g., family objects, foods, landscapes, art, symbols, music).
- Students upload these images to a collaborative board or sketch them physically.
- Students write or record a short description explaining why they chose each image.

Tech Tools

- Padlet (visual wall): <https://padlet.com>
- Canva Whiteboards: <https://www.canva.com/whiteboards/>
- Figma Education (FigJam): <https://www.figma.com/education/>

Reflection Questions

- Which image feels the most meaningful to you? Why?
- What part of your identity feels missing or difficult to represent visually?

Expected Outcomes

- Students express identity in accessible ways.
- The class sees diversity represented visually.
- A foundation for cultural sharing is established.

2. Cultural Word Seeds

Steps



- Students choose a word or expression from a home language or cultural environment.
- They write or record a short explanation of what it means and when it's used.
- Upload or add the word seed to the shared class board.

Tech Tools

- Google Classroom: <https://classroom.google.com>
- Wakelet: <https://wakelet.com>
- Canva Recording: <https://www.canva.com/features/recording/>

Reflection Questions

- Why is this word important to you or your family?
- What does this word express that is difficult to say in English or French?

Expected Outcomes

- Students introduce cultural language practices.
- Peers gain insight into linguistic diversity.
- The cultural wall begins to grow organically.

CONNECT

3. Gallery Walk & Note Dots

Steps

- Students explore the physical or digital gallery of Identity Snapshots and Word Seeds.
- They place “note dots” (stickers, emojis, labels) on items they find familiar, surprising, or inspiring.
- Facilitate a short discussion about what was noticed and why.

Tech Tools

- Miro (stickers + comments): <https://miro.com>
- Canva Whiteboards: <https://www.canva.com/whiteboards/>

Reflection Questions

- What patterns did you notice in the class gallery?
- Which contributions made you curious to learn more?

Expected Outcomes



- Students begin identifying connections among peers.
- Early cultural patterns emerge.
- Curiosity-driven dialogue starts forming.

4. Paired Curiosity Chats

Steps

- Pair students randomly (use a name randomizer if helpful).
- Students ask each other 2–3 curiosity-based questions about their contributions.
- Each pair writes a one-sentence insight about what they learned.

Tech Tools

- Wheel of Names: <https://wheelofnames.com>
- Google Docs Collaborative Notes: <https://docs.google.com>
- OneNote Class Notebook: <https://www.microsoft.com/en/microsoft-365/onenote>

Reflection Questions

- What surprised you about your partner’s cultural experiences?
- What similarities did you notice between your identities?

Expected Outcomes

- Students practice active listening and curiosity.
- They begin building relational trust.
- Early interpersonal cultural connections form.

CO-CREATE

5. Class Definition of “Culture”

Steps

- Students propose individual definitions of “culture.”
- In groups, they merge their ideas into one collaborative definition.
- As a class, refine the definition into a final, living version.

Tech Tools

- Google Docs (suggesting mode): <https://docs.google.com>
- Etherpad: <https://etherpad.org>

Reflection Questions



- What ideas did we all agree on?
- What new perspectives changed your definition?

Expected Outcomes

- The class co-constructs a shared understanding of culture.
- Students see their own ideas embedded in academic concepts.

6. Starter Cultural Wall

Steps

- Decide with the class whether the wall will be physical, digital, or hybrid.
- Add Identity Snapshots and Word Seeds to the shared space.
- Create initial categories based on common patterns.

Tech Tools

- Google Sites (digital hub): <https://sites.google.com>
- Padlet Wall: <https://padlet.com>

Reflection Questions

- How does the wall represent the diversity in our group?
- What do you want to add to it next?

Expected Outcomes

- The cultural community structure is born.
- Students recognize the class as a shared cultural space.

WEEK 2 — How Does a Cultural Community Enhance Learning?

A Conceptual Exploration

A cultural learning community elevates the educational process by creating an environment where knowledge grows through interaction and shared meaning. When students participate in a space enriched by cultural diversity, their learning becomes more flexible, curious and connected to the world around them (Gay, 2010; Paris & Alim, 2017). Each encounter with new viewpoints encourages them to question assumptions, refine their reasoning, and approach ideas with greater depth.

This type of community strengthens learning by encouraging students to observe how different cultural backgrounds influence ways of thinking. As they listen to their peers, they discover alternative interpretations, new strategies for approaching challenges, and distinct methods of expressing understanding (Cummins, 2021; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). This exposure opens up intellectual pathways that conventional instruction alone



cannot provide, fostering analytical skills that are more adaptable and inclusive. Research conducted in Canadian multicultural classrooms demonstrates that when students engage with culturally responsive and self-regulated learning practices in complex tasks, their motivation and engagement increase significantly, particularly for linguistically and culturally diverse learners (Anyichie et al., 2023).

Engagement also increases when students see that their cultural identities are valued. When a classroom acknowledges the variety of languages, traditions, and everyday practices students bring with them, participation becomes more active (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2018). Learners contribute with greater confidence, ask more questions, and share insights that enrich discussions. Studies in Canadian contexts show that culturally responsive teaching practices that validate students' identities and create safe, supportive learning environments lead to measurably improved academic outcomes and deeper classroom engagement (McCallum, 2017). Through this dynamic, communication expands in quality and complexity, allowing students to build stronger collaborative relationships.

A cultural community also supports learning by helping students connect academic topics with experiences outside of school. Through conversations, examples from daily life, and shared memories, abstract concepts take on personal relevance (Hammond, 2015). Canadian research on contextualized learning demonstrates that when educators create culturally relevant word problems and learning scenarios that incorporate students' names, interests, and cultural references, comprehension improves dramatically and student achievement can increase by more than 44% (Canadian Center of Science and Education, 2015). This connection improves comprehension, encourages curiosity and motivates learners to explore subjects more deeply, since knowledge feels meaningful rather than distant.

Another important contribution is the development of social awareness and intercultural competence. As students encounter perspectives shaped by different histories and values, they practice attentive listening and respectful dialogue (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These interactions promote sensitivity toward others, making students more prepared to work cooperatively and navigate diverse environments with openness and maturity. In the Canadian context, where classrooms increasingly reflect the country's linguistic and cultural diversity, developing these intercultural competencies is essential not only for academic success but for participation in an interconnected global society (Kymlicka, 2012). Research emphasizes that when teachers gain deep knowledge of their students' cultural backgrounds, families, and lived experiences, and when they design culturally inclusive contexts, students develop both academic skills and the social-emotional competencies necessary for thriving in diverse communities (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Epstein, 1995).

Furthermore, culturally responsive learning communities contribute to closing achievement gaps by addressing systemic inequities through asset-based pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Hooks, 1994). Rather than viewing cultural differences as deficits to overcome, these communities recognize them as strengths to build upon. When



educators implement practices such as code-switching instruction, validation of diverse communication styles, connection of culturally relevant materials to academic skills, and meaningful involvement of families as knowledgeable resources, students from all backgrounds demonstrate improved academic performance and stronger sense of belonging (Grant & Zwier, 2011; Hale, 2001).

A cultural learning community strengthens education by expanding intellectual horizons, validating personal identity, and encouraging thoughtful interaction among learners (Paris & Alim, 2017; Battiste, 2013). This approach transforms the classroom into a space where knowledge grows through relationships, shared inquiry and cultural presence—creating the conditions for what Battiste (2013) calls “nourishing the learning spirit,” where intellectual and cultural development coexist and thrive together.

Week Outcome

In Week 2, students deepen their understanding of culture as a resource that shapes thinking, communication, and meaning-making. Activities help learners recognize how cultural experiences influence learning and how multiple perspectives contribute to richer academic understanding. Collaboration begins to intensify as students respond to peers and explore how culture enhances learning.

CONTRIBUTE

1. Cultural Learning Examples

Steps

- Ask students to recall a moment when culture helped them understand something better.
- Students write a short paragraph or record an explanation.
- Add these examples to the cultural wall or a shared digital folder.

Tech Tools

- Google Forms (short responses): <https://forms.google.com>
- Canva Video Recorder: <https://www.canva.com/features/recording/>
- Wakelet Reflections: <https://wakelet.com>

Reflection Questions

- How did your cultural background shape your understanding of the situation?
- What might someone from a different culture experience differently?

Expected Outcomes

- Students begin connecting culture with cognition.



- They see cultural knowledge as a learning asset.
- Class discussions gain depth and nuance.

2. My Cultural Lens

Steps

- Students choose a cultural practice, value, or belief that influences how they learn or communicate.
- They create a short written or audio explanation.
- Upload to a shared cultural learning page.

Tech Tools

- Wakelet: <https://wakelet.com>
- Notion for Students: <https://www.notion.so/students>
- Google Docs: <https://docs.google.com>

Reflection Questions

- How does your cultural lens affect how you solve problems?
- In what situations do you notice your lens the most?

Expected Outcomes

- Students articulate how culture shapes behavior and learning strategies.
- Peer awareness increases around diverse learning approaches.

CONNECT

3. Learning Lenses Exchange

Steps

- Students explore two peers' cultural lens posts.
- They leave comments or insights that link experiences.
- The teacher facilitates a short share-out of key connections.

Tech Tools

- Padlet Comments: <https://padlet.com>
- Google Classroom Comments: <https://classroom.google.com>

Reflection Questions

- What did you learn from another person that expanded your thinking?



- How did their cultural lens highlight something you had never noticed?

Expected Outcomes

- Students practice connecting across cultural perspectives.
- Empathy and perspective-taking increase.
- Learning becomes more socially constructed.

4. Perspective Bridges

Steps

- In small groups, choose two cultural learning examples.
- Discuss how each example could help explain or interpret an academic concept (science, history, language arts, etc.).
- Create a short visual showing the bridge between culture and learning.

Tech Tools

- Canva Presentations: <https://www.canva.com>
- Google Slides: <https://slides.google.com>

Reflection Questions

- How can cultural experiences deepen understanding of school topics?
- What perspectives did you combine to form your bridge?

Expected Outcomes

- Students learn that culture is a tool for academic thinking.
- They see direct links between identity and learning processes.

CO-CREATE

5. Collaborative Mind Map: “Culture Helps Us Learn...”

Steps

- Begin a class mind map using a digital whiteboard.
- Students add nodes with ways culture has helped them learn.
- As a class, organize ideas into themes.

Tech Tools

- Miro Mind Map: <https://miro.com>
- MindMeister: <https://www.mindmeister.com>



Reflection Questions

- Which ideas appeared most often?
- What surprised you about how others learn?

Expected Outcomes

- The class builds a shared understanding of culture's impact on learning.
- Students visualize connections between personal experiences and academic processes.

6. Learning Stories Cluster

Steps

- Gather all Cultural Learning Examples from the week.
- Sort them into clusters (e.g., communication, family learning, community wisdom).
- Upload clusters to the developing Cultural Learning Community hub.

Tech Tools

- Google Drive Folders: <https://drive.google.com>
- Notion Databases: <https://www.notion.so>

Reflection Questions

- Which cluster feels most connected to your experiences?
- Are there stories that could fit in more than one category?

Expected Outcomes

- Students begin organizing cultural knowledge collectively.
- The class sees emerging patterns between culture and learning.

WEEK 3 — Who Participates and What Roles Do They Play?

A Conceptual Exploration

A cultural learning community brings together everyone involved in the educational experience and positions each person as an active contributor. In Canadian schools—where students represent a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and family backgrounds—this approach allows learning to grow from the diversity of the community itself (Volante, Klinger, & Bilgili, 2018). Participation is shared, relational, and grounded in



the idea that culture is a powerful resource for understanding, communication, and collaborative problem-solving.

Students as Knowledge Contributors

Students are at the centre of this community. They participate not only as learners but also as knowledge contributors (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Their cultural histories, languages, family traditions, and lived experiences offer valuable perspectives that help shape classroom discussions and learning pathways. Research demonstrates that immigrant students bring rich, diverse cultural backgrounds to the classroom and expose their peers and teachers to different ways of understanding the world (Warikoo, 2014). Despite facing numerous challenges—including language barriers, interrupted schooling, and navigating new cultural contexts—children of immigrants in Canada perform comparably with their peers with Canadian-born parents in educational achievement overall, largely due to educational policies that commit to equal access and promote the importance of first language use and cultural identity (Cheng & Yan, 2018).

Students support one another by sharing interpretations, asking questions informed by their backgrounds, and engaging in collaborative inquiry. When educators adopt a funds of knowledge framework, they recognize that students' families possess “culturally and linguistically accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992, p. 133). This perspective positions students not as deficient in mainstream cultural capital, but as possessing rich knowledge systems from their homes and communities that can be leveraged for academic learning (Civil & Quintos, 2022). In doing so, they learn to see culture as a tool for expanding understanding, building empathy, and deepening their academic engagement.

Teachers as Facilitators and Co-Learners

Teachers take on the role of facilitators and co-learners (Gay, 2010; Paris & Alim, 2017). Rather than being the sole source of knowledge, they create conditions that encourage students to exchange ideas, bring cultural experiences into the learning process, and make connections across identities and subject matter. Research on culturally sustaining education emphasizes that teachers must move beyond deficit perspectives that position families as needing help, and instead recognize caregivers as experts in their children and their best advocates (Quintos, 2025).

Teachers guide dialogue, pose questions that draw out diverse viewpoints, and design learning experiences that weave together curriculum expectations with the cultural knowledge present in the classroom. Their role involves listening closely, validating students' contributions, and helping the group co-construct meaning. Building relationships with immigrant students and their families is essential to helping them thrive—creating culturally safe spaces where students see their upbringing respected and



valued (McCarrol, 2018). In Canada's successful approach to supporting immigrant students, teacher quality stands as one of the most important school-based influences, supported by rigorous teacher selection and preparation processes.

Families as Partners and Knowledge Holders

Families participate by sharing insights about students' cultural practices, values, and learning preferences (Epstein, 2011). Their involvement helps teachers understand the broader contexts that shape students' identities and ways of making sense of the world. Research on Indigenous family engagement emphasizes that families should be heard, respected, and valued at their children's schools, and that they desire to support the inclusion of content about Indigenous peoples in the classroom while standing with educators as part of the school community (Washington et al., 2023).

In many cases, families contribute stories, community knowledge, linguistic resources, or cultural experiences that enrich classroom learning and strengthen the relationship between home and school (Guo, 2012). However, it is important to note that Indigenous families—and many immigrant families—may conceptualize family structure differently than Western nuclear family models, often including intergenerational households with grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and community members who are considered family (Robbins et al., 2013; Sianturi et al., 2022). This broader understanding of family is crucial for genuine partnership.

Effective family-school partnerships require reciprocity, respect, and the development of what scholars call “politicized trust”—explicit recognition that multicultural forms of inclusion blind to Indigenous sovereignty perpetuate colonialism (Bang et al., 2018). For immigrant families specifically, partnerships are strengthened when schools acknowledge the funds of knowledge these families possess and move away from deficit-oriented assumptions (Valdés, 1996; González et al., 2005). Home visits, community events, and flexible engagement opportunities—meeting families where they already gather—build the trusting relationships necessary for meaningful collaboration (Gerlach & Gignac, 2019).

Community Members, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers

Community members, including Elders, cultural leaders, local organizations, and knowledge keepers, play a significant role as well. They bring perspectives that expand students' understanding of the world and connect classroom learning with community realities (Battiste, 2013; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Their presence helps students see that knowledge exists in many forms and that learning is an ongoing process shaped by relationships across generations and cultures.

In Indigenous educational contexts, Elders hold primacy to teach local wisdom and knowledge and sustain traditions, customs, and cultural history (Burnette, 2018; Robbins



et al., 2013). As one Elder shared in research by Bond (2010), Indigenous families and communities are the “mob” who should be listened to and followed in all matters involving Indigenous students and Indigenous education. This principle of community leadership and expertise extends beyond Indigenous contexts to all culturally sustaining approaches.

The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework in Canada emphasizes that programs must be designed and governed by Indigenous peoples, rooted in Indigenous knowledge, language and culture, and guided by Indigenous practices, with continuous engagement of children, families, and communities—including mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, grandparents, Elders, and caregivers (Government of Canada, 2018). This model of community participation provides important insights for all cultural learning communities.

In Ontario, formal structures such as Indigenous Education Councils (IECs) guide school boards in building stronger relationships with communities, sharing information, and enhancing collaborative work to support First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student achievement and well-being (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2025). The participation of Elders in programming, the inclusion of community members in decision-making, and cultural immersion workshops all enrich educators’ understanding of the centrality of Indigenous culture (Barblett et al., 2020; Savage et al., 2014; Burgess & Cavanagh, 2015).

Shared, Fluid, and Interconnected Roles

Within this framework, the roles are shared, fluid, and interconnected (Stoll et al., 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2011). Everyone teaches, everyone learns, and everyone contributes to the collective understanding. The interactions among students, teachers, families, and community partners create a learning environment where cultural diversity becomes a source of insight, creativity, and academic growth.

Culturally sustaining and culturally sustaining/revitalizing practices offer a paradigmatic shift in how family-school-community engagement has been traditionally conceptualized and practiced (Washington et al., 2023). These approaches expand the notion of who counts and should be listened to as leaders, and reconceptualize where leadership in education takes place. When educational institutions engage with Indigenous families and immigrant families during challenging times in ways that support self-determination, cultural revitalization, and sustenance, they move away from contributing to ongoing legacies of colonization, racism, and cultural erasure (Madden et al., 2013).

By recognizing culture as a dynamic resource, a cultural learning community supports students in developing stronger identities, deeper connections to their learning, and a sense of belonging within a multicultural school environment (Thiessen & Cook-Sather,



2007; James, 2019). Research demonstrates that when schools build personal connections with local communities with shared understanding and commitment, the school's relationship with families strengthens, and schools can reach parents more effectively (Grace & Trudgett, 2012; Sims et al., 2012). This collaborative approach, grounded in mutual respect and shared expertise, creates the conditions for all students to thrive.

Week Outcome

Week 3 focuses on the people who influence learning—students, teachers, families, elders, community members, mentors, and knowledge keepers. Students explore how cultural roles shape understanding, support learning, and contribute to a Cultural Learning Community. Activities highlight relational learning, community mapping, and recognizing diverse forms of cultural expertise.

CONTRIBUTE

1. Community Roles Snapshot

Steps

- Students list people in their lives who contribute to their learning (family, neighbours, social groups, online communities).
- They add short notes about what each person teaches or represents.
- Upload the list to a shared document or board.

Tech Tools

- Google Keep: <https://keep.google.com>
- Microsoft Forms: <https://forms.office.com>
- Canva Notes: <https://www.canva.com>

Reflection Questions

- Who plays the biggest role in your learning outside of school?
- Did you include someone you had never considered a “teacher” before?

Expected Outcomes

- Students recognize diverse learning influences.
- The class sees broad definitions of community knowledge.

2. Role Cards

Steps



- Students create a card representing one key cultural role (storyteller, mentor, guide, elder, helper, connector).
- Each card includes: name of the role, responsibilities, and cultural significance.
- Upload cards into a collaborative deck.

Tech Tools

- Canva Card Maker: <https://www.canva.com/cards/>
- StoryboardThat: <https://www.storyboardthat.com>

Reflection Questions

- Why is this role important in your cultural community?
- What skills or strengths does this role model?

Expected Outcomes

- Students articulate the value of roles within cultural systems.
- The community begins building cultural “characters” who carry knowledge.

CONNECT

3. Role Web Connections

Steps

- Collect all Role Cards onto a shared canvas.
- Students draw lines connecting roles that support each other or have similar functions.
- Groups discuss surprising connections.

Tech Tools

- Miro Mind Map: <https://miro.com>
- Lucidchart Education: <https://www.lucidchart.com/pages/education>

Reflection Questions

- Which roles seem to appear across many cultures?
- Which roles surprised you in how they connect?

Expected Outcomes

- Students visualize cultural relationships.
- Patterns appear across diverse communities.
- Students recognize shared cultural structures.



4. Mini-Interviews

Steps

- Pair students to interview each other about a meaningful cultural role in their families.
- Each student writes a 2–3 sentence summary.
- Summaries are added to the Cultural Learning Community.

Tech Tools

- Google Docs: <https://docs.google.com>
- Canva Voice Capture: <https://www.canva.com/features/recording/>

Reflection Questions

- What did you learn about how roles shape others' cultural identities?
- How does your interview partner's role compare to your own?

Expected Outcomes

- Students practice inquiry and storytelling.
- They form deeper peer-to-peer cultural understanding.

CO-CREATE

5. Class Network Map

Steps

- Combine all roles and connections into a large network map.
- Students cluster roles by theme (caretakers, knowledge keepers, mentors, artists).
- Post the final version on the cultural wall or wiki.

Tech Tools

- MindMeister: <https://www.mindmeister.com>
- Canva Diagram Maker: <https://www.canva.com>

Reflection Questions

- What does our community network reveal about how we learn?
- Which cultural roles are central to our class identity?

Expected Outcomes



- Students see the class as a multi-layered learning ecosystem.
- Cultural knowledge becomes relational and collective.

6. Biography Blurbs

Steps

- Students pair up to write a short biography of one cultural role from the network map.
- Each biography includes: who the role is, why they matter, how they teach.
- Add biographies as a new section in the Cultural Learning Community.

Tech Tools

- Google Sites: <https://sites.google.com>
- Notion Pages: <https://www.notion.so>

Reflection Questions

- What makes this role unique in your partner's cultural world?
- How does this role contribute to cultural knowledge?

Expected Outcomes

- Students transform cultural roles into living knowledge entries.
- The Cultural Learning Community grows in depth and meaning.

WEEK 4 — What Content Should Be Included?

A Conceptual Exploration

In a cultural learning community that functions like a collaborative cultural wiki, the content emerges directly from the students rather than from teacher-selected topics. The central idea is that each learner contributes cultural knowledge they consider meaningful, using formats that allow them to express their identity authentically. Instead of defining content in advance, the community invites students to share experiences, memories, languages, traditions, and perspectives that reflect how they see themselves and the world. What becomes relevant is not determined by a checklist, but by the value each contribution holds for the contributor and for the collective learning process.

Student Agency and Cultural Representation

Content is guided by the principle of personal agency. Research in British Columbia's educational context demonstrates that student voice and choice are fundamental to culturally responsive pedagogy, particularly within the framework of the Positive Personal and Cultural Identity core competency, which recognizes that students' personal



and cultural narratives shape their identity and learning experiences (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023). Students choose what aspects of their cultural background they want to highlight—whether these are visible traditions or more subtle elements such as communication patterns, family routines, beliefs, humor, celebrations, migration stories, or community practices. This autonomy allows learners to decide what represents them best and what they feel comfortable sharing.

The BC curriculum framework emphasizes that personalized learning acknowledges that not all students learn successfully at the same rate, in the same learning environment, and in the same ways, and involves provision of high-quality learning opportunities that meet diverse student needs while giving students choices in what and how they learn (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023). Because contributions are voluntary and student-driven, the resulting content reflects a rich mosaic of cultural expressions that cannot be predetermined by curriculum expectations.

Multimodal Expression and Digital Literacies

The variety of formats is equally important. A cultural wiki welcomes contributions in any form that supports meaningful expression. Students may upload videos, record oral histories, display photos, write descriptions, share playlists, document recipes, create artworks, or present digital artifacts connected to their lived experiences. Educational research confirms that multimodal approaches to learning honor diverse student strengths and support engagement across linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Early & Marshall, 2008). The flexibility of the platform encourages creativity and ensures that students can share culture in ways that align with their linguistic resources, comfort levels, and preferred modes of communication.

Indigenous and Canadian educational contexts demonstrate that storytelling creates a climate responsive to individual classroom needs while making connections to prior and new learning, and that storytelling in its many varied forms provides analogies and connections to ideas that students can understand, making learning meaningful and transformative (Empowering the Spirit, 2022).

Authenticity and Lived Experience

Relevance is defined by authenticity and connection. Content becomes meaningful when it helps the learning community understand how culture shapes identity, communication, and ways of relating to others. A short audio clip of a family phrase, a drawing inspired by a childhood memory, or a description of a community gathering all provide insight into how students experience the world. Scholars emphasize that culturally responsive pedagogy involves using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them (Gay, 2018). Because each contribution is rooted in lived



experience, the cultural wiki becomes a space where cultural knowledge is not abstract or generalized, but personal and grounded.

Paris and Alim (2017) argue that culturally sustaining pedagogy requires educators to recognize students as holders of valuable cultural knowledge that enriches classroom learning, moving beyond tolerance to actively sustaining the cultural practices and ways of being of diverse communities.

Collaborative Knowledge Construction

Collaboration plays a key role in determining which content gains significance. Students can respond to, ask questions about, or build on one another's contributions, creating threads of shared understanding. This interaction transforms the wiki into a living space where cultural knowledge is co-constructed. Research on collaborative learning demonstrates that the Core Competencies are often interconnected and foundational to all learning, with students developing competencies when engaged in the “doing” within a learning area, and that discussing competencies with peers, teachers, and family deepens students' understanding and helps them identify personal strengths (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023). What matters is not just what each student uploads but how the group engages with the content, noticing similarities, appreciating differences, and recognizing connections across cultural backgrounds.

Cummins (2021) emphasizes that peer interaction in culturally diverse classrooms deepens cultural understanding and builds intercultural competence when students engage authentically with each other's contributions, particularly when multilingual learners are recognized as bringing valuable linguistic and cultural resources to the learning community.

The Teacher's Facilitative Role

In this model, the teacher's role is not to dictate content but to maintain an environment where students feel safe, respected, and supported as they choose what to share. Educational research emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching must be situated within a particular context, meaningful to the members of the learning community (Gay, 2018). The BC framework for diversity in schools reinforces this approach by emphasizing that inclusive education requires creating learning environments where all students see themselves reflected and valued (British Columbia Ministry of Education & Child Care, 2024). The content grows organically, shaped by students' interests, identities, and the evolving dynamics of the community. The result is a cultural learning space that mirrors the diversity of the classroom and values every student as a contributor, storyteller, and cultural knowledge holder.

Week Outcome



In Week 4, students move from understanding “who participates” to defining “what content matters” within a Cultural Learning Community. Here, they take charge of selecting, curating, and expressing the cultural elements they believe are meaningful—traditions, language, values, humour, foodways, migration stories, or creative practices. The activities help students identify which cultural contributions best represent them and begin organizing these materials into themes. This week builds a foundation for content creation and curation, allowing students to see the richness of cultural knowledge and how it can be represented through multiple formats and media.

CONTRIBUTE

1. Cultural Content Brainstorm

Steps

1. Students create an open list of cultural elements they want to include (e.g., values, rituals, languages, humour, migrations, traditions, everyday practices).
2. They submit ideas in short phrases using a shared brainstorming tool.
3. Class reviews the live word cloud to notice what topics appear most strongly.
4. Teacher invites students to briefly explain a chosen cultural element verbally or through notes.

Tech Tools

- AnswerGarden (collective brainstorm): <https://answergarden.ch>
- Padlet (idea wall): <https://padlet.com>

Reflection Questions

- Which cultural topics felt most natural to add? Why?
- Did you see something contributed by someone else that you might also want to explore?
- What cultural element do you feel has been underrepresented?

Expected Outcomes

- Students surface a wide range of cultural topics meaningful to them.
- Class identifies themes to explore in upcoming tasks.
- Students begin to see their culture as a broad and complex source of knowledge.

2. Format Freedom Task

Steps

1. Students choose *any* format to express a cultural story or idea:



- short video
 - photo collage
 - audio reflection
 - poem
 - mini-artifact photo
 - recipe card
 - infographic
2. They produce a short piece representing one aspect of their cultural identity.
 3. Students upload their piece to the shared community space.

Tech Tools

- Canva (videos, posters, infographics): <https://www.canva.com>
- Notion (content cards/pages): <https://www.notion.so>
- Google Drive: <https://drive.google.com>

Reflection Questions

- What made you choose this format over another?
- How does the format change the meaning or tone of your cultural content?
- What format would you like to experiment with next?

Expected Outcomes

- Students gain ownership of how they express culture.
- The community becomes multimedia-rich from the start.
- Students learn that culture can be represented through many creative pathways.

CONNECT

3. Format Swap Exploration

Steps

1. Students explore the cultural pieces of at least three peers.
2. They analyze how different formats communicate different aspects of culture.
3. They leave at least one positive observation and one question on each piece.
4. As a class, they discuss which formats were most surprising.

Tech Tools

- Padlet (comments enabled): <https://padlet.com>
- Wakelet (collections): <https://wakelet.com>

Reflection Questions



- How did visual formats differ from written ones?
- Which format helped you understand someone's culture most clearly?
- What did you learn about your peers through format alone?

Expected Outcomes

- Students recognize that mode of expression influences cultural meaning.
- Builds cross-cultural curiosity and respect.
- Supports multimodal literacy across grade levels.

4. Content Themes Roundtable

Steps

1. In groups, students sort contributions into emerging themes (e.g., migration, family, celebrations, languages, landscapes).
2. Groups share their thematic categories with the class.
3. Class negotiates which themes will become part of the final community structure.
4. Groups add their thematic summaries to the digital space.

Tech Tools

- Google Slides (group tables): <https://slides.google.com>
- Canva Whiteboards: <https://www.canva.com/whiteboards/>

Reflection Questions

- Which themes appeared most often? Why?
- Which themes were unexpected?
- What does the variety of themes reveal about the community?

Expected Outcomes

- Students collaboratively identify the cultural patterns in the class.
- Themes become foundation for the future Cultural Community platform.
- Students begin acting as cultural researchers and curators.

CO-CREATE

5. Cultural Wiki Categories

Steps

1. Based on the themes identified, students help define the main categories for the Cultural Learning Community (e.g., Language, Foodways, Land & Place, Family Stories, Art & Expression).



2. As a class, they finalize which 5–8 categories will structure the space.
3. Students add placeholder pages or sections under each category.

Tech Tools

- Google Sites: <https://sites.google.com>
- WordPress: <https://wordpress.com>

Reflection Questions

- How do our chosen categories reflect the diversity of the class?
- What categories might still be missing or needed later?
- How will visitors navigate our cultural space?

Expected Outcomes

- Students experience authentic authorship in building the community.
- Class creates a shared blueprint for the Cultural Learning Community.
- Students practice organizational and design thinking.

6. Content Curation Teams

Steps

1. Students form small “curator teams” for each category.
2. Teams select sample contributions and organize them onto their category pages.
3. Students design titles, layouts, and short introductions for their sections.
4. Teams present their draft pages to the class for feedback.

Tech Tools

- Notion databases: <https://www.notion.so>
- Google Drive + Google Sites

Reflection Questions

- What story is your category trying to tell about culture?
- How did you decide what belonged (and didn’t belong) in your section?
- What improvements would make the page more welcoming?

Expected Outcomes

- Students take ownership of their section of the cultural community.
- Organizational thinking connects directly to cultural literacy.
- The cultural platform begins to take shape visually and conceptually.



WEEK 5 — Where Can a Cultural Learning Community Be Created?

A Conceptual Exploration

A cultural learning community can be built in any space—physical or digital—that invites students to share aspects of their identities and learn from one another in a respectful, collaborative environment. What matters is not the platform itself, but the openness, structure, and safety that support meaningful cultural exchange. Schools can offer multiple spaces where students create, display, and interact with cultural contributions, each providing unique benefits for participation and learning.

Physical Spaces for Cultural Expression

One accessible option is a physical mural located in a common school area. Students can add drawings, photos, artifacts, short texts, or symbolic representations connected to their cultural backgrounds. A mural becomes a constantly growing visual archive that celebrates diversity and reinforces collective belonging. Its physical presence encourages students to pause, observe, and appreciate perspectives different from their own. Research on culturally responsive environments demonstrates that when students see their cultural identities reflected in physical school spaces, they develop a stronger sense of belonging and engagement (Gay, 2018). This type of space works best when it is visible, inclusive, and designed so that every contribution has a place without hierarchy or comparison.

The BC curriculum's emphasis on Positive Personal and Cultural Identity supports the creation of spaces where students can represent aspects of their cultural contexts through words and images, describing ways they participate in or are connected to their communities (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023).

Digital Platforms for Cultural Wikis

A second option is a digital cultural wiki, created using platforms such as:

- Google Sites (<https://sites.google.com>) – A free, user-friendly platform that allows collaborative website creation with multimedia embedding, accessible through Google Workspace for Education accounts commonly used in BC schools.
- WordPress (<https://wordpress.com>) – An open-source content management system offering both free and premium options, with extensive customization capabilities for educational projects.
- Notion (<https://www.notion.so>) – A flexible workspace platform that combines wiki features, databases, and collaborative pages, with free educational plans available for students and teachers.



- Google Classroom (<https://classroom.google.com>) – While primarily a learning management system, its Pages feature allows for collaborative content creation and is already integrated into many BC school districts' digital infrastructure.
- Microsoft Teams (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-ca/microsoft-teams/education>) – A comprehensive educational platform that combines chat, video conferencing, file storage, and collaborative workspaces, widely adopted in Canadian school districts with integrated cultural sharing capabilities.
- Edmodo (<https://www.edmodo.com>) – A learning platform specifically designed for K-12 education that facilitates student collaboration, content sharing, and family engagement through a safe, moderated environment.

In this space, students upload videos, audio clips, stories, recipes, maps, or family memories in a format that suits their preferred mode of expression. Digital communities expand participation because students can contribute asynchronously, revise their work, and explore others' posts at their own pace. Educational research confirms that multimodal digital platforms enable students to express their cultural knowledge in ways that align with their linguistic resources and preferred communication modes (Early & Marshall, 2008). These platforms also allow families and community members to participate, offering additional voices and perspectives that enrich the learning experience.

Research on technology integration in Canadian multicultural education demonstrates that when digital tools like collaborative platforms and digital storytelling tools are used intentionally and aligned with inclusive pedagogical goals, they enhance student participation, cultural expression, and intercultural dialogue, particularly among English Language Learners and students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Cummins, 2021).

Interactive Digital Boards and Collaboration Tools

Another possibility is a classroom-hosted digital board or collaborative workspace, such as:

- Padlet (<https://padlet.com>) – An interactive bulletin board platform supporting text, images, videos, links, and voice recordings, with moderation features and privacy controls suitable for educational settings.
- Wakelet (<https://wakelet.com>) – A content curation and collaboration platform designed for education, offering free accounts for teachers and students to create collections of multimedia resources.
- Miro (<https://miro.com>) – A collaborative online whiteboard platform with free educational plans, supporting visual collaboration and multimedia content organization.
- Trello (<https://trello.com>) – A visual project management platform that uses cards and boards to organize cultural contributions, allowing students to create,



categorize, and collaboratively build cultural collections in an intuitive, visual format.

- Seesaw (<https://seesaw.com>) – A comprehensive PreK-6 learning platform designed specifically for elementary education, offering multimodal tools (drawing, voice, video, photos, text) that enable students to document and share their cultural learning through digital portfolios, with built-in family engagement features supporting communication in over 100 languages.

These tools support multimedia contributions and transform the classroom environment into a living cultural repository. Students can react to entries by leaving comments, questions, or connections, fostering active interaction. This option encourages ongoing dialogue and is particularly beneficial for students who express themselves more effectively through audio-visual formats. The BC framework emphasizes that students develop Core Competencies when engaged in collaborative learning experiences, and discussing cultural knowledge with peers deepens understanding while helping students identify personal strengths and establish connections (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023).

Indigenous educational practices demonstrate that learning spaces incorporating storytelling in varied forms—whether through digital media, visual arts, or oral traditions—create climates responsive to individual needs while fostering meaningful and transformative learning (Empowering the Spirit, 2022).

Creating Safe and Inclusive Environments

Regardless of the platform, the space—physical or digital—needs to be open enough to welcome diverse cultural expressions and structured enough to remain respectful and safe. Clear community agreements help set expectations: students share only what they feel comfortable disclosing, contributions are treated with care, and interactions focus on curiosity rather than judgment. For digital environments, privacy settings, moderated posting, and supportive comment guidelines help ensure safety. In physical spaces, supervision and shared norms promote a climate of trust and inclusion.

The BC framework for diversity in schools emphasizes that inclusive education requires creating learning environments where all students see themselves reflected and valued, and where schools develop cultures that value diversity and respond to the diverse social and academic needs of individual students (British Columbia Ministry of Education & Child Care, 2024). Culturally sustaining pedagogy recognizes that educational spaces must actively sustain and validate the cultural practices and ways of being of diverse communities, moving beyond simple tolerance to genuine celebration of difference (Paris & Alim, 2017).



The Power of Collaborative Cultural Exchange

What all these options share is their ability to transform learning into a collaborative cultural exchange. Whether students contribute to a hallway mural, an online wiki, or a classroom digital board, the space becomes a collective creation shaped by their identities, stories, and voices. Research demonstrates that culturally responsive teaching must be situated within particular contexts that are meaningful to members of the learning community, where students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences become central to the learning process (Gay, 2018). A cultural learning community thrives wherever students feel invited, heard, and protected as they share who they are.

Week Outcome

Week 5 invites students to think critically about where a Cultural Learning Community can live—physically, digitally, or both. Students explore potential spaces in the school and online platforms, compare their advantages, and collaboratively design a space that is welcoming, respectful, and secure. The activities help students articulate what makes a community space culturally responsive and safe, and they begin shaping the design of the final platform. This week transitions students from content creation to community-building, as they decide how their collective knowledge will be shared, displayed, and accessed.

CONTRIBUTE

1. Space Exploration Scavenger Hunt

Steps

1. Students explore school areas or digital platforms to identify possible homes for the Cultural Learning Community.
2. They take photos or screenshots documenting possibilities.
3. Students upload observations to a shared board.
4. The class briefly reviews all space options together.

Tech Tools

- Google Photos: <https://photos.google.com>
- Padlet (visual maps): <https://padlet.com>

Reflection Questions

- Which spaces feel inviting or culturally open?
- Which spaces feel restrictive? Why?
- What space would make cultural contributions feel respected?



Expected Outcomes

- Students learn to evaluate physical and digital learning environments.
- The class broadens its understanding of where culture can live in schools.
- Builds shared responsibility for space design.

2. Space Preference Post

Steps

1. Students share their top choice of space (digital or physical).
2. They explain their selection in 3–4 sentences or a short audio comment.
3. They comment on at least one peer's preference.
4. The teacher collects recurring patterns.

Tech Tools

- Google Classroom posts: <https://classroom.google.com>
- Figma FigJam boards: <https://www.figma.com/education/>

Reflection Questions

- Why do you prefer this space?
- How does this location support cultural expression?
- What limitations would we need to address?

Expected Outcomes

- Students articulate opinions with clear reasoning.
- Students help shape the logistical direction of the project.
- Increases student ownership and democratic decision-making.

CONNECT

3. Pros & Cons Chart

Steps

1. Groups compare top space options using a pros/cons table.
2. Each group posts their chart.
3. Class reviews all charts and identifies trends.
4. Groups recommend their top space to the class.

Tech Tools

- Miro boards (grid templates): <https://miro.com>



- Google Sheets: <https://sheets.google.com>

Reflection Questions

- What criteria matter most when designing collaborative cultural spaces?
- Which option seems most sustainable long-term?
- How do digital and physical spaces offer different opportunities?

Expected Outcomes

- Students apply analytical thinking to real-world design decisions.
- The class moves toward consensus through structured comparison.
- Students gain insight into the importance of intentional space design.

4. Safety & Openness Workshop

Steps

1. Class brainstorms guidelines needed to keep the space welcoming and safe.
2. Students draft initial norms in small groups.
3. Groups merge norms into a single class agreement.
4. The agreement is posted in the chosen cultural space.

Tech Tools

- Google Docs shared: <https://docs.google.com>
- Padlet columns: <https://padlet.com>

Reflection Questions

- What does a safe cultural space look and feel like?
- Which norms protect vulnerable or marginalized voices?
- How will we hold each other accountable?

Expected Outcomes

- Students collaboratively define ethical, safe participation norms.
- Foundation for respectful cultural exchange is established.
- Shared accountability reduces future conflict.

CO-CREATE

5. Space Selection Vote + Design Sketch

Steps



1. Teacher creates a voting form with top space options.
2. Students vote and see real-time results.
3. Once space is selected, students collaboratively sketch a layout.
4. Students add notes describing functions (e.g., welcome section, categories, visuals).

Tech Tools

- Google Forms voting: <https://forms.google.com>
- Canva wireframes: <https://www.canva.com>

Reflection Questions

- Does the space represent our cultural diversity?
- How will visitors navigate it?
- What atmosphere should the space create?

Expected Outcomes

- Students democratically determine the home of their community.
- They gain basic design and planning skills.
- Class begins building collective visual identity.

6. Platform Setup Teams

Steps

1. Students form small teams based on interests—design, writing, organization, tech.
2. Teams add sections, menus, and titles to the selected platform.
3. They upload sample content from previous weeks.
4. Teams present progress to the class for approval.

Tech Tools

- Google Sites: <https://sites.google.com>
- WordPress: <https://wordpress.com>

Reflection Questions

- What role do you feel most confident contributing to in this stage?
- What does our platform communicate about who we are as a community?
- What improvements can enhance clarity and inclusion?

Expected Outcomes

- Students collaboratively build the infrastructure of the cultural community.



- Platform becomes fully functional and ready for final content.
- Learners experience authentic digital authorship.

WEEK 6 — How Can We Use the Cultural Learning Community?

A Conceptual Exploration

A Cultural Learning Community becomes most meaningful when students take the lead in creating collaborative spaces that place culture at the centre of learning. Rather than functioning as a teacher-directed project, it grows from the contributions, decisions, and interactions of learners who recognize culture as a source of knowledge, a tool for understanding the world, and a catalyst for meaningful change. In the Canadian educational context—where classrooms include multiple languages, histories, and identities—these student-designed spaces act as bridges between personal experience and academic learning.

Early Years and Elementary Applications

At all educational levels, students can build spaces where cultural knowledge fuels inquiry. In early years and elementary settings, children may construct simple shared boards, cultural corners, or collective visual displays. These collaborative spaces help them explore early concepts such as belonging, community, and identity using cultural artifacts, stories, and images that resonate with their lived experiences.

Research demonstrates that when young learners are positioned as cultural knowledge holders, they develop stronger connections to curriculum content and demonstrate enhanced engagement in learning processes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023). The BC curriculum's focus on Positive Personal and Cultural Identity emphasizes that even young students can represent aspects of their cultural contexts and describe ways they participate in or are connected to their communities, building foundational understanding of how personal and cultural narratives shape identity (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023).

For example, elementary students in BC schools have used digital platforms like Seesaw to create multilingual storytelling projects where they share family traditions through drawings, voice recordings, and photographs, allowing classmates and families to engage with diverse cultural perspectives in over 100 languages (Seesaw Learning, 2024). Indigenous educational frameworks demonstrate that incorporating storytelling circles and cultural sharing in varied forms creates responsive learning climates where students make meaningful connections between their lived experiences and new learning (Empowering the Spirit, 2022).



Middle and Secondary School Applications

In middle and secondary grades, students can design more complex collaborative environments—digital galleries, interactive timelines, discussion forums, or shared cultural wikis—where their contributions become entry points for analyzing themes across subjects. Through these spaces, learners begin to understand how culture shapes communication, influences interpretation, and guides how people solve problems. Their collective work demonstrates that cultural knowledge is not decorative; it is a resource that deepens academic thinking and supports multiple pathways to understanding.

Educational research confirms that when adolescent learners engage with multimodal platforms to share cultural knowledge, they develop enhanced critical literacy skills and intercultural competence (Early & Marshall, 2008). Culturally responsive pedagogy at the secondary level recognizes that using students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference makes learning encounters more relevant and effective, particularly for ethnically and linguistically diverse students (Gay, 2018). Research on educational practice as an interdisciplinary enterprise emphasizes that culture is fundamental to understanding how learning occurs and cannot be separated from cognitive processes, making cultural knowledge essential rather than supplementary to academic achievement (Cole, 2010).

For instance, secondary students might use platforms like Notion or Google Sites to create collaborative cultural databases examining migration stories, comparing historical narratives from multiple cultural perspectives, or analyzing how different communities address contemporary social issues. Students in Canadian schools have utilized platforms like Padlet to build collective resources exploring how cultural worldviews shape environmental stewardship practices, integrating Indigenous knowledge systems with scientific inquiry (Cummins, 2021).

Postsecondary and Professional Applications

At the postsecondary level, students can organize discipline-specific cultural hubs where knowledge from diverse cultural frameworks is used to examine professional issues. For example, engineering students might compare design traditions from different cultures, while health sciences learners analyze how cultural worldviews influence wellness or caregiving practices. These collaborative spaces invite emerging professionals to understand culture as an essential lens for ethical decision-making and community engagement.

Engineering Education

Canadian engineering programs have begun incorporating Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and design principles into curriculum to enrich engineering education and address the professional responsibility to work with diverse communities (Friesen & Herrmann, 2018). Engineering students at institutions like the University of Manitoba



explore how Indigenous design principles—which emphasize holistic, community-centered approaches and long-term sustainability—offer valuable alternatives to conventional Western engineering paradigms that often employ closed-system thinking (Seniuk Cicek, Ingram, & Friesen, 2021).

Programs such as the Indigenous Design and Engineering Academy (IDEA) at the University of Toronto demonstrate how student-led initiatives can explore connections between Land-based knowledge systems and STEM disciplines, creating spaces where engineering students engage with traditional and cultural knowledge to examine cutting-edge topics through a distinct Indigenous lens (University of Toronto Engineering Outreach, 2024). These collaborative learning environments help students understand that diverse cultural frameworks provide innovative approaches to design challenges, sustainable development, and community-responsive engineering solutions.

Health Sciences Education

In nursing and health sciences, students engage with cultural learning communities to develop cultural humility and cultural safety competencies essential for professional practice. Canadian nursing education has established comprehensive standards recognizing that cultural knowledge is fundamental to providing equitable, respectful healthcare (Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing & Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association, 2024). Nursing students create collaborative learning spaces where they examine how cultural worldviews influence concepts of health, wellness, healing practices, and patient-provider relationships.

These student-driven initiatives recognize that healthcare professionals must understand Indigenous knowledges, respect diverse cultural practices, and address how historical and systemic factors affect health-seeking behaviors and healthcare interactions (Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, 2007). By positioning culture as a critical resource rather than a barrier to overcome, health sciences students learn to apply cultural knowledge to improve patient outcomes, build trust with diverse communities, and practice with cultural safety as a foundation for equitable care delivery.

Research on multilingual learners in higher education emphasizes that recognizing students as bringing valuable linguistic and cultural resources to academic contexts enhances both individual learning outcomes and collective knowledge construction (Cummins, 2021). Culturally sustaining pedagogies at the postsecondary level move beyond tolerance to actively sustaining and valuing the cultural practices and ways of being of diverse communities, recognizing these as essential to professional competence in increasingly globalized fields (Paris & Alim, 2017).

University programs across Canada have implemented collaborative digital spaces where students from diverse cultural backgrounds co-create case study analyses, bringing



multiple cultural frameworks to professional problem-solving in fields such as social work, education, business ethics, and community health. These student-led initiatives demonstrate how cultural knowledge becomes a critical resource for understanding complex professional challenges and developing culturally responsive practice.

The Transformative Power of Student-Led Cultural Spaces

Across all levels and disciplines, student-created cultural spaces share a common purpose: they show that learning is enriched when cultural knowledge is treated as a legitimate and powerful source of insight. As students contribute stories, examples, and experiences, they collectively build a resource that helps them interpret academic content more deeply and from multiple viewpoints. The community becomes a space where culture acts as a driver of creativity, critical thinking, and social awareness.

The BC framework for diversity in schools emphasizes that inclusive education requires creating learning environments where all students see themselves reflected and valued, and where diverse cultural perspectives are recognized as enriching the learning experience for everyone (British Columbia Ministry of Education & Child Care, 2024). When students develop Core Competencies through collaborative cultural sharing, they engage in authentic communication, develop critical and creative thinking, and build social awareness and responsibility (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2023).

Using a Cultural Learning Community in this way transforms the learning environment into one where students see themselves not just as learners, but as cultural knowledge holders. They shape the space collaboratively, negotiate meaning with peers, and experience firsthand how culture can guide inquiry, spark innovation, and support both personal and academic growth. Research demonstrates that culturally responsive teaching must be situated within particular contexts meaningful to members of the learning community, where students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences become central rather than peripheral to the learning process (Gay, 2018). Educational research as an interdisciplinary enterprise confirms that culture is inseparable from cognitive development and academic achievement, making cultural knowledge an essential foundation for learning across all disciplines (Cole, 2010).

Week Outcome

In Week 6, students bring together everything they have contributed, connected, and designed across the previous weeks. This final stage centers on refining contributions, building interactive sections of the Cultural Learning Community, and launching the space publicly. Activities emphasize appreciation, collaboration, and envisioning the future of the community—how it will continue to grow and evolve beyond the course. Students reflect on their learning, make interdisciplinary connections, and take ownership of maintaining the cultural space as a living resource. This week marks the culmination of the project: the creation of a vibrant, authentic Cultural Learning Community.



CONTRIBUTE

1. Final Contribution Piece

Steps

1. Students create a polished cultural contribution reflecting identity or cultural knowledge.
2. They select any format: video, poem, audio, story, digital collage, mini-documentary, etc.
3. They upload it to the final Cultural Learning Community space.
4. Students annotate their piece with a brief explanation.

Tech Tools

- Canva (video, stories, posters): <https://www.canva.com>
- Google Drive uploads: <https://drive.google.com>

Reflection Questions

- What did you want viewers to feel or understand?
- What part of your cultural identity felt most important to show?
- How did your piece evolve from earlier drafts?

Expected Outcomes

- Students' final cultural contributions represent deep personal and academic reflection.
- Community becomes a rich multimodal archive.
- Students feel ownership and pride.

2. Role in the Community Post

Steps

1. Students write a short statement defining their ongoing role in the Cultural Learning Community.
2. Examples: curator, storyteller, organizer, designer, researcher, connector.
3. Students add their statement to the “About Us” section of the community.
4. Class reviews the section to ensure all voices are included.

Tech Tools

- Google Sites: <https://sites.google.com>
- Notion pages: <https://www.notion.so>



Reflection Questions

- Which role best matches your strengths?
- How do you want to contribute moving forward?
- What responsibilities are important to keep the community alive?

Expected Outcomes

- Students understand their role in sustaining the community.
- Reinforces identity, agency, and collective responsibility.
- Helps establish continuity for future classes.

CONNECT

3. Round of Appreciations

Steps

1. Students visit the contributions of at least three classmates.
2. They leave meaningful appreciation comments (not generic praise).
3. Students respond to at least one appreciation on their own contribution.
4. Teacher facilitates a whole-class reflection circle.

Tech Tools

- Padlet (comments): <https://padlet.com>
- Google Classroom comments: <https://classroom.google.com>

Reflection Questions

- What did you appreciate the most in someone else's work?
- What surprised you while exploring the final pieces?
- What patterns did you notice across contributions?

Expected Outcomes

- Strengthens community bonds and mutual respect.
- Reinforces value of collaborative cultural learning.
- Encourages meaningful peer recognition.

4. Disciplinary Link Cards

Steps

1. Students create cards linking cultural insights to academic subjects (e.g., math patterns, scientific perspectives, literary traditions, artistic symbolism).



2. Students upload cards to a dedicated section.
3. Groups review the cards to identify cross-disciplinary themes.
4. Teacher integrates insights into future lessons.

Tech Tools

- Canva cards: <https://www.canva.com>
- Google Slides cards: <https://slides.google.com>

Reflection Questions

- How does culture shape the way people approach different school subjects?
- What academic insights emerged from cultural knowledge?
- How could teachers use these connections in lessons?

Expected Outcomes

- Students experience culture as part of the curriculum.
- Builds interdisciplinary thinking and critical analysis skills.
- Teachers gain material for culturally responsive instruction.

CO-CREATE

5. Launch Event

Steps

1. Students prepare a short presentation of their Cultural Learning Community (CLC).
2. Invite families, another class, or administrators.
3. Students guide visitors through the digital or physical community.
4. End with a group reflection or Q&A session.

Tech Tools

- Canva Presentation: <https://www.canva.com>
- YouTube (unlisted videos): <https://www.youtube.com>

Reflection Questions

- What aspect of the community are you most proud of?
- What do you hope visitors understand about your class culture?
- How did the community evolve since Week 1?

Expected Outcomes



- Community becomes public, meaningful, and celebrated.
- Students experience authentic audience and purpose.
- Recognizes cultural voices and group achievements.

6. Sustainability Plan

Steps

1. Class discusses how the Cultural Learning Community will continue beyond the current unit.
2. Students identify rotating roles (moderators, uploaders, greeters, curators).
3. They create a maintenance schedule or update system.
4. Teacher documents the plan for future cohorts.

Tech Tools

- Google Calendar (update schedule): <https://calendar.google.com>
- Notion task boards: <https://www.notion.so>

Reflection Questions

- What does the community need to stay alive?
- Which sections require updates most often?
- How can we support future classes who join this space?

Expected Outcomes

- Ensures longevity of the Cultural Learning Community.
- Reinforces collective ownership and stewardship.
- Helps students see cultural learning as ongoing, not one-time.

What You've Accomplished

Week 1 – What is a Cultural Learning Community?

You learned to recognize and define CLCs as collaborative environments where students' cultural identities are treated as sources of knowledge, strength, and belonging.

Week 2 – Why Build a Cultural Learning Community?

You explored the purpose behind this work—understanding how CLCs foster inclusion, deepen learning, and prepare students for life in a diverse, interconnected world.



Week 3 – Where Can Cultural Learning Happen?

You discovered that cultural learning spaces can be physical, digital, or hybrid—and that meaningful learning emerges wherever culture is visible, respected, and accessible.

Week 4 – How Do We Use a Cultural Learning Community?

You learned strategies for bringing culture into disciplinary learning, transforming academic content into something more relevant, curious, and connected.

Week 5 – Who Leads Cultural Learning?

You saw how powerful it is when students lead—choosing what to share, how to share it, and how to shape their community, while educators guide and support.

Week 6 – Assessing and Evolving Your Community

You explored how to assess the health of your CLC, gather authentic feedback, and guide its continuous growth as a living, evolving space.

You Are Now Ready To...

- **Recognize culture as curriculum**—not an add-on, but a foundational part of learning.
- **Center student voice and agency**—so learners become co-creators, not passive recipients.
- **Design inclusive learning spaces**—physical and digital—where every culture has room to breathe.
- **Facilitate cultural dialogues** grounded in curiosity, respect, and empathy.
- **Integrate cultural knowledge across disciplines**, enriching every subject through diverse perspectives.
- **Build authentic community**, where every student feels seen, valued, and capable.
- **Reflect and adapt**, understanding that cultural learning is ongoing and responsive to student needs.

This journey has prepared you not just to implement a Cultural Learning Community—but to live it in your teaching practice.

Your Journey Continues

This six-week program is not an ending.

It is a beginning.

Cultural Learning Communities grow, shift, and evolve.



- They change as your students change.
- They deepen as trust deepens.
- They become stronger as community becomes stronger.

As you move forward:

- **Start small.** You don't need to do everything at once.
- **Let students lead.** Their cultural wisdom is the heart of the work.
- **Stay flexible.** Adapt activities to your context.
- **Learn alongside students.** Model cultural humility and openness.
- **Connect with others.** Share your journey with colleagues and families.
- **Be patient.** Cultural learning takes time and trust.
- **Celebrate small steps.** Every moment of growth matters.

Remember:

There is no "perfect" Cultural Learning Community.

Each one is unique—just like the students it serves.

Before You Go: Essential Ethical Considerations

Creating a Cultural Learning Community requires care, humility, and responsibility.

Cultural Respect & Avoiding Appropriation

DO:

- Let students choose what to share.
- Honor cultural complexity—never reduce a culture to a stereotype.
- Recognize power dynamics—whose cultures are centered, and whose are marginalized?
- Listen more than you speak.
- Ask when you're unsure.

DON'T:

- Force students to "represent" their entire culture.
- Treat culture as food, festivals, or costume alone.
- Use sacred or restricted cultural practices.
- Present your interpretation as cultural fact.
- Tokenize or spotlight only certain cultures.

Cultural Ownership

Students and families are the experts on their cultures.



Your role is to create space—never to judge, correct, or validate their experiences.

Sacred or Restricted Knowledge

Some knowledge:

- Is private
- Belongs only to certain community members
- Requires protocols
- Should not be displayed publicly

Always let students decide what is appropriate.

Never pressure anyone to reveal private or sacred knowledge.

Power & Privilege

Be aware that:

- Dominant cultures often appear "neutral."
- Marginalized cultures are often framed as "different."
- Your own cultural identity influences how you facilitate.

Take action:

- Name dominant culture explicitly.
- Challenge cultural hierarchies.
- Confront microaggressions when they occur.
- Amplify marginalized voices intentionally.

Ethical Use of AI in Cultural Learning

AI can support organization, accessibility, and translation—but it cannot replace human cultural knowledge.

Appropriate Uses

- Translation support (with human verification)
- Accessibility features: text-to-speech, transcripts, alternative formats
- Organizing content
- Generating prompts or question ideas

Inappropriate Uses

- Creating cultural content or explanations



- Speaking "on behalf" of a culture
- Judging or evaluating cultural practices
- Replacing student or family voices
- Uploading sensitive cultural information to AI systems

Teach students critical AI literacy—so they understand its limits and protect cultural integrity.

Accessibility & Inclusion

Ensure:

- All students can participate through multiple modalities
- Privacy is respected
- Families are meaningfully included
- Tokenism is avoided
- Cultural humility remains a continual practice
- School policies and safety guidance are followed

Final Reflection Questions

As you continue this work, ask yourself:

- What excites me most about creating a Cultural Learning Community?
- What challenges do I anticipate?
- What do I need to learn or unlearn?
- How will I ensure safety, ethics, and inclusivity?
- Who can I partner with—students, families, colleagues, cultural knowledge keepers?
- How will I know my CLC is truly student-driven?
- What is one step I can take tomorrow?

You're Ready.

You now have:

- A strong theoretical foundation
- Practical activities and tools
- Ethical guidelines to follow
- A deep appreciation of culture as knowledge
- The commitment to honor student identities

Most importantly, you are ready to create spaces where every student belongs.



Moving Forward

Remember:

- Start where you are.
- Build gradually.
- Learn continuously.
- Stay flexible.
- Be patient.
- Celebrate progress.
- Center equity.
- Honor every culture.

Cultural Learning Communities have the power to transform classrooms—to make learning richer, deeper, more relevant, and more human.