Circle of Courage and UDL

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We recently were privileged to have Dr. Kevin Lamoureux speak with us on "10 Journeys of Decolonized Instruction." As we listened and learned, we were confronted with the fact that we have much to do! In that message, Dr. Lamoureux referred to a Circle of Courage created by Dr. Martin Brokenleg. Primarily used to address at risk youth, I found the Circle of Courage something that made the work I need to do have focus for possible first steps. As we consider our vital role in Truth and Reconciliation, this Circle of Courage provides a way to also pause, reflect, and consider the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and how they might be applied to our teaching as we endeavor to move into the future with intention and inclusivity in mind from an Indigenous perspective.

Let's begin with looking at the Belonging quadrant with its focus on being part of a community. Universal Design for Learning's foundational belief is that we can create educational environments that optimize learning for ALL learners. In the Engagement principle, there are guidelines that discuss the idea of fostering collaboration and community (CAST, 2023). It's vital in our post-secondary school education environments that we build a community where our students feel respected, accepted, and have a sense of belonging. Without a sense of belonging, students will find it difficult to engage!

Mastery is the next quadrant of the Circle of Courage to explore. Sometimes when we consider mastery, we immediately think of the summative assessments in our courses. In the Circle of Courage, the emphasis is on accomplishments throughout the learning journey. Having high expectations of all students, coupled with encouragement, can instill a sense of pride and accomplishment in students as they accept new challenges and learn new skills. Universal Design for Learning's "Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance" (CAST, 2023) aligns with Mastery in the Circle of Courage for competencies gained.

Independence is the third quadrant in the Circle of Courage to explore. Part of learning is

allowing students opportunities to make decisions and then grow based on their successes or failures. Fostering independence supports our students to develop the lifelong skills needed to be successful. Universal Design for Learning's principle of Action and Expression address executive functions (CAST, 2023) and the principle of Engagement looks at sustaining effort and persistence (CAST, 2023) along with supporting self regulation (CAST, 2023). Our learners need to develop the capacity to set appropriate goals, receive support for achieving those goals, as well as supporting them to monitor progress as they progress through their academic journey.

Now let's consider the idea of Generosity from the Circle of Courage. This quadrant embraces the idea that we all have something to contribute. It focuses on the value of being generous and being prepared to contribute to another person's life. As teachers, we are grateful that teaching inherently allows us to contribute to the lives of our students but are we also setting up opportunities for students to practice generosity? We want students to go beyond surface understanding to explore the impacts of what they are learning to all of us. This is often done in conversations. Do we provide opportunities to think and have conversations that go beyond the surface? Universal Design for Learning's Action and Expression checkpoint Expression and Communication challenges us to provide more than one way for students to share ideas and thus those conversations.

The Circle of Courage helped me to reflect on some Indigenous perspectives to learning. Sometimes we are encouraged to "step outside the box" or, in this case, the circle, to broaden our teaching perspective. This time, I found comfort in staying inside the Circle of Courage to broaden my understanding a bit more on Indigenous Pedagogy and give me the courage to take first steps.

References

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