

LINguistic and Cultural DIversity REinvented (LINCDIRE): Integrating Western and Indigenous Perspectives to Redefine Language Education Practices

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Canada and the United States are home to ever-growing linguistically diverse communities. Among the hundreds of minority languages spoken in both countries, Indigenous languages contribute to more than 65 languages in Canada and 134 in the United States. However despite this, Canada and the U.S. are currently experiencing a rapid loss of non-dominant/minority languages compared to other parts of the world, with many language families projected to be extinct by the end of the century (Anderson, 2011). In Canada, the use of Indigenous languages has steadily declined across generations and many endangered languages face the possibility of extinction (Norris, 2007). This troubling trend is often attributed to attitudes and teaching practices that discourage language use and undermine the value of these non-dominant languages (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). At best, Indigenous and minority languages are taught as separate subjects with out-dated methodologies. Pedagogical change is needed to maintain and foster language and cultural plurality and to reshape how we think about non-dominant languages in mainstream education.

The *LINguistic and Cultural DIversity REinvented* (LINCDIRE) project strives to provide this needed pedagogy for all ages, levels and languages across the globe (www.lincdireproject.org). LINCDIRE is a Canadian-funded international research project that combines Western and Indigenous approaches to language education. This unique pedagogy envisions language learning as holistic, collaborative, creative, and reflective. Currently in its pilot phase, LINCDIRE is in the process of actualizing this approach through the development of instructional designs for teachers and an online environment for students. We are piloting the project in five initial languages (Ojibwe, German, Italian, French, and English) and have begun to branch out to other languages as the project continues to grow. This article will introduce the main components of LINCDIRE's pedagogy and outline four ways it can transform the language classroom.

The LINCDIRE Pedagogy: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Language Education

The LINCDIRE pedagogy emerges from the integration of four key ideas: plurilingualism, the Medicine Wheel, the action-oriented approach, and digitally-mediated collaboration. The first two,

plurilingualism and The Medicine Wheel, redefine how we conceptualize language competence and the learning process. The third and fourth, the action-oriented approach and digitally-mediated collaboration, allow us to apply these concepts to classroom practices.

(1) Plurilingualism: The first core concept of LINCDIRE, plurilingualism is often conflated with the more well-known term, ‘multilingualism.’ To clarify, multilingualism is defined as the *coexistence* of multiple languages and cultures within a *society*. Comparatively, plurilingualism is defined as the *interconnectedness* among languages and cultures within *individuals* (Council of Europe, 2001). A plurilingual approach departs from the monolingual tradition that upholds a distinct separation among languages with the goal of mastery of all languages to a native-like degree. Instead, plurilingualism values the interdependence of partial competences in all known languages to be used flexibly and creatively to achieve effective communication. From a plurilingual perspective, learning is a non-linear, highly individualized process since each student enters the classroom with a unique linguistic and cultural repertoire based on specific backgrounds, experiences and environments (Piccardo, 2013, 2018). In such a classroom where all languages and cultures are acknowledged, students develop language and cultural awareness as they draw on and discuss similarities and differences among languages and cultures.

Grounded in a plurilingual approach to language learning, the goal of LINCDIRE is not only to improve linguistic skills in the target language, but also to foster awareness, appreciation and curiosity towards other languages and cultures. The learning of a language cannot be isolated from the learning of cultures, nor can it be isolated from other languages. LINCDIRE embraces plurilingualism at its core, conceptualizing a holistic picture of language and cultural competence by acknowledging and engaging students’ unique linguistic and cultural repertoires in the language classroom.

(2) The Medicine Wheel: The second key concept of LINCDIRE is the Medicine Wheel, a key symbol and way of life for Indigenous people (Toulouse, 2016). The four coloured quadrants represent the balance among the spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual domains of life. The centre of the wheel represents a 360° perspective, where all learning converges onto a position where learners have a holistic view of themselves and the world around them. As a key teaching and worldview in many Indigenous cultures, the Medicine Wheel is also the foundation of an effective pedagogy for Indigenous students. Each quadrant represents a particular learning strategy as described below:

- Spirit (yellow): Learning is connected to the learner’s community, culture and environment. This situates learning within a meaningful context for the student, thereby fostering motivation.
- Emotion (red): Learning occurs through the use of imagery, symbols and stories. Students use visuals and narratives to explore how learning is connected to themselves.

- **Body (black):** Learning occurs through hands-on experience and collaborative work. Non-verbal modes and strategies encourage the use of critical thinking skills and novel ways of approaching new knowledge.
- **Mind (white):** Learning is about holistically mapping out the learning process. This can help students visualize their learning pathways and encourage them to reflect and plan.

The LINCIDIRE pedagogy internalizes these teachings and conceptualizes the learning process as one that is contextual, visual, narrative, kinaesthetic, collaborative and reflective. Similar to Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, the Medicine Wheel conceptualizes learning beyond a linguistic and logical realm. However unlike Gardner's (1983) seven distinct intelligences that have a tendency to categorize learners, all four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel are intertwined with one another and all four must be engaged in learning. It is a holistic perspective that values balance, interconnectedness and the growth of the whole person. Guiding the learning process through the four quadrants is a culturally respectful approach that can authentically engage Indigenous students by helping them bridge meaningful connections to their learning (Toulouse, 2016).

Thus far, two key ideas of the LINCIDIRE pedagogy (plurilingualism and the Medicine Wheel) have mainly been conceptual and somewhat abstract. How can these concepts be realistically and effectively implemented in a language classroom? This is addressed by the final two key ideas, the action-oriented approach and digitally-mediated collaboration.

(3) The Action-Oriented Approach: In the action-oriented approach (Council of Europe, 2001), students use language to carry out *actions within a social context*. It is similar to the more commonly known communicative approach that departed from the past rigid, method-based practices and instead values authenticity, context and interaction. The action-oriented approach retains these principles of the communicative approach but extends them for a purpose beyond communication. In accordance with the LINCIDIRE pedagogy, the action-oriented approach aims to help students build skills to use language outside of the classroom and engage with people in a linguistically and culturally diverse society.

The action-oriented approach, as language in a social context, necessarily departs from the 'four skills' (listening, reading, speaking, writing) and the 'three elements' (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation) of language learning of the past (Lado, 1961). It expands and transforms this traditional approach into a holistic descriptive scheme consisting of three main aspects (Council of Europe, 2001, 2017).

- **Four modes of communication:** The 'four skills' are redefined as reception, production, interaction and mediation. Each of these modes further expands into an oral and written form.
- **Linguistic and general competences:** Linguistic competences include the 'three elements' as well as more social dimensions of language, such as pragmatic and sociocultural competence.

This includes linguistic competences in all known languages, not only in the target language. General knowledge and skills beyond language are also valuable in an action-oriented classroom (e.g., knowledge about other cultures, organizational skills, ability to work well in a group).

- **Communication and learning strategies:** Students strategically engage all of their language-specific and non-language-specific skills to plan for and practice purposeful actions that contribute to a clearly defined goal.

The action-oriented approach is the vehicle through which plurilingualism and the Medicine Wheel can be integrated into classroom practice. Real-life scenarios in which students are aware of and plan for an end goal make learning meaningful and tangible. This coincides with the Medicine Wheel's holistic approach to learning and, in particular, with the Spirit, where learning is connected to a meaningful context within the community and the Mind, where students are reflecting and planning. Since an action-oriented approach fully contextualizes the task, it naturally involves the Emotion and Body quadrants as well. For example, in a scenario where students are to participate in a community celebration highlighting Canadian diversity and family histories, they can create a poster to visualize their family tree and engage with their own and others' stories (Emotion). They can also collaborate and interact with their peers to receive feedback on their stories and posters (Body).

(4) Digitally-Mediated Collaboration: The final key contributing idea to the LINCDIRE pedagogy is digitally-mediated collaboration. Technology is playing an increasingly important role in language learning and resonates well with the LINCDIRE pedagogy. It can foster creativity in the use of language and cultural resources as well as intercultural awareness, openness towards other perspectives, and the construction of a cultural identity (Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne, 2016; Diehl & Prins, 2008). Technology has also demonstrated potential to support the revitalization and preservation of Indigenous language and culture (Cowan, McGarry, Moran, McCarthy, & King, 2012; Kitchenham, 2013).

An online portfolio such as LinguaFolio Online, demonstrates many similarities with the LINCDIRE pedagogy. Through LinguaFolio Online, students can describe their language learning experiences, track their plurilingual growth and set learning goals. However key aspects of the LINCDIRE pedagogy such as social interaction and the Medicine Wheel are not represented in the LinguaFolio interfaces and functionalities. In order satisfy all components of the pedagogy, the LINCDIRE team is currently building a website called *Language Integration through E-Portfolio* (LITE, www.lite.lincdireproject.org). LITE is an online, student-friendly environment with functionalities that have been specifically designed to integrate all components of the LINCDIRE pedagogy. Some of the functionalities of LITE include creating a plurilingual profile, completing action-oriented tasks, and reflecting on the quadrants of the Medicine Wheel. The development of the main functionalities of LITE is nearing completion and we are starting to pilot the site in various contexts.

The LINCDIRE Pedagogy in Practice: Language Innovation through LITE

LITE is expected to transform the learning landscape by providing students with a creative and communal virtual environment, a plurilingual portrait, and opportunities to support self-directed learning and holistic self-reflection. Below are some select features of LITE integrate all components of the LINCDIRE pedagogy to afford these four innovative practices in language learning:

(1) A Creative and Communal Environment: All student users of LITE have access to a personal page titled “My Plurilingual Journey” where they can create their own online profiles. The “My Plurilingual Journey” page was explicitly designed to be a personal and creative environment where students can explore and negotiate their plurilingual identities. The multimodal and multi-language support for this page allows students to uniquely narrate their own stories to share with their classmates. It fosters a supportive community that enables students to recognize and appreciate linguistic and cultural diversity in themselves and in others.

(2) Self-Directed Learning: Along with the family history scenario mentioned previously, LINCDIRE has also developed a variety of action-oriented tasks that address all four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel. Although scenarios vary widely across age groups, target levels, and contexts, all of them require students to be collaborative and creative throughout the task. Since neither of these processes is linear or well-defined, the tasks require students to independently and collectively reflect on and plan their own actions. The teacher’s role then shifts from a ‘transmitter of knowledge’ to a coach, advisor, organizer, and facilitator to support students throughout the task (Piccardo, 2014). The LINCDIRE tasks enable ideal conditions to foster learner autonomy and for students to develop skills for lifelong learning.

(3) A Plurilingual Portrait: At the end of a task, students also complete a self-assessment on the “Do a Level Check” page to review how they used language and to stimulate reflection about their growth throughout the task. This self-assessment is not graded or evaluative in nature, instead it takes the form of Can-Do statements (Council of Europe, 2001) that students respond to with “yes,” “with help,” or “not yet.” The results from the self-assessment then inform a radar chart (currently in development) which will consist of all of the skills in students’ plurilingual repertoires. The radar chart will also superimpose all of the students’ languages across varying levels. This provides students with a plurilingual portrait of their knowledge that reinforces language learning as inclusive and multi-faceted.

(4) Holistic Self-Reflection: Students can select a quadrant on the “My Reflections page” to answer reflection questions and are given visual depictions of their progress in each quadrant. This functionality of LITE uniquely addresses the Medicine Wheel and helps students reflect on all four aspects of their learning. The images represent snapshots of their reflections, allowing students to review

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their progress in each quadrant and encouraging them to pursue balance among the four. These self-reflections can help students build a deeper understanding of themselves as learners and of the learning process.

The Future of LITE: A Catalyst for Change

LITE was specifically designed under the LINCDIRE pedagogy to foster pedagogical innovation, not only for Indigenous and minority languages, but also for the broader context of language education in general. An action-oriented classroom that makes use of digitally-mediated collaboration can help overcome the common, linear vision of language teaching. The continued use of LITE among teachers and students can also facilitate a shift towards plurilingual awareness and a Medicine Wheel-informed view of learning. Over time, this can foster openness towards diversity and a deep curiosity about other languages and cultures. As an integration of Western and Indigenous perspectives, the LINCDIRE pedagogy demonstrates many similarities and overlapping ideas between the two. We hope that LITE can facilitate further dialogue between the two perspectives to generate transformative knowledge and approaches in language education.

For more information on LINCDIRE and LITE, please visit:

www.lincdireproject.org

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