Annotated Bibliography: Decolonial Approaches to Rhetoric and Composition Pedagogy

## Introduction

For hundreds of years Indigenous communities have the faced pressure of physical and cultural erasure (Powell 427), and for hundreds of years Indigenous communities have resisted “those marginalizing, colonial narratives and policies so indigenous knowledge and lifeways may come into the present” (King et al. 7). In recent decades, the field of rhetoric and composition has seen the formation of several spaces in which both “Native scholars and non-Native allies” come together to further the resist the effects of rhetorical colonization to which our field is susceptible (King et al. 5).

In the past, it has been common for instructors of rhetoric and composition to apply decolonial frameworks to their instruction with just a few modifications of the syllabus and assignments, using the term *decolonial* as a metaphorical “catch-all term appropriated to mean human rights or social justice” (Itchuaqiyaq 36). The following annotations are just a few selections of decolonial scholarship that can help composition instructors apply what the collective literature interprets as a more literal decolonial pedagogy. It is important to note, however, my position as a white, non-Indigenous scholar. I do not suggest that these selections are the Western prescription for the challenges that indigenous communities face, nor do these annotations represent all Indigenous perspectives. They are a quiet reflection on the ways in which all scholars—especially non-Indigenous scholars—might more appropriately engage with Indigenous rhetorics in our classrooms without falling into the trap of “appropriation” or self-indulgent abuse that Arola warns against (282).

With that in mind, I offer a few considerations before the adopting the pedagogical applications found in the annotations that follow. First, these applications are not meant to be merely “additive” supplements to Western rhetorical traditions (Powell 398; King et al. 9). To be decolonial these applications must align with a commitment to major overhauls of settler-colonial systems present in our classrooms, what Itchuaqiyaq calls “reorientation” (36-37) and King et al. call “reshaping” (11). Finally, for those of you who may be non-Indigenous scholars, in order for your work in classrooms to be decolonial it must come in the form of a collaborative and community partnership with affected stakeholders whose perspective matters most (Itchuaqiyaq 46). As non-Indigenous scholars strive to decolonize their classrooms, they must strive to form partnerships with Indigenous communities, but not equal partnerships. Non-Indigenous scholars are not, nor should they be the “ally” at the center of the conversation; non-Indigenous scholars should act as “accomplices” to the real drivers of the conversation: the sovereign Indigenous communities whose stake in the playing field is much deeper (Kilewa). Euro-Americas forced many Indigenous communities from their lands because their communal stewardship of the land seemed to threaten the colonial pursuit of rugged individualism and private wealth accumulation. It makes sense, then, that to decolonize rhetoric and composition curricula, instructors must act as accomplices in a communal *not* individual effort.

## Arola, Kristen. “Composing as Culturing: An American Indian Approach to Digital Ethics.” *Handbook of Writing, Literacies, and Education in Digital Cultures*, edited by Kathy Mills et al., Routledge, 2018, pp. 275–84.

### **Summary**

In an era that many writing instructors might say is plagued with new and innovative ways for students to plagiarize, Arola pushes against the institutionalized privileging of product-based, lone-writer composition pedagogies in which the autonomous student-writer is tasked with producing authentically original ideas without any hint of dishonesty. Instead, she advocates for the “author who composes in relation to” the contextual world around them (278), a process that is informed by American Indian rhetoric which envisions culture as a communal development of ideas, not individual bursts of authentic inspiration. According to Arola, implementing American Indian rhetoric appropriately requires that instructors 1) become aware of the risk of appropriation and that all “remixing” of material is context-based, 2) understand that authors, who cannot exist in isolation, depend on relationships, and 3) place more emphasis on the composing *process*, not just the end product alone.

### **Pedagogical Applications**

Instructors might apply the concepts from this text as they develop the outcomes of information literacy, critical thinking, and composing processes. Rather than seeking to catch students who play the plagiarism game, Arola’s argument suggests that instructors are better off focusing their time and energy on helping students identify the ways in which already-existing information has shaped their paradigms. Rather than encouraging students to produce original ideas (the stress of which might lead students to cheat), teachers can create assignments and activities that push them to build on and contribute to ongoing conversations. They might also reexamine their syllabus and grading policy, especially regarding “final” drafts. An instructor’s goal, according to Arola, should be to deprivilege finality, by helping students discover the value in the actual process of composing, not the value of the product. In that case, instructors might add or alter any already existing reflection questions to interrogate the ways in which students’ paradigms have shifted, and spend more energy assessing the reflection questions.

### Keywords: plagiarism, culturing, remix, American Indian rhetoric

## Itchuaqiyaq, Cana Uluak. “Iñupiat Iḷitqusiat: An Indigenist Ethics Approach for Working with Marginalized Knowledges in Technical Communication.” *Equipping Technical Communicators for Social Justice Work: Theories, Methodologies, and Pedagogies*, edited by Rebecca Walton and Godwin Y. Agboka, Utah State University, 2021, pp. 33–48, doi:10.7330/9781646421084.c002.

### **Summary**

Itchuaqiyaq’s essay, though geared toward technical communicators, reveals several important considerations when working within decolonial frameworks, especially, and most importantly, for non-Indigenous scholars. Itchuaqiyaq insists that all decolonial effort “*must begin* with an Indigenist paradigm” (36), meaning that while “traditional” Indigenist “values can inspire…anyone” to seek social justice in the community, good intentions on the part of scholars—and I will add teachers—are not enough. Scholars should first question whether their efforts actually align with Indigenous stakeholders’ needs and whether they actually seek a “reorientation away from settler/Western practices” (36). A final consideration is whether researchers have formed adequate community partnerships with affected stakeholders and that partnership respects Indigenous sovereignty when affected communities reject certain research proposals.

### **Pedagogical Applications**

How does this article apply to composition? Itchuaqiyaq’s guidance for non-Indigenous scholars raises questions of rhetorical awareness. Instructors who read this essay will discover ways in which we, as researchers, might question some of our research practices as they relate to communities and research “subjects.” In turn, instructors can develop lesson material that helps students evaluate representations in their writing and research of communities of which they are not members. This can provide students a greater sense of audience and the stakeholders that might be affected by their writing. In order to develop an oral component to composition curricula (something that more and more institutions are requesting), instructors might ask students to develop community outreach plans in which students prepare an initiatory dialog between themselves and indigenous communities. Then they will carry that plan, reflecting on their attempts to understand stakeholder needs and respectfully build bridges. This type of communication in undergraduate rhetoric and composition courses could set a precedence for coalitions among the next generation of researchers who will come out of those classes.

### Keywords: Indigenous virtue ethics, Indigenist paradigm, decolonial frameworks

## Kilawna, Kelsie. “We Don’t Need Another Ally.” *IndigiNews*, 3 May 2022, https://indiginews.com/okanagan/we-dont-need-another-ally.

### **Summary**

Of the sources in this collection, Kilawna’s article on the trouble with allies, is the most recent. Kilawna challenges the use of the term “ally” that has formerly been used by decolonial advocates wishing to decolonize media outlets. More specifically, she challenges it as a self-proclaimed title adopted by the non-Indigenous to “maintain power and control for…comfort” which is really just a “performative allyship.” The problem is that claiming to be an ally often leads non-Indigenous advocates to take “up space in conversations…silencing those they claim to ally with.” They propose the term “accomplice” because it connotes a secondary role. Instead of centering the non-Indigenous Western narrative of the ally, it centers Indigenous stakeholders as the sovereign drivers of their movement who seek quiet accomplices that “don’t look for gloat or glory in the work they do” and that are “not motivated by guilt or shame” but rather “their own understanding that they are beneficiaries of stolen land.” Kilawna’s overall takeaway is that a performative allyship does not dismantle colonialism, it maintains it. Accomplices acknowledge and help to decenter historical privilege.

### **Pedagogical Applications**

The pedagogical applications that come from this source may not seem as straightforward as the other selections. Though Kilawna never mentions the term, I believe that her use of the word “title” connotes an individual’s station or position. As many colleges and universities across the nation are primarily white institutions (PWI), instructors of rhetoric and composition can draw on this piece to address with students the nuances of positionality. Instructors might include positionality statements as regular elements of assignments, especially those dealing with social research regarding Indigenous communities. More importantly, however, instructors can help students make the appropriate moves within their positionality statements. Instructors can help students interrogate the motives behind their discourse—whether their discourse seeks to appease guilt and maintain privilege or whether their discourse seeks to form bonds, expand privilege, and dismantle colonial structures in the way their Indigenous counterparts deem appropriate. Hopefully, students will learn that an I’m-white-but-I-come-in-peace statement is not sufficient. Instead, a positionality statement should consider what a non-Indigenous rhetor can contribute to the conversation without maintaining systems of oppression or silencing marginalized communities.

### Keywords: positionality, ally, accomplice

## King, Lisa; Gubele, Rose; Anderson, Joyce Raine. “Introduction: Careful with the Stories We Tell: Naming Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story.” *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics*, edited by Lisa King, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Anderson, Utah State University Press, 2015, pp. 3–16, doi:10.7330/9780874219968.c000.

### **Summary**

This chapter of *Survivance, Sovereignty, and* Story, King et al. lays the ground work for Native scholars and what they call “non-Native allies” who wish to more intentionally teach American Indian rhetorics in their classrooms. Like Itchuaqiyaq, they acknowledge that even well-intentioned instructors, without a proper understanding of how survivance (“the continuance of native stories”), and sovereignty (the right to self-determination) are critical components to proper representation of Indigenous communities. They demonstrate that more explicit and appropriate instruction can legitimize Indigenous histories and rhetorics. This introduction, as well as the chapters that follow in the collection, act as a partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous ally instructors to ensure that they understand the critical terms that contextualize indigenous texts and rhetoric. Of course, as King et al. make these suggestions as part of an edited collection of work Indigenous rhetorics, I encourage instructors who wish to implement decolonial frameworks in their course design to examine the entire collection.

### **Pedagogical Applications**

Taking concepts from this introduction can help instructors develop lesson ideas that can encourage information literacy and critical thinking. In terms of information literacy, acting on this chapter’s call to widen the canon (so that it includes Indigenous texts) is important if we are to represent Indigenous texts as not just supplementary, but foundational. Instructors can also begin to pose questions about representation as it relates to inclusions and exclusions. When students are evaluating source material, they might ask students which voices are represented, which are excluded, and which might be misrepresented. This can also lead to conversations about the best way to foster a more inclusive representation among source material. Instructors might also use this chapter to develop activities that help students to reflect on who controls how marginalized groups are represented, and how sovereignty and survivance help certain groups persist among colonial rhetorics that seek erasure.

### Keywords: survivance, sovereignty, American Indian rhetoric,

## Powell, Malea. “Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2002, pp. 396–434, doi:10.2307/1512132.

### **Summary**

Powell’s article pushes against the notion that a mere application of Indigenous rhetoric combats colonialism. Adding Indigenous rhetoric as a supplement to the Western rhetorical tradition, (AKA the “smorgasbord” approach) is a “quick fix” to a deeper issue. According to Powell, this approach leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes regarding the “authentic” Indian. Powell insists that Indigenous texts are not artifacts of authenticity, they are acts of survivance and resistance. She outlines past texts in which Indigenous writers used rhetoric to maintain “subject-status” and “reimagine” what it means to be “Indian,” thus maintaining sovereignty. Powell’s call to action is for rhetoric and composition scholars to acknowledge and legitimize the presence of the “reconfigured” and “reimagined” American Indian who has persisted through rhetoric despite continual attempts at erasure.

### **Pedagogical Applications**

Powell’s article offers instructors a unique opportunity to help students develop rhetorical awareness. By emulating the type of analysis that Powell carried out on two American Indian textual artifacts, instructors can incorporate Indigenous texts in the classroom and analyze them for purpose and audience. In this way instructors can help students see the way language has and continues to promote resistance and maintain “subject-status.” Instructors can also ask reflection questions in discussion boards or in class that interrogate textual analysis even further by asking how the analysis challenges common misperceptions and stereotypes surrounding Indigenous communities. It also opens the opportunity for students to engage—so long as they are respectful forming community relations—in efforts to decolonize the colonial spaces around them.

### Keywords: survivance, objectivity, subjectivity, sovereignty,