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Indigenizing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of existing scholarship on the Indigenization of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). Providing a careful review of this literature contributes a missing map of this field of scholarship and shares key insights for scholars. This is a timely contribution. While the assessment of prior learning has been in practice for decades, this practice has excluded (and continues to exclude) the knowledges of those who remain underrepresented within higher education. In the case of Indigenous learnings, such exclusions are part of the settler colonial operation of post-secondary education that Indigenous scholars and allies are working to disrupt. In order for post-secondary institutions to remain current and adaptive to the ever-changing process of articulating and accrediting knowledge, recognizing and implementing the Indigenization of PLAR is integral. Readers will gain an improved understanding of PLAR, design and implementation considerations when seeking to Indigenize a PLAR process, and examples of well-implemented PLAR for Indigenous learners. As more and more post-secondary institutions consider (to greater and lesser extents) how to address ongoing colonial exclusion of Indigenous knowledges and learners, an Indigenized PLAR process can offer a useful tool. In the settler state of Canada specifically, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action include a focus on providing adequate funding and training so that post-secondary educators can incorporate Indigenous knowledges and teaching methods into the classroom, Indigenized PLAR could potentially support the work of fulfilling this promise. This paper proceeds as follows: 1) a discussion of the search and analysis methodology; 2) a discussion of the importance of Indigenizing PLAR; 3) an overview of key design lessons drawn from the literature; 4) a discussion of important insights in implementation; and 5) a conclusion.

L'objectif de cet article est de passer en revue les études existantes sur l'indigénisation de l'évaluation et de la reconnaissance des acquis. L'examen minutieux de ces publications permet de combler les lacunes de ce domaine d'études et de partager des idées clés avec les chercheurs et les chercheuses. Cette contribution arrive à point nommé. Bien que l'évaluation et la reconnaissance des acquis soit pratiquée depuis des décennies, cette pratique a exclu (et continue d'exclure) les connaissances de ceux et celles qui restent sous-représentés dans l'enseignement supérieur. Dans le cas des apprentissages autochtones, ces exclusions font partie du fonctionnement colonial de l'enseignement postsecondaire que les universitaires autochtones et leurs alliés s'efforcent de perturber. Pour que les établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire restent à jour et s'adaptent au processus en constante évolution d'articulation et d'accréditation des connaissances, la reconnaissance et la mise en œuvre de l'indigénisation de l'évaluation et de la reconnaissance des acquis sont essentielles. Les lecteurs acquerront une meilleure compréhension de l'évaluation et de la reconnaissance des acquis, des considérations de conception et de mise en œuvre lorsqu'ils cherchent à indigéniser un processus d'évaluation et de reconnaissance des acquis, et des exemples d'évaluation et de reconnaissance des acquis bien mise en œuvre pour les apprenants et les apprenantes autochtones. Alors que de plus en plus d'établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire s'interrogent (à des degrés divers) sur la manière de remédier à l'exclusion coloniale des savoirs et des apprenants et apprenantes autochtones, un processus d'évaluation et de reconnaissance des acquis autochtones peut s'avérer utile. Dans l'État colonisateur du Canada en particulier, où les Appels à l'action de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation mettent l'accent sur la fourniture d'un financement et d'une formation adéquats pour que les éducateurs et les éducatrices de l'enseignement postsecondaire puissent intégrer les connaissances et les méthodes d'enseignement autochtones dans la salle de classe, l'indigénisation de l'évaluation et la reconnaissance des acquis autochtones pourrait potentiellement soutenir le travail de réalisation de cette promesse. Le présent document se déroule comme suit : 1) une discussion sur la méthodologie de recherche et d'analyse; 2) une discussion sur l'importance de l'indigénisation de l'évaluation et de la reconnaissance des acquis; 3) un aperçu des principales leçons de conception tirées des recherches publiées; 4) une discussion sur les idées importantes concernant la mise en œuvre; et 5) une conclusion.

Tânisi Peyton Juhnke nitisiyihkâson, Treaty Four kayâhtê nitôhcin mâka Lekwungen askiy mêhkwâc niwîkin. My name is Peyton Juhnke, I am Métis from Treaty Four territory in what is now known as Regina, Saskatchewan, and I grew up on the homelands of Wolastoqiyik in Fredericton, New Brunswick. I now live on the lands of the Lekwungen speaking peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt, and the WSANEC Peoples. Through my maternal side, I am a band member of Cowessess First Nation and am connected to this community through three of my late great-grandparents bearing the last names Pelletier, Desjarlais, and Lavallee. On my paternal side, we have German ancestry. I hold a Bachelor of Philosophy from the University of New Brunswick and I am currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria.

My name is Tobin LeBlanc Haley, and I am a white settler descending from Irish, English and French settlers who lived in Unama'ki (Cape Breton), New Brunswick, and Quebec. Currently, I live in Fredericton, New Brunswick located on the territory of the Wolastoqey and am an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick. In the context of the topics covered in this paper I am very much the learner.

The practice of assessing and recognizing prior learning has gained traction within post-secondary institutions. Typically called Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) or Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)[1], this method of assessment can be defined as "a process that involves the identification, documentation, assessment, and recognition of learning acquired through formal and informal study" (Thompson & Zakos, 2021, p. 40). Having emerged in 1934 (Wihak, Collins & Beamer, 2005, p. 8), this method of assessing knowledge gained outside of academia first began to be used in the 1970s in the United States among adults to gain access to post-secondary education (Thompson & Zakos, 2021, p. 13). More recently, there has been a growing focus on the ways that institutions and practitioners are adapting the PLAR process to respond to the specific needs of Indigenous learners coming from outside formal pathways and as a means of addressing the discrepancy in Indigenous versus non-Indigenous people accessing post-secondary education. The Indigenization of PLAR is still considered a new and emerging field (Anaquod et al., 2021).

The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of existing scholarship on the Indigenization of PLAR. Providing a careful review of this literature contributes to a missing map of this field of scholarship and shares key insights for scholars. This is a timely contribution. While the assessment of prior learning has been in practice for decades, it has often excluded (and continues to exclude) the knowledges of those who remain underrepresented within higher education. In the case of Indigenous learners, such exclusions are part of the settler colonial operation of post-secondary education that Indigenous scholars and allies are working to disrupt. In order for post-secondary institutions to remain current and adaptive to the ever-changing process of articulating and accrediting knowledge, recognizing and implementing the Indigenization of PLAR is integral. Readers will gain an improved understanding of PLAR, design and implementation considerations when seeking to Indigenize a PLAR process, and examples of well-implemented PLAR for Indigenous learners. As more and more post-secondary institutions consider (to greater and lesser extents) how to address ongoing colonial exclusions of Indigenous knowledges and learners, an Indigenized PLAR process can be an important tool. In the settler state of Canada specifically, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015) include a focus on providing adequate funding and training so that post-secondary educators can incorporate Indigenous knowledges and teaching methods into the classroom (62. ii). Indigenized PLAR, which involves the recognition of Indigenous knowledges and supports Indigenous learner access to post-secondary education, could potentially support the work of fulfilling this promise. Alone, however, as discussed in the conclusion, PLAR will not address the exclusion of Indigenous learners and knowledges or ensure respectful and meaningful inclusion of Indigenous people and knowledges within the academy.

This paper proceeds as follows: 1) a discussion of the search and analysis methodology; 2) a discussion of the importance of Indigenizing PLAR; 3) an overview of key design lessons drawn from the literature; 4) a discussion of important insights in implementation; and 5) a conclusion.

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[1] The acronyms PLA, PLAR, APL, and RPL are commonly used to discuss prior learning assessment and recognition. For the ease of the reader, PLAR will be used when referring to the assessment and recognition of prior learning; however, different authors referenced use different terms. According to Wong (1997, p. 208) depending on one's geographic location, the term used to refer to the assessment and recognition of prior learning will differ from Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), or the most commonly used term in Canada, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) (Wihak, Collins & Beamer, 2005, p. xii). An additional term that came up in the literature was Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) (Thompson & Zakos, 2021).

Methodology

The guiding question animating this research was, quite simply, what does the literature on Indigenizing PLAR say about this process for post-secondary institutions? In order to retrieve the literature on Indigenizing the PLAR process, a scoping review was conducted to determine the scholarship within this field, where there are intersections in understanding, and where scholars diverge in their thinking. Upon reflecting on the available literature, we encountered key questions: How is an Indigenized PLAR process more equitable? What can we learn from those who have implemented this type of process? And what are the gaps? From there, a set of search terms were identified to encompass the scope of the information being sought. The search terms employed to yield the literature were "Indigenous recognition of prior learning assessment," "Indigenizing recognition of prior learning assessment," "Aboriginal people(s) prior learning," "Indigenizing PLA," "Indigenous PLA," "Indigenizing PLAR," "Indigenous PLAR," "Indigenizing RPL," "Indigenous RPL," "Indigenous learners in higher education," "Indigenous adult learners," and "Aboriginal holistic model." For search engines, Google Scholar, the University of New Brunswick online library search engine, and the University of Victoria online library search engine were used. We chose to use the entire online library option, rather than specific scholarly databases (such as JSTOR) from both universities, to capture as many pieces as possible given that the topic at hand is relatively new and interdisciplinary.

As for the inclusion and exclusion criteria, all years were considered; there were no restrictions placed on the country of origin (although all pieces needed to be in English); and all works needed to pertain to, or at the very least mention, supporting Indigenous learners. This was determined by doing a keyword search on every article to ensure it mentioned "Indigenous" or "Aboriginal." The literature could discuss PLA in various contexts, including receipt of admission into a post-secondary institution, transfer across programs and/or institutions, and a professional context of obtaining employment—as long as the findings were transferrable to an academic context. In total, 23 scholarly pieces and three reports were considered, and the main contributions of each piece were entered into a database, which was, in turn, analysed for key themes. Through this process, the authors were able to identify key examples of how PLAR has been Indigenized and identified three key lessons for any institution seeking to adopt these practices. This paper will now move to consider the three key lessons.

The Importance of Indigenizing PLAR

In a broad sense, PLAR has been identified as a tool to make education more accessible and equitable (Gair, 2013; Wheelahan, Dennis, Firth et al., 2003, Harris, 1999, and Castle & Attwood, 2001 as cited in Hamer, 2010[2]), responding to the call to implement equity, diversity, and inclusion practices within higher education. Thompson and Zakos (2021) also support this claim by stating that PLAR can "improve access and equity to formal learning opportunities for those who have been poorly served by conventional approaches to education delivery" (p. 40). Other scholars view PLAR as "advantaging the excluded, illuminating and validating knowledges

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[2] As this is a review of the literature, we at time make note of relevant literature and quotes cited in the pieces reviewed using "as cited by" or similar. This practice of secondary citation accurately captures our learning from the pieces we reviewed and, importantly, provides the reader with a sense of the "conversations" happening between PLAR scholars. In the context of this literature review, such a citation practice offers a more fulsome view of the landscape of the field.

that previously have been invisible, and breaking down discriminatory barriers" (Burtch, 2006 as cited in Gair, 2013, p. 73). PLAR has been found to aid in "closing the gap between privileged and marginalized peoples, including Indigenous learners" (Dyson & Keating, 2005, as cited in Gair, 2013, p. 73). Frawley (2017) discusses the potential for upholding inclusion within the recognition of prior learning and states that, according to Gidley and colleagues (2010), there are different degrees of social inclusion, but "the widest interpretation involves the human potential lens of social inclusion as empowerment" (p. 72). Price and Jackson-Barrett (2009) trouble these assertions by examining how the intentions of universities to promote equity for underserved populations through PLAR does not always materialize.

Concerning the rates of Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education, the numbers are still lagging behind those of non-Indigenous students (Anaquod et al., 2021, p. 5). This discrepancy has been traced to the negative experiences of Indigenous students within the education system of the settler state (Lydster et al., 2019 as cited in Anaquod et al., 2021, p. 12). Such experiences are, in large part, due to the tumultuous history of education being used as a tool of assimilation and genocide against Indigenous peoples "to destroy Indigenous languages and undermine Indigenous cultural practices" (Thompson & Zakos, 2021, p. 28), specifically through the Indian Residential School and Indian Day School systems. One of the key goals of these systems was to strip Indigenous children, who were forced to attend the institutions, of their identity. In reflecting on this violence, one can map the intergenerational impact on Indigenous peoples' self-esteem and identity, specifically in the context of the value of the cultural knowledges so often weaponized against us/them.[3] An Indigenized PLAR process can contribute to tending to these harms by "break[ing] down barriers … to build self-esteem, self-confidence and reduce the negative impact of discrimination and colonization" (Thompson & Zakos, 2021, p. 78). However, the Indigenous learners who find themselves in post-secondary institutions are underrepresented among students engaging in the PLAR process (Wihak, Collins & Beamer, 2005). Indigenized PLAR processes can potentially serve as important tools for reconnecting Indigenous students with education because as Thompson and Zakos (2021) state, PLAR provides "[t]he validation of our experiences at an individual level, and a collective level [which] is an important part of the learning process and the healing process" (p. 31). Drawing on a case study of prior learning portfolio development at the First Nations Technical Institute, Hill (2004) states that this process encourages "unlearning negative messages of self and culture" (p. 135). In this way, PLAR can be used in reconstructing identity rooted in culture. However, it is important to note that identity reconstruction is not a necessary component of the PLAR process because, as Robertson (2011a) states, this assumption "is grounded in a historic trauma worldview" (p. 98), which "operates from the assumption the selves of Aboriginal people are damaged and in need of replacement" (Robertson, 2011b, p. 468).

In considerations of the ways that PLAR may fall out of alignment with EDI practices, it has been stated multiple times within the literature that PLAR may unfairly privilege those who have the academic vocabulary and/or skillset to communicate their knowledge in ways that are in alignment with the expectations within post-secondary institutions (Hamer, 2011; Wheelahan, Miller & Newton, 2002 as cited in Hamer, 2012; Wotherspoon, 2015). The imposition of normative judgments on learners about how they communicate or translate their learning has the potential to exclude those coming from outside an academic setting who are not as well-versed in this communication style (Andersson & Fejes, 2005 & Cameron, 2005 as cited in Hamer, 2012). To complicate this further, Hamer (2010) asserts that PLAR processes can be used in "assessing

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[3] We use us/them here as Peyton Juhnke is Indigenous and Tobin LeBlanc is a white settler.

the individual against norms (competencies) set by the dominant culture" (p. 104) and can thus "become a powerful tool for the re-imposition of normative judgements" (p. 106). Dolleman (2022) identifies how this point of tension about what learning is accepted within academia, and what learning falls outside of Western conceptions of knowledge acquisition, can cause harm to learners who are undergoing the PLA portfolio processes. Building on the scholarship of Whittaker and colleagues (2006), Dolleman (2022) states that when students are unsuccessful in having their prior learning recognized within the portfolio process it "can result in students calling into question their perceptions of themselves as learners or even their social identities" (p. 45). Indeed, it has been found in "earlier research findings that successful RPL candidates are those who can 'translate their professional or vocational practice discourse into the academic' (Wheelahan, Miller, & Newton, 2002, 13) and underlin[ing] the potentially exclusionary effects of RPL for those who do not meet the prevailing normative criteria or cannot affect the necessary translation (Andersson and Fejes 2005; Cameron 2005)" (p. 115). The risk of PLAR that does not attend to broader EDI considerations and the specific location of Indigenous learners is further alienation from the academy and a reproduction of colonial and other damaging exclusions within post-secondary education. As such, this paper sets out key considerations for Indigenizing PLAR as reflected in the literature.

Lessons in Implementation

Lesson One: Situating PLAR Processes Within the Local Context

One lesson that emerged from the research was the importance of situating processes of knowledge recognition within local Indigenous nations (Anaquod et al., 2021; National Staff Development Committee of the Australian National Training Authority, 1996; Dolleman, 2022; Eagles, Woodward & Pope, 2005; Thompson & Zakos, 2021; Wallace, Agar & Curry, 2009; Wotherspoon, 2015). Drawing on the recommendations of Wallace, Agar and Curry (2009), this contextualization would look like creating "a model that works from Indigenous participants' strengths" (p. 114) through working with Indigenous Elders. In their work, Wallace, Agar and Curry (2009) prioritized engagement with Indigenous communities when designing services or tools for them. A model following these recommendations would result in an PLAR process that is consultative, iterative, and reflective. Dolleman (2022) supports the above through the observation that "the most effective mechanisms […] have been developed in consultation with (or entirely by) Indigenous people[s] themselves, incorporating culturally-specific [sic] outcomes and assessment" (pp. 43–44). Eagles, Woodward and Pope (2005) also articulate that, since this work involves Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and stories, they should be involved throughout the stages of PLAR development. In this collaboration and sharing of knowledge, Sanderson (2010) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging who and where this knowledge is coming from. This acknowledgment is a way of upholding relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) with the Indigenous peoples one is working with, in addition to the relationship one has developed with the knowledge. In responding to the priorities of the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in terms of addressing the educational inequity that Indigenous students face, Anaquod and colleagues (2021) have identified that at the heart of doing this work effectively and respectfully are relationships with Indigenous students, as well as with Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association institutions. Through the meaningful involvement of Indigenous communities, Indigenous

knowledges get embedded within the process of recognizing prior learning (Frawley, 2017) and thus create the space for more recognition and acknowledgement within academia more broadly. The National Staff Development Committee of the Australian National Training Authority (1996) provides examples of how to structure a culturally responsive PLAR process through collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in ways that are grounded in their distinct cultures and protocols. This process "may include co-opting of community members (including Elders) into the assessment process, attention to individual/group learning consideration of language/literacy, availability of culturally appropriate benchmarks, [and] availability of assessors trained in cultural awareness if they are non-Aboriginal" (National Staff Development Committee of the Australian National Training Authority, 1996, p. 38). Thompson and Zakos (2021) offer insight into how to build an Indigenous prior learning portfolio process which centers the consultation of and participation from Indigenous communities of the region—this is taking place "in order to hold the traditional teachings of the land and language on which the course is to be taught" (p. 94). An important result in an inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing within curriculum while honouring protocols (Thompson & Zakos, 2021).

Lesson Two: Recognizing Multiple Forms of Knowledge Acquisition and Sharing

The second lesson that emerged from the literature was the importance of developing a prior learning recognition assessment process that recognizes multiple forms of knowledge acquisition and sharing (Eagles, Woodward & Pope, 2005; Hamer, 2010; Hamer, 2012; Hill, 2004; National Staff Development Committee of the Australian National Training Authority, 1996; Thompson & Zakos, 2021; Wallace et al., 2009; Wihak, Collins & Beamer, 2005; Wotherspoon, 2015). Hamer (2010) states that requiring knowledge to be presented in rigid and specific ways can be exclusionary, especially to those coming from outside expected pathways, which is a perspective echoed by Wotherspoon (2015), who states that privilege is afforded to those who can represent their knowledge in ways that align with academic vocabulary. As a result, Hamer (2010; 2012) and Eagles, Woodward and Pope (2005) argue for a more expansive offering of knowledge presentation to make the process more comprehensible and relevant to Indigenous learners and their specific cultural contexts, and thus ultimately more appealing to engage in. However, it is likely that this flexibility and openness will benefit non-Indigenous learners coming from a variety of backgrounds as well. Scholars in the field have conceptualized what a flexible process might include. Wallace (2008) found that technology was effective for students to represent their knowledge, and the National Staff Development Committee of the Australian National Training Authority (1996) suggested a more expansive assessment process that allows for the "consideration for culturally appropriate timing, location, methods of assessment and cultural evidence for RPL claims" (p. 3). Both Thompson and Zakos (2021) and Hill (2004) found that storytelling or oral presentations and visual representations, such as artwork using mind maps, were ways of making space for learners. The push to provide more variety is supported by the experiences of students who prefer a more interactive process that is responsive to various learning styles (Wihak, Collins & Beamer, 2005).

Lesson Three: Navigating Recognition and Retraumatization

The final major theme identified from within the literature was navigating the tension that exists between the ability of PLAR to improve the self-perception of Indigenous students and the

ability of PLAR to potentially retraumatize students. Dolleman (2022) and Thompson and Zakos (2021) write that the PLAR process presents the opportunity to improve the self-concept of Indigenous peoples and their distinct cultures as being rich with intelligence and value, countering dominant narratives undermining the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge systems. This can be taken a step further with the potential for identity creation through engaging in PLAR (Hamer, 2011; Robertson, 2011b; Whittaker, Whittaker & Cleary, 2006 as cited in Hamer, 2012). However, in processing learning moments that have occurred throughout one's life, there is the potential for the resurfacing of trauma to occur. Robertson (2011a) states that this process does not need to involve the divulging of personal, communal, or historic recollections of trauma, as this can be damaging (Robertson, 2011b). Since there is the potential for the remembering of traumatic experiences, it would be beneficial for educational institutions engaging in PLAR processes to consider how they will support students. The Australian National Training Authority (1996) recommends providing cultural support such as Elders and Knowledge Keepers for students, and cultural sensitivity or awareness training for assessors, particularly those who are not Indigenous.

Implementing PLAR with Indigenous Learners

At first glance, institutions that want to create an Indigenized approach to PLAR might be tempted to adapt an already established process, but as Koller and Rasmussen (2021) state regarding Indigenization more broadly, we must "rebuild anew using an authentic balance of Indigenous and Western knowledges as a foundation" (p. 221). This rebuilding must be rooted in Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing as "the prospect of being assessed against unfamiliar norms through perceived exclusionary processes is not attractive" (Hamer, 2011, p. 105). When examining the link between recognizing prior learning and Indigenous frameworks for understanding the value of knowledge, Wotherspoon (2015), citing the work of Battiste and Henderson (2009), states that "Indigenous knowledge systems, in contrast to the modular and hierarchical ways in which formal school systems are organized, do not depend on the transmission and measurement of knowledge so much as on language and relationships that enable people to understand and express meaningful roles in creation" (p. 81). In this way, an Indigenized approach to PLAR necessitates the linking of assessment outcomes with the priorities of Indigenous communities, specifically in terms of language, relationships, and responsibilities, while also balancing institutional outcomes.

The recommendation that repeatedly emerged from the literature was the importance of collaborating with Indigenous nations—whose ancestral homelands this work is taking place on—to build an Indigenized process rooted in their specific culture(s) (Anaquod et al., 2021; National Staff Development Committee of the Australian National Training Authority, 1996; Dolleman, 2022; Eagles, Woodward & Pope, 2005; Thompson & Zakos, 2021; Wallace, Agar & Curry, 2009; Wotherspoon, 2015). In taking this approach, post-secondary institutions can more effectively mitigate pan-Indigeneity[4] in the PLAR process. Pan-Indigenization refers to the conflating of cultures, practices, and experiences of many or all Indigenous peoples (Butsang, 2022). Such conflation remains an issue well into the 21st century, despite the fact that it is known that there are various nations that comprise First Nations peoples in Canada, in addition to Métis and Inuit peoples. The problem with pan-Indigenizing Indigenous communities is that it "obscures the realities of the varying relationships diverse communities have with the land and each other"

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[4] Also referred to as "pan-Indianness," "pan-indigenizing," or "pan-Indianism" (Bowra & Mashford-Pringle, 2021).

(Butsang, 2022, p. 70). Further, pan-Indigenization serves to overlook or leave out the distinct teachings and knowledges embedded within each nation and the land it is in relationship with (Bowra & Mashford-Pringle, 2021). In this consultation and collaboration with Indigenous communities, it is encouraged to build the PLAR process in a way that upholds Indigenous teachings to ensure that the outcomes are culturally specific and culturally relevant to students (Dolleman, 2022; McKeown et al., 2018).

One example of how Indigenous teachings have been incorporated into an Indigenized PLAR process is at the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) where students are encouraged to reflect on their learning, holistically drawing on teachings about the "four aspects of the self– spirit, heart (emotion), mind, and body: the capacity to see, feel, know, and do" (Hill, 2004, pp. 145–146). This approach is also reflected in Thompson and Zakos (2021) where they identify this holistic understanding of the self in relation to learning as a key component of the portfolio process. Additionally, students are encouraged to recognize their kinship ties to their more-than-human relatives and how these relationships contribute to their learning, building on a Haudenosaunee model (Thompson & Zakos, 2021). At FNTI, students undergo exercises based on Anishinaabe teachings of the Seven Stages of Life to map their learning with their life stage (Hill, 2004). Within the context of program planning, Sanderson (2010) offers another example of incorporating Indigenous culture through medicine wheel teachings, emphasizing the interconnectedness of everything. Thompson and Zakos (2021) write that the PLAR portfolio "provided a safe place in which cultural knowledge and practices could be shared and valued, often for the first time" (Thompson & Zakos, 2021, p. 103), showing the unique opportunity of the Indigenized process to privilege Indigenous knowledge within academia. Despite there being a framework for how Indigenous knowledges have been incorporated into PLAR thus far, Thompson and Zakos (2021) urge PLAR practitioners again to not rely on pan-Indigenous approaches, but rather to take the time to work with the local Indigenous communities to design a process reflective of their knowledge systems.

Another way that an Indigenized approach to PLAR is distinct is that it is structured in a way that is expansive to incorporate various modes of knowledge production, transmission, and presentation (Arnold, 2013; Eagles, Woodward & Pope, 2005; Hill, 2004; Thompson & Zakos, 2021; Wallace, Agar & Curry, 2009; Wihak, Collins & Beamer, 2005). In this way, "'ways of knowing' different from traditional academic pathways can be acknowledged and accepted" (Arnold, 2017, p. 481). Aligning with the oral transmission of knowledge, often through storytelling, which is integral to many Indigenous communities, certain PLAR assessment processes allow for the sharing of knowledge orally (Eagles, Woodward & Pope, 2005; Hill, 2004). Arnold (2013) states that "all [our] 'stories', whatever genre or structure … [are] underpinning academic knowledge" (p. 36), further emphasizing the validity of storytelling within academia. This is echoed again in Arnold (2017) when he writes that "stories are as important a way of knowing as any other" (p. 489). Other emerging paths are presenting knowledge through technology (Wihak, Collins & Beamer, 2005) which creates space for "audio, visual and written forms, that can be flexible" (Wallace, Agar & Curry, 2009, p. 119), or through more creative avenues such as artwork (Hill, 2004). As Eagles, Woodward and Pope (2005) explain, "much research suggests that transference of knowledge takes place through oral processes including speech, story telling, song and dance" (p. 5) encompassing the value of varied modes of knowledge presentation. While all learners have different strengths, "the ultimate goal is to help learners demonstrate their competence confidently and clearly" (Thompson & Zakos, 2021, p. 43).

Conclusion

This paper has provided readers with a mapping of existing literature on the emerging field of Indigenizing PLAR. We reviewed the importance of Indigenizing PLAR, key design lessons, and key insights for implementation. Overall, the literature suggested that an Indigenized PLAR process within post-secondary institutions, when done with leadership from Indigenous communities, can be one tool, among others, to support Indigenous learners and to further embed routinely excluded Indigenous knowledges within the academy.

In assessing the possibility for future areas of research within the scope of Indigenizing PLAR, there is room for assessing what this looks like within post-secondary institutions, specifically in the admissions process rather than in post-admissions. Additionally, research that attends to the different challenges encountered in introducing a PLAR process across professional and non-professional programs would shed light on the different challenges universities and colleges may encounter when implementing a PLAR process across their institution. What is needed is a concerted effort of the part of post-secondary institutions to invest in supporting learners coming from outside expected formal pathways to access PLAR assessments. Alone, however, PLAR cannot address the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge and students in post-secondary institutions or create spaces where such knowledges are respected. In Canada specifically, addressing the funding gaps for Indigenous postsecondary students identified in the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action as well as addressing the persistent underrepresentation of Indigenous faculty members (2%) must be prioritized (Statistics Canada, 2020). PLAR is an important part, but only a part of the broader process of addressing the colonial exclusion of Indigenous people and knowledges from post-secondary institutions in settler states.

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