

MODULE 2

TOKENIZATION



"I was in a class once, and we were discussing something pretty controversial, I believe the topic was cultural appropriation of art, of Native art, using it as a nationalist identity; on the twenty dollar bill we have Bill Reid's First Men, or The First Men. We were discussing that in a class and a teacher literally did a 90-degree angle to me and said, "And what do you think about this? What do you think about this situation?" (IVT: 1,19)

Before proceeding with this Module, please watch IVT: 1,19 and 1,20.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

"Tokenization"

Tokenization is a concept that typically arises in relation to this clip when it has been discussed in workshops and other meetings. Consider the following:

- What is tokenization/tokenism?
- Why is tokenization a problem?

"Aboriginal as expert"

This student's commentary suggests that the instructor's actions could be interpreted as being consistent with the assumption that Aboriginal people are "experts" to be consulted in reference to Aboriginal subject matter.

The "Aboriginal as expert" assumption presumes that any Aboriginal person has knowledge of, and is willing to speak to, issues and information regarding Aboriginal peoples and history. For instance there was a situation in a class where an instructor, when asked about a particular Aboriginal

culture, turned to a student he knew to be from that heritage and asked her to speak about her culture to the class. This student had not identified her heritage to the class, nor had she volunteered to speak about her heritage. When the instructor called upon her, the student quickly declined and later reported feeling embarrassed and uncomfortable. She stated that the instructor had tokenized her to serve a particular function for his class and supplement his lack of knowledge in the area.

The "Aboriginal as expert" assumption also falsely presumes that a single person could be knowledgeable of a vast array of material and diversity of peoples, cultures, and histories because he or she is Aboriginal. This assumption can unfairly place the burden of the discussion on one or few students, though the classroom discussion is not their responsibility - it is the instructor's. That does not, of course, mean that Aboriginal students may not have something of value, or a unique perspective, to bring to the discussion: the question is rather the terms on which they are to be engaged.

This situation raises an interesting issue: when an instructor calls on a student of Aboriginal heritage in regards to Aboriginals subject matter, what is the instructor risking in terms of how the student perceives their actions, and how other students perceive the same? What might the students take away from the classroom as an idea of appropriate ways to conduct a classroom discussion?

Additional clips relevant to this module:

- IVT: 4,35
- IVT: 9,7
- IVT: 6,8

WORKSHOP MATERIALS

WORKSHOP PLAYLIST

1. IVT: 1,19
2. IVT: 1,20
3. IVT: 1,32

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What about this situation made this student uncomfortable? (You may want to revisit this clip, IVT: 1,19 and 1,20.)
2. Consider the intent of the instructor vs. the impact on the student:
 - a. What do you think the intentions of the instructor were?
 - b. What was the impact on this student? Can you infer how the student interpreted the motivation for the instructor's actions?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

3. How might this situation impact others involved in the situation:
 - a. Other students? How might they have perceived this situation?
 - b. The instructor?

EXERCISE

When asked in what ways the instructor could have handled this situation better, the student suggested that the instructor could have waited for her to respond to the situation rather than call on her. (IVT: 1,32)

Are there ways of calling on a student that might not result in such a negative reaction? As a group, discuss ways that the instructor might have been able to minimize the negative impact on the student.

At the end of the exercise, discuss the following:

Do discussions have to take place in class? What other ways can students participate in a discussion?

Example:

Create a blog for students to post their thoughts on classes/discussion topics.