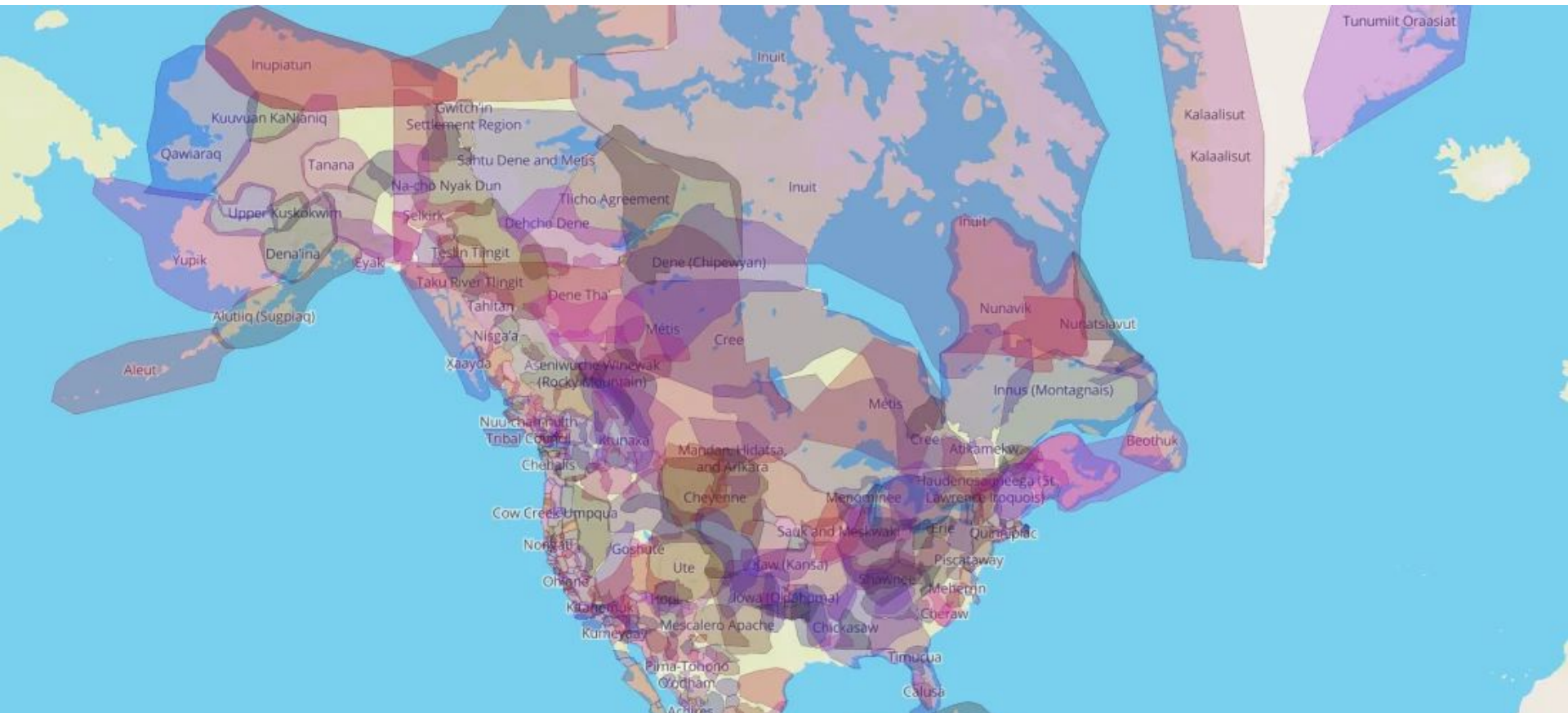


# Confronting Climate Distress: Reframing Climate Anxiety to Action



# Land Acknowledgement

To learn about whose land you are on, visit [native-land.ca](https://www.native-land.ca)





# Community Check-In



# How is Climate Impacting Us?

## Have you felt...

### **Sad, angry, despairing or confused due to:**

- Deforestation, biodiversity loss, extinction events
- Heatwaves melting glaciers, drying forests, community loss
- Flooding, mass displacing, drowning, infrastructure damage

### **Sense of loss, melancholy, helplessness due to:**

- Changes in local environment
- Loss of green spaces, familiar plants, animals
- Sudden shifts in ecological systems

### **Hopelessness or scared about:**

- The future of the planet, your family, children, and future generations





# Heatwaves

- Growing frequency
- Increases negative mental health and wellbeing
- Impacts cognitive capacity and work
- Exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities
- Spikes in substance use and violence (Sanz-Barbero 2018)



# Forest Fires

- Wildfires on the rise globally
- Mental/physical wellbeing impacts
- Community displacement
- Direct and indirect trauma for families, youth and students  
(Brown 2019)





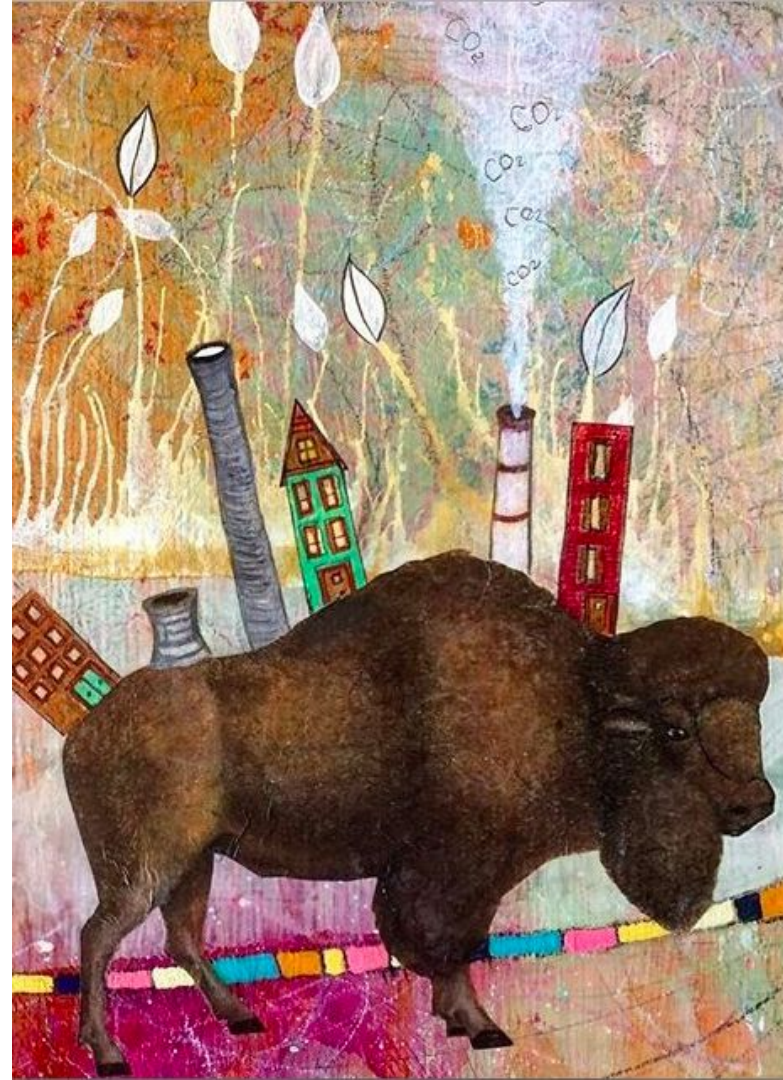
# Flooding

- Growing frequency due to climate change
- More unpredictable and damaging
- Stress, anxiety, grief, loss, depression, PTSD (Cainconi 2020)
- Disease, substance misuse, gender violence



# Air Pollution

- Fossil Fuel air pollution causes 10+ million premature deaths annually (Vohra 2021)
- Increasing rates of asthma in youth (Yale Environment 2019)
- Causes respiratory, heart and cognitive disease
- Shelter in place can foster isolation and distress





# Converging Crises

- Climate change
- Covid pandemic
- Expanding inequity
- Food insecurity
- Ongoing systemic racism
- And more



# Group Discussion

**Prompt:** *How do you see climate change events and emotions impacting how you navigate your teaching and student engagements?*



# Terminology: Climate Anxiety

- Chronic fear of environmental doom (Albrecht, 2011)
- Mental distress or anxiety associated with worsening environmental conditions (Usher, Durkin, Bhullar, 2019)
- Anxiety experienced in response to past, current and anticipated ecological crisis (Pihkala, 2020)



# Terminology: Climate Grief

- Grief associated with physical ecological losses and attendant ways of life and culture;
- Grief associated with disruptions to environmental knowledge systems and resulting feelings of loss of identity;
- Grief associated with anticipated future losses of place, land, species, and culture





# Terminology: what do we mean by..

**Eco-denial:** blocking bad environmental news.

**Eco-dissociation:** Disconnection from being a part of natural systems.

**Eco-rage:** Anger at those we perceive as responsible for ecocide or climate crisis. Frustrated at not being able to stop the bad actions of others, we may strike out.

**Eco and Climate Trauma:** Severe environmental experiences can become trauma

**Solistagia:** pain or distress caused by the loss of a comforting place; the sense of desolation people feel, consciously or unconsciously, when their home or land is lost.



# Make space to talk about climate change

**Be clear** complex feelings can be a normal and rational response to climate threats.

**Empower students** to envision just, equitable, healthy systems and communities.

**Teach and model** healthy ways to respond to difficult facts about climate change.

**Be respectful** and supportive of different stages of understanding. Don't deny someone's climate feelings. Acknowledge them and be curious about them.

**Use harm reduction** approaches and pair difficult facts with solution-based thinking that build agency, imagination and conversation.

**Teach about root causes** of climate change (i.e. fossil fuel in emissions, gender inequity, colonization, white supremacy) and how to connect solutions to root causes.

**Use art, nature, music, poetry, food, dance, and imagination** as different mediums to explore climate feelings and issues.

**Build trust.** Talking about mental health and wellbeing impacts of climate change requires dedicated trust-building to open welcoming space to be vulnerable.





# Allow for Messy Hope

- Climate anxiety and hope are interconnected and messy, that's OKAY!
- Shift Doom narratives to solution-based thinking and collaboration (Marlon 2019)
- Take time to highlight hope and good news
- Break climate challenges down into its parts and pieces that offer more agency and pathways to action



# Engaging a Trauma Lens to Support Students

- Relationship/Connectivity/Warmth
- Transparency/Predictability
- Empowerment/Reflexivity





# Relationship/Connectivity/Warmth

- *Focus on compassion*
- *Get to know your students; show you care*
- Think through your lesson plan and anticipate as many outcomes as you can; provide content warnings, if needed
- Be open-minded and empathize without judgement and/or threats
- Affirm responses by reflecting back using students' words throughout the discussion
- If you feel like the discussion is becoming non-productive or spiraling out of control, pause the discussion and have everyone perform grounding/settling exercises
- Thank the students for a respectful discussion when wrapping up

Zacarian, Alvarez-Ortiz, and Haynes, 2020



# Transparency/Predictability

- *Use consistent routines*
- Be clear and transparent about expectations, course objectives and assignments so students can focus on learning rather than predicting what's next
- Use multiple modes of communication to reach students and ensure they've received current information
- Give students materials (readings, videos, etc.) ahead of time and have them engage with the content through reflective activities
- Inform students of the structure of the facilitation
  - What should they expect?
  - How can they provide responses?
  - What is your role?
  - Are there any boundaries they need to know?

Zacarian, Alvarez-Ortiz, and Haynes, 2020





Theme	Caring Pedagogy	Kindness Pedagogy
Scope	Individual	Group
Impact	Personal/Small	Personal/Group/Big (Transformative)
Philosophy	Empathy, moral/ethical imperative	Compassion
Main idea	Understanding the individual or having personal knowledge of people	Believing people and believing in people
Practice	Individual to individual connection and understanding	Altering our approach and working atmosphere/world
Commitment	Time intensive	If practiced well, it could save time
Examples	Getting to know individual student and their situation in order to offer support when needed	Taking a more collaborative approach to learning by for example, having space to display, taking the time to have check-ins with students when requested and needed, using students' names, being open to accommodations, adapting curriculum to reflect student need. Use of enquiry-driven discussion is easier.
Scale	Harder to scale up, i.e. in bigger classes	Easier to scale up

# Mobilizing as Practitioners

- Gather information and resources about climate change and trauma impacts
- Cultivate a trauma-informed community of practice
- Build a culture shift in your department that incorporates climate and trauma lenses
- Create space to process and connect with others about the impacts of being a climate change communicator
- Find ways to link and embed strategies to your current practice.





# Engaging a Trauma Lens to Support Students

- Trust and kind curiosity
- Somatic awareness
- Knowing the story
- Creative Expression





# Trust & Kind Curiosity

- Allow students to opt out of potentially triggering topics
- Consider alternative ways to engage with the material for students opting out
- Build flexibility into your assessment and absence policies so students can opt out, no questions asked



# Somatic Awareness

- Physical bodily awareness through breathing or grounding exercises
- Square breathing exercise
- Five senses





# Knowing the Story

- Having the facts about climate change
- Ability to work on solutions





# Creative Expression

- Offer assignments beyond written reports and papers
- Role playing, jig-saw activities
- Card and board games
- Assignments with creative writing, dance, theatre, music, drawing, slam poetry, film, animation etc.



# Group Discussion

**Prompt:** *How do you see yourself engaging with strategies outlined in this session in your teaching practice?*

*What could be some of the barriers or challenges?*

*What are some of the successful strategies that you have practiced in your teaching to support your students?*



# Group Reflections and Strategies



Final  
Questions  
&  
Wrap up!







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