

## Old Ways Are the New Way Forward

### How Indigenous pedagogy can benefit everyone



A Reflection Paper prepared for the Canadian Commission for UNESCO  
By Jean-Paul Restoule and Chaw-win-is  
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## About the Authors

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Jean-Paul Restoule is Anishinaabe and a member of the Dokis First Nation. He is Professor and Chair of Indigenous Education at the University of Victoria. Jean-Paul's research includes Indigenous pedagogy in online learning environments, and looking at how teachers feel best supported when learning to bring Indigenous perspectives into their classrooms. Jean-Paul recently served as Indigenous curriculum lead for an innovative online course for First Nations school Principals and was the founding curator of Deepening Knowledge, an effort to infuse Indigenous peoples' histories, knowledge and pedagogies into all levels of education. Jean-Paul is also the instructor of a MOOC examining how Indigenous perspectives can benefit all learners.

### **Chaw-win-is**

My name is Chaw-win-is aksup (Boulder on the Beach Woman) and I am Nuu-chah-nulth aht and a member of Tla-qui-aht and Cheklesaht nations. Currently, I am the Indigenous Resurgence Coordinator for the faculty of Education at the University of Victoria, in British Columbia, Canada. I have been working in Indigenous Education in various capacities locally here for over 20 years as well as a community organizer and activist on the national crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada. I received my MA in Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria in 2007 and my research was focused on ensuring I documented and shared the history and stories of my late grandfather Chah-chin-sun-up who was an Elder, Beach keeper, Spokesman for the Chiefs and Head Chief Warrior of the Cheklesaht peoples. I am a mother of two children who are the centre of everything I do, as well as my communities. It is the love of them and this land I belong to that drives me to keep moving forward.

## Introduction

*“The pedagogy and practices that honour Indigenous learners also complement their peers in schools. Interactivity, assessment for/as learning, experiential opportunities, character education, commitment to the environment, wholistic approaches to teaching, differentiated instruction, parental/guardian involvement, community engagement, hands-on activities, the use of exemplars, inquiry based projects, consistent/safe classroom leadership (i.e. procedures & routines), technology, scaffolding and student-centred learning goals (i.e. clear success criteria and descriptive feedback) are some of the strategies that are identified as more active for Indigenous students<sup>1</sup>. These approaches are also reflected in the literature regarding factors that contribute to overall student success in equitable school systems.<sup>2</sup>”*

This reflection paper argues that traditional Indigenous ways of teaching and learning are relevant not only for Indigenous people, but for the education of all people. As teachers and practitioners, the authors seek to explore the connection between what is sometimes referred to as “new” innovations in education with the forms of teaching that originated in traditional Indigenous education ways. For instance, think of differentiated instruction, daily physical activity, outdoor education, place-based, experiential, embodied, or service learning—pick a pedagogical buzzword—and there is likely some root to be found in the ways that worked for Indigenous communities for millennia. So why not explore how the old ways could be the new way forward?

We begin with a story that demonstrates how Indigenous pedagogy can benefit anyone, and how old ways are the new ways forward. Storytelling is one of the most fundamental and powerful forms of teaching and learning within Indigenous cultures. The story we share here is told by the Nuu-chah-nulth people about a place that is currently referred to as Vancouver Island in Western Canada. A tricky thing to do when talking about Indigenous pedagogy is to be specific to land and place, as this is where knowledge and relationship develops, while also respecting a diversity of approaches. In order to talk about Indigenous pedagogies within the Canadian context, we have to acknowledge the one thing that all Indigenous peoples share is the experience of living under colonial rule. Challenging that rule is part of Indigenous education and pedagogy. At times, we borrow and adapt from other cultures, thinking of what works for our people. It is in this spirit that we survey examples from across the diversity of peoples and traditions on Turtle Island (i.e. North America). This is because our potential audience is equally diverse and geographically scattered. It is not

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<sup>1</sup> Ball, 2007; School District #73 Kamloops/Thompson, 2012; Toulouse, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> p.17, Toulouse.

our intention to imply that a placeless pan-Indigenous approach is the ideal way to approach the application of Indigenous pedagogy. Far from it... Indeed, we would advocate for the making of relationships within local communities and with knowledge keepers as the best way to ensure the work is done respectfully. Many of the approaches discussed in this paper are familiar to most Indigenous peoples and have cultural protocols and variants that guide their use and application in local community contexts. Our attempt in this paper is to provide sketches of what is possible while acknowledging the great diversity in approaches across territories and cultures.

## The Power of Stories

Stories can exemplify teaching and learning in an Indigenous way. This is a story that Chaw-win-is learned from her grandfather and has permission to share with all of you in this context.

*Chaastims (Mink) wanted to go visit his father up in the sky. He wanted to be a good son and take care of things up there while his father went on a vacation. His father was responsible for watching the fire in the sky, the sun. Chaastims assured his father he could watch the sun for him, not to worry. "Just go ahead and enjoy yourself and I'll take care of things here," he said.*

*So, his father agreed and went maybe to Hawaii to smoke cigars and relax, with his feet up, on its warm, sandy beaches.*

*Now Chaastims was a handsome guy. You know how good-looking people can be sometimes.... So Chaastims set himself about to watch the fire, taking pains to have enough wood and watching that the flames didn't get too high. As time passed, he grew bored of the constant effort and attention that fire tending requires. That was when he caught his reflection in a flame and was distracted by his own reflection. "Gee, I really am handsome," he thought.*

*As you may know, fires only take a moment of neglect before they are roaring and hungry flames leap out. Chaastims got scared, ran away and hid as the fire grew rapidly out of control. In no time, the whole aauuk (island, now known as Vancouver Island) burnt down! The land turned to ash, covering the whole island. There was only the sea left. Koho (Codfish) got so excited about these events that he swallowed the moon and made everything dark.*

*Now remember, this was a haa-huu-pah (story, sacred history) from the time before there were Quu'asminaaa (human beings). The animals, including birds, sea beings, insects and bugs governed themselves in relation to the land. As soon as this disaster struck, a couple of the chiefs of that time gathered the animals together to strategize what to do next. The Chiefs we remember today are Halibut and Woodpecker. You see, we didn't like dwelling on what had been done and exasperating ourselves with why things happened. We simply needed to put our heads together to figure out the answer to the question, "Where do we go from here?" Halibut and Woodpecker called all the people (animals) to gather around the shore. Halibut explained there was earth at the bottom of the sea. He called for volunteers to dive to the bottom to retrieve the earth while Woodpecker produced two cedar baskets for the volunteers to carry the earth in. Halibut told the people that once the earth was retrieved he would call on the two fastest runners, two qwayaatskiik (wolves) named Aykutupis and Astaasaapii. These two would be tasked with*

*running around the entire island, redistributing the earth so the regeneration of the haahuuthlii (the land/territories – a chief's responsibility) could begin.*

*The first volunteer was Chims (Bear). He growled that he would be able to get the earth as he was a great swimmer and also very strong. He took the cedar baskets and placed them on his broad shoulders and dove as deep as he could into the sea. The people and the two chiefs waited and waited. They waited some more until Chims popped up, shaking water droplets off his fur and panting hard. The baskets, however, were empty.*

*Halibut asked for another volunteer. This time Mowich (deer) volunteered. He is known to be fancy-footed, having stolen backfire from the qwayaatsiik at one time, so he took the baskets from Chims and dove nimbly into the water. The people waited and waited. They waited some more, then Mowich popped up, panting, almost out of breath. The baskets were empty and so this went on for a while, with different volunteers, from the strong to the clever. Even the seabirds volunteered and each time they came up out of breath, having tried their best, but with empty cedar baskets, unable to complete this task. Everyone grew more and more discouraged as the last few volunteers were unsuccessful – they began to lose hope and started to walk away from the shore.*

*Then, they heard a little voice pipe up – it was a small target head duck. "Excuse me," he said, "I'd like to try!"*

*Halibut and Woodpecker were fair and gracious chiefs and so offered him the same chance to retrieve the earth. Some snickered as he precariously perched the cedar baskets across his tiny shoulders. Woodpecker and Halibut ignored their snickers and encouraged the little duck to carry on. The little duck dove neatly into the water and again everyone waited and waited. They waited some more but grew alarmed. "Surely the little duck has been gone too long! He must have drowned!" some said. Everyone was despairing now and they began to cry for what they feared was their last hope left at the bottom of the sea.*

*Suddenly with a little splash target head duck appeared! And on his shoulders, he carried two cedar baskets, all full to the brim with earth he had retrieved from the bottom of the sea.*

*Halibut and Woodpecker acted quickly and called forward the two fastest runners. Astaasaapii was the first and was given his name because he ran in one direction around the island as fast as it takes for a cedar ember to burn on the longhouse fire. The second wolf Aykutupis took the other basket and ran around the island in the other direction – this wolf was so named this because he took as much time as it takes for a drop of rain to fall from the longhouse eaves to the ground.*

*When they finished – the earth began to regenerate. Eventually, everything grew green again. The animals spent this time preparing themselves because they knew Cha-chin-sun-up (To Put The Land in Order) was coming – he was coming to transform the animals into people.*

*--Related by Chaw-win-is [as told to me by my late grandfather Cha-chin-sun-up].*

While this story originates in Nuu-chah-nulth territory and community (Western Canada), it has a lot to teach anyone. The listener or the reader may be drawn in by a recognition of the human traits we all share and find humour in the great extremes of both folly and heroism. There are also moral lessons to hear and abide by. Depending on when the story is told and who hears it, there are a multitude of ways of sharing, hearing, teaching and learning. This is the power of Indigenous stories and why they are a great teaching tool.

However, the power of stories and of Indigenous knowledge more generally means that we have to be careful about the ways in which they are used. Stories and knowledge are medicine. Like any medicine, it can be healing when used appropriately. Used incorrectly, it can also cause harm. There has to be great care in the ways that Indigenous knowledge is taken up and is used.

*The power of Indigenous<sup>3</sup> pedagogies, and the recognition of one's self being nourished by its spirit, is what make it attractive to students and teachers fortunate enough to be exposed to it in its fullness.*

Its power is also what causes teachers hesitation to engage with it. A host of fears and anxieties about appropriation, misinformation, one's own lack of knowledge, readiness, or permission are all reasons even the best-prepared teachers shy away from truly engaging with Indigenous education and what it has to offer their students. These concerns come from a good place, a desire to do the right thing, or perhaps more accurately, to not do the wrong thing. But if you had access to the possibility of restoring healthy communities, combatting racism and improving social relations, and leading humanity to more ecologically sustainable ways of living, the responsible action would be to learn how to use these tools rather than leave it alone and unapplied, out of fear. The answer lies in approaching Indigenous pedagogy with the respect, reverence and relationship it deserves while knowing that we are human. Like the story of Chaastims, we make mistakes, but we can also learn from them. It's increasingly evident that we need policies that encourage and enable more teachers to respectfully take up Indigenous education ways, and that now is the moment to do so.

## The Moment

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada<sup>4</sup> was launched in 2007 in order to provide a space for those directly or indirectly affected by the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools system with an opportunity to share their stories and experiences. In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its Final Report to government, which includes 94 recommendations. This call to action has

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<sup>3</sup> We use Indigenous in this paper to refer to original peoples of the land or territory, including First Nations people, Metis and Inuit in the Canadian context. Where source material may have used "Aboriginal," we have changed it to "Indigenous" for consistency in the text. While there may be subtle distinctions in using one term over another, for the purposes of this paper, we believe it is sufficient to use "Indigenous" throughout to avoid confusion.

<sup>4</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.

sparked a commitment from institutions and individuals across Canada to contribute in various ways to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Canadian education institutions, in particular, are looking at ways they can take up the responsibilities of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, helping to build up Indigenous communities after the long legacy and onslaught of residential schooling and its policies of assimilation and genocide. As Justice Murray Sinclair, the chair of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, states, “Education is what got us into this mess – the use of education at least in terms of residential schools – but education is the key to reconciliation.”<sup>5</sup> The “mess” took several generations to get into. It only makes sense that reconciliation efforts will take a similar amount of time to bear fruit. Reconciliation is a long-term process, not a single event. If this mess was created by the explicit removal of Indigenous knowledge and ways of learning during the raising of Indigenous children, then let’s hope the reintroduction of Indigenous pedagogies can play an important role in the reconciliation process. We believe it’s good not only for our people, but for all people. When our Elders taught the younger generations through stories and through relationships to land and place, they weren’t thinking, “this knowledge is only for Nuu-chah-nulth, or for Anishinabek,” but that the land teaches anyone who cares to listen. These tools for survival that have been learned through careful observation, and passing on from generation to generation will help anyone living here and now.

There is an urgent need to build relationships that foster resurgence and reconciliation in education. Understanding Indigenous peoples' worldviews, perspectives and ways of knowing is relevant to all educators and educational policy-makers in Canada and elsewhere. Its importance has been recognized in a myriad of policy documents, including the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples<sup>6</sup> and the Association of Canadian Deans of Education's Accord on Indigenous Education<sup>7</sup>. These documents call for teachers to better serve the educational needs of Indigenous peoples while improving the quality of education about Indigenous peoples to all Canadians. Across Canada, provinces and territories have developed policies to improve Indigenous student achievement and increase Canadian student awareness and understanding of Indigenous issues (e.g. Ontario Ministry of Education's *First Nations Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*<sup>8</sup> and British Columbia's *Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom*<sup>9</sup>). The Council of Ministers of Education Canada has an Indigenous Education Plan<sup>10</sup> with strategies for engaging Indigenous youth and educating all young Canadians about Indigenous experiences. The Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission<sup>11</sup> include a number of recommendations for educators in Canadian public schools to teach about Indigenous histories and move towards a better understanding of Indigenous cultures, peoples, worldviews and knowledge. Now is the time.

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<sup>5</sup> Haydn Watters. “Truth and Reconciliation chair urges Canada to adopt UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples”, CBC, June 1, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-chair-urges-canada-to-adopt-un-declaration-on-Indigenous-peoples-1.3096225>.

<sup>6</sup> Canada, Georges Erasmus, and René Dussault. 1996. Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa: The Commission.

<sup>7</sup> Association of Canadian Deans of Education. 2010. Accord on Indigenous education. [Ottawa, ON]: ACDE.

<sup>8</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education. 2007. Ontario First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework, Toronto, ON: Aboriginal Education Office.

<sup>9</sup> British Columbia Ministry of Education. 2015. Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom: Moving Forward, Victoria, BC: Crown Publications, Queen’s Printer.

<sup>10</sup> Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. 2015. Indigenous Education Plan 2015-2017, [https://www.cmec.ca/532/CMEC\\_Indigenous\\_Education\\_Plan\\_2015%E2%80%932017.html](https://www.cmec.ca/532/CMEC_Indigenous_Education_Plan_2015%E2%80%932017.html).

<sup>11</sup> TRC, “Honouring the Truth.”



This moment of reconciliation arrives in parallel with other urgent reasons to seek Indigenous pedagogies and knowledge in the work of education. For one, there has been an Indigenous baby boom in Canada since the 1980s<sup>12</sup>. The Indigenous population has been growing significantly faster than the rest of Canada and is significantly younger, with nearly half of Indigenous people in Canada under the age of 24.<sup>13</sup> Indigenous people in Canada have become increasingly urbanized too. Half to three-quarters of the Indigenous population are living in cities.<sup>14</sup> What this demographic shift means is that Canadian teachers in public schools are more than ever going to be encountering Indigenous students. With such a young and growing population, Indigenous people will be an important force in Canada's future, helping shape its economy, governance, justice and education systems. We can't ignore these youth that will be in classrooms across the country, nor their potential. Whether teachers believe it or not, there is more than likely an Indigenous student in their classroom, or at least in their school,<sup>15</sup> even if these students don't look like what a teacher might perceive an Indigenous person to look like.<sup>16</sup>

To make school spaces more engaging for Indigenous students, educators should include more Indigenous perspectives in their teaching. It's an opportunity for all students to learn from historically-misrepresented and marginalized sources of knowledge. When Indigenous perspectives are included, students receive a more comprehensive approach to all the disciplines and subjects taught in schools. How can Canadians claim to have a comprehensive understanding of geography without Indigenous perspectives on land, culture and people? How can we have a comprehensive understanding of history as a subject without engaging with Indigenous perspectives on historical events? If we think about any subject, there will always be something missing if we don't include an Indigenous perspective on that topic.

*Including Indigenous education in the curriculum is not just more inclusive, it's just good pedagogy.*

Hand in hand with reconciliation is the social justice argument. Most Canadians pride themselves on their shared beliefs in upholding human rights and equality of opportunity. It is a national narrative that is worn with patriotic pride. When a thoughtful Canadian learns about the injustices of residential schooling, the *Indian Act*, the sixties scoop (and Millennial scoop), Jordan's Principle, Shannon's Dream, the missing and murdered Indigenous women, or other clear examples of disparity and systemic racism, they are usually shocked or outraged.<sup>17</sup> Even if they are not turned into activists by exposure to these discriminatory

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<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada (2013). *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit, National Household Survey, 2011*, Ottawa: Ministry of Industry.

<sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Peoples in Canada."

<sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Peoples in Canada."

<sup>15</sup> People for Education. 2015. *Ontario's schools: The gap between policy and reality (Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2015)*. Toronto: People for Education.

<sup>16</sup> Harlan McKosato, "What does an Indian look like?" *Indian Country Today*, October 25, 2016, <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/opinions/what-does-an-indian-look-like/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples", Environics Canada, June 2016, <http://www.environicsinstitute.org/uploads/institute-projects/canadian%20public%20opinion%20on%20aboriginal%20peoples%202016%20-%20final%20report.pdf>.

practices, most Canadians at least believe that we should help the ones most in need. When Indigenous people turn up in statistics as the most likely to be marginally-housed, unemployed, incarcerated, struggling with addictions, experiencing higher rates of violence, at risk of suicide, or not completing school, there is at least a sense among many Canadians that these problems must be addressed. Tackling these social problems, then, should be a key concern for educators. We can't do so without an adequate education about Canada and Indigenous peoples. This means being truthful about colonization and its legacy, about law and policy, and the different levels of government's role in both the enslavement and emancipation of Indigenous people.

Finally, there is another opportunity and reason for bringing forward Indigenous pedagogies within the education system. That is the great turning<sup>18</sup> toward ecological sustainability as a way of ensuring humanity's survival. If we are to survive as a species, our fundamental stories about ourselves and who we are in relation to others has to change. The belief in human superiority and dominance over Earth and other life forms has led to incredible violence. Seeing Earth as a resource, instead of seeing her first as a mother and teacher, has meant short-sighted plunder and threatening our own existence. To save ourselves, we must become humble again. Gregory Cajete<sup>19</sup> writes that Indigenous ways of knowing and learning "*hold the keys to educating new generations into a sustainable future that our current 'way' of modern education can never accomplish.*" Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies seek continuity and regenerativity, not exploitation and dominance. It's a starkly different worldview than what most modern North America and Europe has been built upon. Restoring *mino-bimaadiziwin* [the good life], or continuous regenerativity<sup>20</sup>, and the flourishing of life to its full potential, is a shift that must be made for our own survival. Cajete and Armstrong, among others, characterize this approach as Indigenous education for all. Other educators and philosophers have referred to this as "the great turning."<sup>21</sup>

There is a reason that Indigenous people have survived and thrived for millennia with these ways of knowing, teaching and learning. The period of colonization is but a blip in the entire history of Indigenous peoples' histories and survival, and recovery is possible. Why have Indigenous people resisted assimilation, unless there is something very valuable to hold on to, to share, and to encourage a better way of living with all our relations? Indigenous people have always adopted and adapted to new ways of doing things, new materials, new technologies, new knowledge, if it encouraged people to live well. But these new ways are incorporated within ethics and values that come from long-term relationship to land and community. Indigenous ethics are rooted by a deep relationship to all that is living, and of seeing everything as alive and related. When we begin with this understanding, it changes the way we view the world and how we can learn from and within it. Whether we are convinced to do this work out of a moral imperative, to address social injustice, to respond practically to a demographic shift, or because it's just good pedagogy, any or all of these reasons compels us to act. But where are we to start?

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<sup>18</sup> David Korten. *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Gregory Cajete. *Indigenous Community: Rekindling the teachings of the seventh Fire*, St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2015, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Winona LaDuke, "Indigenous Environmental Economics: A North American Primer," *Akwe:kon Journal*, 9 no. 2 (Summer 1992): 52-71.

<sup>21</sup> See Joanna Macy, Chris Johnstone, or David Korten.

## Starting where we are now

We need to start from where we are, and we need to believe that small steps matter because they will eventually lead to bigger changes. This is the ripple effect. Think of that target head duck diving down to retrieve earth. He brought up a piece of earth from the bottom of the sea and helped restore the island. Many snickered and dismissed the duck, but it was that brave act by a humble creature that helped everyone survive. It's also important to note that the restoration wasn't done alone. The wolves had their part to play. Halibut and woodpecker also did their piece. Although some educators will feel alone taking the risk to do this work, when more and more of us join the effort, great things can be achieved. We all occupy different positions of power to make positive change happen. We have to look at where we are situated, and how we can facilitate or bring about the changes we want to see happen in the world.

One of the important things all of us must do is to develop a relationship with the place where we are, and with the original people of that place. This relationship must be one that is respectful and reciprocal. Ultimately it is the land that teaches.

*Long-term occupancy and relationship with a place is the foundation of Indigenous knowledge and the keepers of that knowledge are the Indigenous people.*

By entering into respectful relationships with the knowledge-keepers, we will have a foundation to start from. In order to validate our learning, they are a valuable resource. As we engage in this learning journey, we must include local communities and knowledge-keepers in the visioning, implementation and evaluation of Indigenous education work. It is a relationship, and it will take time to nurture and develop. Action must happen alongside of the relationship-building, and be informed by it. Sometimes we are immobilized since we don't know how to engage in this relationship. It's important to make the relationship building as part of the process, and not just a precursor. Relationships are ideally initiated before any extensive process, but too often the lack of these becomes a rationale for why one isn't doing anything.

There are many great pieces of work on what is Indigenous education.<sup>22</sup> In my research and reading, I see a common theme emerge where we speak of teaching "in an Indigenous way." Indigenous pedagogy is not just a way of doing, but it's also a way of being. Indigenous education includes many different types of practices, strategies, techniques, and actions. An educator wishing to teach in an Indigenous way must also have the right attitude, orientation, approach, and ethics. That's the way of being. In the recommendations that follow, one can learn and become skilled at some of the activities listed. Others are examples of orientations that we must train ourselves to become, or consciously improve and enhance and nourish an inherent gift, if we already have this natural inclination. If I were to distill these great thinkers and

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<sup>22</sup> See Eber Hampton's *Towards a redefinition of Indian education*; anything by Greg Cajete; Yatta Kanu's *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives*; anything by Marie Battiste; Lenore Stiffarm's *As we see...*; anything by Pamela Toulouse; Tanaka's *Learning and Teaching Together*; Goulet and Goulet's *Teaching each other*.

practitioners' writings and reflections, I come to a number of recommendations for effective pedagogies that originate in Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.

## What to do

Restoule<sup>23</sup> has written that there are two core tenets of Indigenous education: everything is alive, and we are all related. These tenets form the basis for what Cajete calls the “making of an Indigenous teacher.”<sup>24</sup> It means breaking out of the walls of schools in order to learn from the community and from the land. In traditional Indigenous education, we learned from our environment. The plants, the animals, the land, the sky are all potential teachers and careful observation of phenomena and relationships within the whole system is a vital source of knowledge. We also learn from community. All our human relatives were, and are our teachers. Cajete<sup>25</sup> encourages both teacher and learner to “*participate in a dialogue that is inherently creative and transformative. This way of learning, communicating, and working in relationship, based as it is on equality and mutual reciprocity, mirrors ways found in nature.*” Furthermore, “*we can reorient teaching and learning around the Indigenous principles of relationship and responsibility for the care and healing of the Earth.*”

*We need to continue to see community as a source of knowledge, and that all members of a community have knowledge to share.*

Knowledge is not exclusively the domain of experts. Or rather, any one of us can have an expertise in something. It is about recognizing and respecting knowledge-keepers for the knowledge they hold of that practice or skill.

When we see everyone as a potential knowledge-keeper and teacher, it changes the dynamic of our relationships. The classroom dynamic is transformed as well, when all members are seen as potential teachers. When teachers show their vulnerability and need for more learning by becoming a co-learner in a spirit of inquiry, they model how to learn to their students and demonstrate that learning is a lifelong journey. This is also an important way of entering into Indigenous topics for the non-Indigenous teacher who feels hesitant to begin. Admitting what it is you don't know, and how you are going to find out, is valuable for students. This approach as a co-learner allows you to bring Indigenous knowledge into the classroom. Transforming teacher-student relationships is an innovative way to integrate Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. It is in these ways that we see Indigenous pedagogy as one of relationship to land and to community. As Cajete<sup>26</sup> says, “*Relationship is the cornerstone of Indigenous community, and community is the place where we learn what it is to be related.*”

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<sup>23</sup> Jean-Paul Restoule, “Everything is alive and everyone is related: Indigenous knowing and inclusive education,” in *Inquiry into practice: Reaching every student*, eds. Carol Rolheiser, Mark Evans, Mira Gambhir (Toronto: OISE/UT Press, 2011). See also Joseph Couture, 2000, *Native Studies and the Academy*.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory Cajete, “Indigenous Community.”

<sup>25</sup> Gregory Cajete, “Indigenous Community,” 22.

<sup>26</sup> Gregory Cajete, “Indigenous Community,” 23.

Indigenous pedagogy is community-centered. An advantage of seeing the whole community as a place for learning is that it encourages citizenship and responsibility to others. Learning from multiple generations encourages a respect for Elders. Involving parents, families and community members in learning activities fosters greater awareness and respect. During an oral history project for youth in South Texas, students were encouraged to ask their families what impact they had on their town or community. The teacher reported that engagement in collecting family stories and contributions was much higher than reading about the achievements of distant white Presidents. Hearing about their family's efforts as workers, creating the ditches for sanitation, and engineering irrigation for the development of agriculture fostered a sense of pride and greater respect for each other's families<sup>27</sup>. And they could see the impact. This activity probably did more for cultivating a sense of citizenship than a civics lesson on how a bill becomes law. The positive impact of involving elders, community and family members in instruction has been noted by several scholars.<sup>28</sup>

Another important outcome of creating community in the classroom is getting away from approaches that reward competitive individualism. When called out by teachers, Indigenous students have been known to either not answer the question or provide an incorrect one, so as to avoid having their peers feel bad for not knowing something.<sup>29</sup> Studies where a teacher circulates around the room engaging with students in smaller groups demonstrate that this puts students at ease, reduces stress and fosters collaboration and working together. Students feel a sense of belonging and greater self-esteem. Cooperative approaches, including peer-tutoring, develop teamwork and pride in group accomplishments.<sup>30</sup> This Indigenous approach to teaching within a community is an innovation that can help all young learners.

Education researcher Yatta Kanu has several tips for non-Indigenous teachers about what to do to "Indigenize" the classroom.<sup>31</sup> This includes the incorporation of Indigenous methods of teaching and learning, such as the use of stories, sharing or talking circles, and land-based learning. Indigenizing the classroom also means using a more student-focused teaching style, such as providing a space for students to speak honestly while also respecting student silence, and encouraging students to really listen to each other. Furthermore, teachers can provide spaces where decision-making and problem-solving is shared, opportunities for students to explore themselves and their values are created, and a diversity of teaching methods is used to accommodate different learning. These suggestions do not have to be Indigenous-specific, yet they do respect Indigenous approaches. Finally, Kanu's study also points out the value of guest speakers, activities that counter stereotypes and creating spaces that provide a sense of belonging and community where student safety is maintained. Indigenous pedagogy values respect for all.

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<sup>27</sup> Francisco Guajardo, "Border Stories," published Nov. 2, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kO-1xqyec-Y>. Also see, Francisco Guajardo, "To take wisdom and make it deep," Indigenous Issues and Voices in Educational Research and Development, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona (April 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Cornel Pewewardy, "Learning styles of American Indian/Alaska native students: A review of the literature and implications for practice," *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41, no. 3 (2002); Kanu, "Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives"; Peter Howard & Robert Perry, "A school community model for enhancing Aboriginal students' mathematical learning," *Mathematics: Essential Research, Essential Practice*, Volume 1. Australia: Mathematics Education Research Group Australasia, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Karen Swisher, Donna Deyhle, "Adapting instruction to culture," In *Teaching American Indian Students*, ed. Jon Reyhner, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 81-95.

<sup>30</sup> Cornel Pewewardy, "Learning Styles".

<sup>31</sup> Yatta Kanu, "Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives."

Kanu's findings and the work of Toulouse, among others, highlight that when children are treated with respect and given a real voice, they rise to any challenge and develop a greater sense of responsibility.<sup>32</sup> Teachers can foster this independence by incorporating more student self-reflection and self-evaluation within the classroom. Seeing every student's strengths is important, as it encourages meaningful participation and helps students' self-esteem as they begin to see their value as someone who has knowledge to share and skills that can contribute to the team. As an Oneida elder used to say, when our individual gifts are recognized and shared, we end up elevating the whole community.<sup>33</sup> Working from a recognition of student strengths helps to encourage more meaningful participation. The use of circles can be especially helpful in activating and demonstrating this respect for student contributions. In the circle, everyone's voice is listened to and valued. The goal of using circle approaches is bringing as many voices forward as possible, and coming to a group understanding. For resolving conflicts or for creating classroom ethics, rules and responsibility, circles have proven an effective Indigenous pedagogy for community harmony, inculcating a culture of mutual respect and responsibility.<sup>34</sup>

Indigenous pedagogy is wholistic. Many scholars of Indigenous education have noted the importance of seeing the whole before its parts. Indigenous ways of seeing values an understanding of how the parts relate to the whole, rather than compartmentalizing knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Mainstream Canadian schooling often focuses on the acquisition of intellectual skills, to the exclusion of everything else. Indigenous ways stress the importance of attending to all aspects of being, including one's intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual development. This is also a way of ensuring that diverse learning styles are respected. Some topics are just taught better by favoring one style over another, and some students just pick up ideas better from learning one way rather than another. Therefore, it is important the teacher uses multiple ways of communicating different concepts. If a teacher can encourage students to approach each concept by not only thinking, but also feeling, doing, and using their intuition, there is much more likelihood that more students will retain this knowledge. One of these approaches will find its mark with them, so it's important to try them all. Even if a student learns best one way, their learning is strengthened by being exposed as well to other ways. This applies to assessment as well as delivery. Using multiple assessment methods allows to measure different learning styles, and to better demonstrate what learners know.<sup>36</sup> Cajete<sup>37</sup> notes that an Indigenous approach to science education uses creative expression as a precursor to scientific inquiry and discovery. He wrote, "*The creative process is the most essential universal that centers people*

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<sup>32</sup> Yatta Kanu, "Integrating Aboriginal perspectives"; Toulouse, "Beyond shadows"; see also the edited collection "As we see...Aboriginal pedagogy", by Lenore Stiffarm (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Grafton Antone, personal communication, various times, 2000-2008.

<sup>34</sup> On circle methodologies, see Michael Hart, "Brief reflections on sharing circles and Indigenous worldviews and empowerment," *Circle Talk*, 2 no. 1, 51-53; Jean-Paul Restoule, "Circle methodology and male Aboriginal identity formation," in *Within and Beyond Borders: Critical Multicultural Counselling in Practice*, eds. Olga Oulanova, Isaac Stein, Aanchal Rai, Maya Hammer, & Patricia Poulin, (Toronto: OISE, 2009), [http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/cdcp/UserFiles/File/Publications/within\\_and\\_beyond\\_borders.pdf](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/cdcp/UserFiles/File/Publications/within_and_beyond_borders.pdf); Fyre Jean Graveline, *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*, Halifax: Fernwood, 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Cornel Pewewardy, "Learning Styles"; Marie Battiste and James Sakej Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, Saskatoon: Purich, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Cornel Pewewardy, "Learning Styles"; Adrienne Alton-Lee, *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)*, Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Gregory Cajete, *Igniting the sparkle: An Indigenous science education model*, Skyland, NC: Kivaki Press.

and learning and understanding. It is the elemental process in the natural as well as the world of thought.”<sup>38</sup> Others have noted the crucial importance of providing students with opportunities for expressing knowledge visually through pictures, diagrams, maps, and so on.<sup>39</sup> Schooling has valued writing as a means of demonstrating knowledge, which has helped students with literacy skills to excel. Students adept at explaining what they know orally or visually have unfortunately not been afforded the same opportunities.

Indigenous pedagogy values learning by doing. Educators would do well to find ways to incorporate more hands-on and project-based learning experiences into their teaching practice. As educators, we often talk about the need for differentiated instruction and offering all students the opportunity to see the real world. Practical examples of more abstract and theoretical concepts can help more students succeed. Within Indigenous worldviews, it is often believed that unless one learns by experience, the knowledge is not truly their own. An extreme example is provided by Ross<sup>40</sup> of an Elder who allowed a younger person steering a vessel to run into rocks in shallow water so that they might learn from the experience about taking care and slowing down. Had they simply told the person, they might not truly understand the consequences. But by experiencing one minor catastrophe, they will be sure never to repeat it! The point of the story is that Indigenous people value one’s autonomy of personhood. To gather knowledge is a highly personal endeavor and must be experienced to truly be one’s own. A teacher can tell someone what to know, but it is most powerful and memorable when one comes to it through their own process and experience. To facilitate this form of Indigenous pedagogy, the teacher creates opportunities and experiences in the learner’s path so that they may experience the knowledge and the learning for themselves.

Storytelling is highly valued as an Indigenous teaching method as it provides the learner with the autonomy and independence to make their own meaning from the story. In an oral culture, the use of narratives is a helpful mnemonic device that allows multiple types of knowing to be encoded in a memorable way. Silko<sup>41</sup> tells of the educative power of traditional stories in her recounting of Yellow Woman. She demonstrates how a story is not just art and entertainment (although it is these too), but that when heeded, can also provide maps, genealogy, history, science, politics and philosophy. Oftentimes a traditional story is all of these things at once. It’s what makes traditional legendary stories so rich. Storytelling and drama develop oral, written and listening skills, as well as empathy and personal affirmation.<sup>42</sup> Cajete<sup>43</sup> urges us to pay attention to guiding traditional stories of Indigenous peoples and communities as they provide us with orientation. Indeed, many of the legends, or the class of stories Anishinaabek call Aatishsoakaan, include morals and ethical considerations. While the stories provide subtle direction on how to live (or in the case of Trickster stories, often how NOT to do something), they also provide guidance on concrete ways to do things that ensure respect, reciprocity and responsibility toward all our relations. Details on the right ways

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<sup>38</sup> Gregory Cajete, “Igniting the spark,” p. 116.

<sup>39</sup> Lawrence Ingalls and Helen Hammond, “Teachers’ Cultural Knowledge and Understanding of American Indian Students and Their Families: Impact of culture on a child’s learning,” *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 25, no.1 (2006), 16-24; Pewewardy, “Learning Styles”.

<sup>40</sup> Rupert Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*, Toronto: Penguin, 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a beauty of the spirit: Essays on Native American Life today*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Cornel Pewewardy, “Learning Styles”; Yatta Kanu, “Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives.”

<sup>43</sup> Gregory Cajete, “Indigenous community”

to pick medicines or to treat the dead can be encoded in these stories and be tangential to the plots. If done well, stories are passed on, internalized, and ensure survival.

## Moments of hesitation

Thoughtful teachers can be cautious to teach in an Indigenous way, since they hesitate sharing stories about themselves or telling stories from a culture that is not their own. There are countless examples of researchers, artists, explorers, and scientists who take stories, designs, medicines and other forms of Indigenous knowledge and use them out of context for personal or material gain. The teacher who is knowledgeable of these histories and colonizing activities wants to avoid co-opting, re-colonizing and stealing from Indigenous cultures. Some have been frightened away from doing any good work because they have seen examples of mistreatment, theft, and cringe from worthy adaptations by others. Emergent research from Restoule and others term this response as hesitance and trespass. Teachers struggle to find ‘good ways’ to teach Indigenous education in mainstream classrooms since they are affected by their own ‘hesitancies’.<sup>44</sup> These hesitancies are both pauses for reflection, as well as pauses due to fear of trespass. These ‘pauses’ allow learning to take place for the educators. Initially identified as ‘barriers’ to teaching Indigenous histories, the data shows that many hesitancies emerge in the form of fears. This data was categorized as fear of rocking the boat or offending others, fear of appropriation, fear of misinformed-inappropriate action, and fear of perpetuating stereotypes. We found that these fears are interconnected with the idea of ‘fear of trespassing’. The attempt to avoid trespassing came most strongly through the fear of appropriation or misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous histories.

But here’s the thing... Trespassing has already happened since Canada is on Indigenous land. Not doing anything maintains the status quo, which we’ve already seen is problematic. The teacher who is paralyzed by analysis and fear of doing wrong is not excused from trespassing, as it has already happened. Hopefully, seeing things this way allows non-Indigenous teachers and policy-makers to get past making excuses and feeling sorry for themselves and getting down to action. Instead of asking, “Do I have the right to teach this material?” we should reframe the question as “What is my responsibility?”<sup>45</sup> One of the gifts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action<sup>46</sup> is how they are addressed to all Canadians as their responsibility. It’s not simply the government that is called to change. It’s not just schools. It’s not just the courts and the justice system. It is all of us who are called to seek individual ways to contribute to change. How we work in those systems or advocate for change within those systems is up to all of us. We all have some power, and we have to determine what that is and how we can meaningfully contribute to these changes. It comes from orientation and taking stock. In Anishinaabe pedagogy, the concept of learning and social change begins as a vision. That vision leads us through time on a path toward where relationships are formed and knowledge is built. Eventually we learn when it is time to act. But our learning is not over when we act. Further reflection on our actions leads us to have new visions and new opportunities for change.

We must begin with ourselves and acknowledge what one knows and doesn’t know. Learning is a continual process and everyone has to start somewhere. Seeking and maintaining relationships with Indigenous

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<sup>44</sup> Jean-Paul Restoule, Daniela Bascunan, Mark Sinke, Shawna Carroll (In review). American Educational Research Association. See also <https://www.Indigenouspd.com>.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Heath Justice, personal communication, November 26, 2004.

<sup>46</sup> TRC, “Calls to action.”



people and organizations to gain the knowledge needed can lead to meaningful classroom activities and deep friendships. In the beginning a teacher, educator or policy-maker can invite Indigenous people into the workplace. Over time, they may learn for themselves. There is always room to go deeper, to learn more. Mistakes will be made along the way, but these too are opportunities for learning. This sense of inquiry can be shared with one's students. Building relationships with Indigenous people defuses the appropriation issue because one is not speaking for, but speaking with. Acknowledging our traditional sources of knowledge is important. Just as we cite others while doing research, we have to acknowledge when we are using Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy. That means acknowledging the source of the teachings. Who did we learn this from and when did they share it with us?

We need to address the anxiety and fear educators face of presenting materials in an area where they are not the "expert." Many teachers teach subjects they never majored in at university. If there is something in the curriculum they are expected to teach, they find a way to locate the information and resources to do it. A key difference with Indigenous knowledge<sup>47</sup> is that the learning can't happen by simply Googling it. It has to be developed through relationships. This can't be done overnight. But fortunately, this means that one can take the time to do it right. When one approaches teaching as a process, it's a lifelong and continuous spiral of learning, refining, learning and refining. There is no end.

It's also important to acknowledge a debate about Indigenous education as culturalism versus anti-colonialism/anti-racism.<sup>48</sup> Restoule often advises non-Indigenous teachers to focus on teaching what Canada has done and is doing vis-à-vis Indigenous people rather than teaching culture. That is, make students aware of residential schooling and other colonial histories. If seeking Indigenous voices and perspectives to tell that story, there is a wealth of great resources for assisting the teacher in doing the hard work. When we advocate for the greater inclusion of Indigenous pedagogies in mainstream schools, it doesn't have to mean smudging your students and taking them into a sweat lodge that you've built yourself. The myriad of approaches that have been merely touched on in this reflection paper demonstrate that teachers can find a way to begin with that is comfortable. One doesn't have to do ALL these things to be doing Indigenous pedagogy. It's good to start with something small and build relationships, reflect, and then do some more. Like the target head duck in the opening story, it's time to dive in and start with what you can carry right now.

We can also take inspiration from our revered Elders. If you've spent any time with cultural knowledge keepers, you probably have heard them say, "I know a little bit, and I'll share it with you," or "I'm still learning, but here's what I know." If they can have a lifetime of experience in these areas and still feel like there's so much yet to know, then we can give ourselves permission to also be on a lifelong learning journey. Every little bit we do to make things better in this area is a step in this journey. Let's permit ourselves to dive in, admit to others we are not sure, but that we're learning, ask for help, and be prepared to learn from the mistakes we're about to make. Along the way, we must form relationships that serve as supports and also a check on what we're doing. As we do this work, now and then we should look back and see how far we've come, and for a moment take pride in that achievement. That will keep us going in those

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<sup>47</sup> "8 ways" accessed October 14, 2017, <http://8ways.wikispaces.com/>.

<sup>48</sup> See Cathryn McConaghy, *Rethinking Indigenous Education: Culturalism, Colonialism, and the Politics of Knowing*, Sydney: Post Pressed, 2000; Verna St. Denis and Carol Schick, "What makes anti-racist pedagogy in teacher education difficult? Three popular ideological assumptions", *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XLIX, no. 1, 2003, 55-69.

moments when we look ahead at how much more there is to do. What should keep us focused on change is imagining the world we want our children to inherit, and what we are doing to make that world happen. As we do this work of resurgence and reconciliation, we can imagine our starting point with this generation as floating at sea after our canoe has tipped over. Like the closing story and activity shared by Chaw-win-is asks us to consider: What treasures will we pick up and put in our canoe? What are the pieces of our being we want to use to build our nations and our communities?

## The End is the Beginning

In closing, here is one more Indigenous pedagogical method to share. It comes from an activity called *Hotoquist* (Our Canoe has tipped over). Chaw-win-is tells us that Elders and language speakers from her community, specifically Cliff Atleo Sr., speaks about the impact of colonization using this Nuu-chah-nulth metaphor that is rooted in our life on the sea and the importance of our canoes. This metaphor, to me, has to do with what we might mean in terms of Indigenous resurgence.

*Hotoquist: Our canoe has tipped over and we are lost at sea, along with ourselves and our treasures. As we gather ourselves together and turn the canoe back over, we need to decide what we will bring with us back to shore. We must take the time to consider what we need to bring to shore because that is when the re-building of our nations will begin. As my auntie Lee Maracle said to me once in a recent conversation, “We are building from a skeleton of what we once were.” This is resurgence.*

*This Nuu-chah-nulth notion was developed into a leadership workshop for young people. Together, we’d create a canoe with many baskets and generate a conversation about what we want to bring with us back to shore. Indigenous youth always spoke of the importance of bringing family, stories, songs, dances, and language first, before anything else. They were also honest about wanting to bring their cell phones to stay connected. It was a fun workshop and got Indigenous youth to laugh, while at the same time seriously consider what is really important to them. It gave them time to pause and reflect, as well as an opportunity to really explore with each other what they felt was important to them into re-building their nations. This was a powerful exercise since most decisions in the world and in their communities that directly impact them are being made without creating an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Leadership is unfortunately something reserved for older folks and band councils, where decisions made directly impact their lands, families and communities. To put themselves in the shoes of those leaders and to have to think about deciding what is important as a nation collectively was an important re-enactment of Indigenous governance and decision-making. My wish was to inspire leadership from within, rather than labeling what a good leader is with a list of attributes. More importantly, it’s about the resurgence of Indigenous principles. The cedar baskets of treasures became principles for them to be governed by. This metaphor has many layers of meaning, and uses a process that is Nuu-chah-nulth. Because of this Indigenous-centred approach, I found it much easier to talk about “a way forward” than I ever did talking about colonization from a Western historical framework.*

*Old ways are the new way forward.*