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The Indigenization Controversy For Whom and By Whom?

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Abstract

Efforts to decolonize and Indigenize education are occurring throughout Canada, and to a lesser degree in the United States. Although initially about addressing the historical and continuing oppression of Indigenous peoples, I expand the goals to include the survival of all humans and our non-human relatives. In light of our global crises, we must move more forcefully toward truth, reconciliation and Indigenous sovereignty, while at the same time decolonizing and bringing Indigenous worldview and local Indigenous knowledge into and across the curriculum for the benefit of all students. Unfortunately, resistance from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous critics of this mandate continue. A main concern relates to who should be allowed to implement such education and who should have access to it. I offer a rationale for engaging all people in this enterprise in spite of the complexity and risks that our outweighed by the profound potential for bringing our world back into balance. Pointing out the important difference between pan-Indigenism and local place-based knowledge and why both are needed, conclude with specific suggestions for how all educators can help with decolonizing and Indigenizing schooling immediately.



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Four Introductory Stories

Story One: Indian Country Divided

Two decades ago, I served as a school board member for STAR (Service to All Relations), an alternative elementary school for Navajo children just outside the reservation near Flagstaff. One evening my wife and I played music for a fund-raiser. With her on the banjo and me on a keyboard, we played favorite Dixieland standards to a mixed audience of Navajo parents and non-Indian supporters from Flagstaff. We opened with “Georgia on my Mind,” a Hoagy Carmichael song that Mildred Bailey made famous when it first came out in 1930. Bailey’s mother was a Coeur d’Alene, and she grew up on the reservation in Idaho. Like Kid Ory, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and many other musicians of the time, she was proud of her Indian heritage but was careful who she told. Although no one in the audience had a clue about the Indian association with our first song, the affiliation was evident for the last one. I explained to the audience that we would close with a Lakota gratitude song I had sung many many times in *inipi* ceremonies. I told why it was important to close with such a song. As I was packing up the piano, a Navajo *Hatalii* (Medicine Man) came up to me and scolded me: “You know better than to bring a ceremonial song out of the circle and perform it in public!” He walked abruptly away. Almost immediately, another respected Medicine Man came up to me and said, “Thank you for bringing that song out of the circle for everyone to hear.”

Story Two: We Are All Related

In September 2016, I co-organized the “Sustainable Wisdom Conference” at the University of Notre Dame. We managed to sponsor a dozen respected Indigenous speakers. After the first day’s presentations, we held a reflective talking circle. One of the presenters voiced a severe concern about our conveying too much that should be for Indigenous eyes and ears only. Some emotional dialogue ensued, and when it got uncomfortable, people looked at me to respond. Thinking I would just make things worse with my strong position on the topic, I asked a Cree Sun Dance Chief who I had managed to bring in spite of his not having a doctoral degree if he would say a few words. He spoke for nearly fifteen minutes about trees being great teachers who with all their variety and colors share open spaces and support for one another via the intertwining roots. He said we all share the same spiritual truths, and Indigenous worldview allows us to hold many sacred centers. The essence of his message was that none of us really own sacred ideas. They belong to the Creator. We can share because we are all related and because our world is in trouble and needs everyone to do what we know can work. I looked at the eyes of the person who had registered the concern and could see that even if she did not fully agree she was now at peace with going forward.

Story Three: Importance of Indigenizing Primary School Teachers

I was in the first grade at a school in St. Louis Missouri. I had forgotten my lunch. It was in a box with an image of Roy Rogers and his horse Trigger on the front. Both were my heroes. Mom arrived half an hour after school, walked into the classroom, and set my lunch on a table in the back. She had obviously rushed to bring it to me and had not put on her usual makeup. As soon as she left the children began to chant “Donnie’s Mom’s a squaw.” I looked at the teacher with eyes pleading to make them stop. When she crossed her arms and smirked, I got up and ran

home. How different it might have been for me if the teacher had learned to recognize the value of Indigenous worldview, knowledge and perspectives? How much better it would have been for the rest of the children? For the world at large? What if she even knew what I did not know until I was 50- that Roy Rogers had Choctaw ancestry?

Story Four: Divisions from Within

After entertaining a number of pitches, Ojibwe author Richard Wagamese agreed to partner with two talented, award-winning non-Indigenous film-makers, Trish Dolman and Christine Haebler, to make the movie of his acclaimed book, *Indian Horse*. (The book conveys the tragedy of boarding schools and anti-Indian prejudice.) They, in turn, hired a non-Indigenous director, one Wagamese liked, along with two Indigenous directors in training. Wagamese, a partner and executive producer, was very involved in every aspect of the development of the film before he died half way through the making of it, wanted his story to reach as many people as possible and thought this group had the talent and resources to do this. Included in the company was Paula Devonshire, a member of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte First Nation along with executive producer, Clint Eastwood.

With the success of the film, however, came some harsh criticism and backlash from a minority of Canada's Aboriginal filmmaking community. Whereas most recognized the sincere commitment of the producers to native rights, truth and reconciliation, continuing education, and their helping Indigenous members of the crew with industry careers, a few others put forth nasty claims and alleged that the producers, as white women, should not have had such control over the film and should never have hired a non- indigenous person to be creatively involved in directing the film. (*They posited that it was cultural appropriation and in a way diminished Wagamese's sovereign right as the original creator to have anyone he wished to interpret his works*) Positioned as a legitimate desire to bring Indigenous voices to the forefront, the allegations more likely stem from the kind of fear, anger, frustration, and impatience that historically divides Indigenous communities (C.Haebler and T.Dolman, personal communication, August 10, 2019).

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Together

An Internet search for this topic results in thousands of references to decolonizing and Indigenizing. The first term is generally referred to as being about correcting revisionist history; challenging authoritarian structures; diversifying instructional practices; questioning assessment practices; challenging conquest masquerading as law. Indigenizing can bring forth Indigenous worldview and local wisdom while promoting sovereignty. Both efforts primarily focus on Indigenous students and their communities. The original goals were about giving space to Indigenous people and stopping the invisibility. I propose that the goals target all people because everyone suffers from colonizing and loss of Indigeneity.

The problem is that even scholars who talk about the importance of Indigenous worldview for human survival, continue focusing only on Indigenous students. For example, in her article "Making Space for Indigeneity: Decolonizing Education" Tiffany Smith writes that "decolonizing needs to begin within the mind and spirit of educators so that they can seek to accept that there are worldviews that exist other than the dominant Western perspective," however the goal of her work relates to the "impacts of deficit thinking on the education of Indigenous students." (2016, p 50).

It is this deficit thinking that is behind divide-and-conquer behavior such as occurred in the fourth story. The painful allegations come from generalized deficit-based protection of self-identity. I watched the movie critically after reading the book and found it to be as true to the book as any movie can be. Indigenous actors played Indigenous roles. The producers have even put forth interactive educational modules for Canadian schools. Wagamese sadly passed into the next world before the movie was finished so we cannot ask him why he felt the company he selected would best get his message across. I believe, however, that he would feel satisfied. I think he would be disheartened to believe the power of the film might be overshadowed by an unnecessary controversy over it. He might prefer, as I do, that the message of the film be understood by all as a foundation for building the desired structures we all wish to see.

Of course, none of this is to say we should go soft on decolonizing efforts. I have personally blasted many non-Indigenous book authors and film-makers myself for whitewashing anti-Indian coverage of Indigenous topics for many years. However, I have done so as a scholar pointing out specific inaccuracies or settler hegemony. (See, for example, my text *Unlearning the Language of Conquest: Scholars Expose Anti-Indianism in America*. Or Google my article for *Indian Country Today* entitled “The Heart of Everything that Isn’t” about the best-selling book about Red Cloud entitled *The Heart of Everything that Is*.) This is not what is happening, however, in the Indigenization controversy. I submit that when we see Indigenizing education and media as promoting Indigenous worldview, knowledge, and perspectives for human survival, not just Indigenous survival, not only will divisions between Indigenous peoples disappear, but we will have recruited allies of people who remember their ancient Indigenous ancestry—something every human has.

Indigenizing schooling in behalf of Indigenous students will continue. It has already become a research specialization (Veracini 2010). The need for truth and reconciliation is more important than ever with the growing violence against Indigenous Peoples worldwide (Four Arrows, 2018). Adam Barker and Emma Battell Lowman (2016) write about settler colonialism as a structure that operates via a continual displacement and/or replacement of a place’s original Indigenous People. This must be addressed of course. However, we must add to this body of research about Indigenizing and decolonizing for only the benefit Indigenous peoples to its legitimate benefits for the world.. It is about a long overdue effort in schools to counter anti-Indianism (Cook-Lynn, 2007; Four Arrows, 2008) for the sake of all humans who are indigenous to the Earth. In fact, this was a message of the 2019 United Nations extinction rate report (Dean, May 6, 2019). 450 scientists from 50 countries studied 15,000 scientific papers to predict two things. One is that around a million more species will be come extinct in one generation based on current extinction rate projections. The other was that this tragic probability can be mitigated by Indigenous worldview (Four Arrows, 2019). Such conclusions were also published in *Nature Sustainability*: “Our results add to growing evidence that recognizing Indigenous Peoples’ rights to land, benefit sharing and institutions is essential to meeting local and global conservation goals” (Garnett et al, July 16, 2018).

A good example of what I am saying here is with Dr. Marie Battiste’s book, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (2013). In it she documents the devastating consequences of colonial systems on both Aboriginal populations and everyone else. Rochelle Starr points out in her piece, “Decolonizing Education: Not an Indian Problem” (2014): “Battiste’s message, as I was privileged to learn during an interview with her, identifies the Eurocentric framework that underpins the educational system as continuing to have damaging

effects for everyone, impacting teachers, administrators, and students, non- Indigenous and Indigenous alike. Indigenizing education is for *all students* at all grade-levels. We are now all facing the same terrors to some significant degree. The more non-Indigenous people can learn about Indigeneity, the more likely they can become allies for Indigenous sovereignty. More importantly, the greater the chance for a sustainable world.

It may also be that the best way for Indigenous communities to achieve toward authentic sovereignty is to get more non-Indigenous and more Indigenous people to re-embrace our original worldview. Many Indigenous leaders and tribal members have forsaken their traditional ways and Native languages while adopting the dominant worldview. I know a number of non-Indigenous “allies” who do more to protect traditional values, language and ceremonies than some First Nations governmental leaders! I also know Indigenous people who passionately want to participate in saving their language and traditions, but know too little about their worldview and local knowledge.

The point is if we believe that we are all related, and if Indigenous worldview has been proven to work significantly better than the dominant worldview for more harmonious life, then we must begin a major campaign for complementary worldview reflection on a large scale. Future generations depend on such a transformational opportunity. Momaday says, “I think we’re on the brink of disaster on many fronts. I believe that Native people can help us out of that, help push us back away from that brink” (1991, p. 439). Similarly, Chomsky writes that “the grim prognosis for life on this planet is the consequence of a few centuries of forgetting what traditional societies knew and the surviving ones still recognize” (2016). And the list of scholars saying such things is growing.

In spite of these warnings, education today unquestioningly supports the dominant colonizing worldview’s beliefs about such things as nature, hierarchy, authoritarianism, competition, cooperation, women, children, future generations, economic concepts, diversity, learning approaches, spirituality and virtue. Only through such global decolonizing and Indigenizing can we stop anti-Indian genocide and culturcide simultaneously with saving biodiversity and water. “It is this internalized logic of domination that blinds the settlers historically and currently to both the demands of a developing exploitive corporate state which needs them to assert its right to wealth and power gleaned from the land that they initially claim, and to the ongoing violence playing out on their own spirits, bodies, and families in the name of civilizational progress and national power (Martusewicz 2019).

As educators use decolonization to challenge educational and cultural hegemony, we must also replace it with Indigenous perspectives and values that guided us for most of human history in ways that cultivate more peaceful, healthy and happy relationships in and with the world. We must wake up from the hypnotic trance that is causing us to destroy ourselves and our home. What are some of the reasons Indigenizing mainstream education is so difficult to put into action? I propose in addition to internal division and the absence of promoting Indigenizing as a global project for all people, it also relates to:

1. Parents, legislators, teachers, and administrators who have been indoctrinated to see Indigenous knowledges as something of the past with no merit for the present.
2. Supportive non-Indigenous teachers who are uncomfortable with teaching anything Indigenous for fear of doing it wrong or incompletely.

3. Supportive Indigenous teachers who feel they do not have sufficient authority.
4. Indigenous tribal members who fear that in addition to everything else taken away from them, now their spiritual wisdom will be stolen, misinterpreted and misused.
5. Indigenous tribal members who have themselves been assimilated; brainwashed or punished in ways that cause them to reject traditional Indigenous worldview and subsequent lifeways.
6. Teachers fearful of retaliatory repercussions for challenging status-quo dominant systems.
7. We must recognize the faulty scholarship of academics that continue anti-Indianism.

This last objective is worth some more words. Hegemony is difficult to spot especially when it comes from high ranking professors and best-selling authors. Such prestigious academic and culture hegemony and gatekeepers have and continue to stifle Indigeneity. These are those who publish best-selling books that try to prove the superiority of modern civilization over the “primitive past.” Examples include Keeley’s Oxford University Press text *War Before Civilization* whereby he claims that civilian massacres prove that the “humanity of humans is a product of civilization and centralized governments that overcame the horrors of primitive life;” and UCLA anthropologist Robert Edgerton’s book, *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony* that says “child abuse and other social maladies that were far more pervasive in primitive societies than in ours prove the superiority of Western culture” (Four Arrows, 2008, p. 11). In his decades old article in the *Journal of American Indian Education* McKenna puts such academics into three categories (a) Those who are overtly racists and anti-Indian (b) Those who generally exclude Indians from academic life (c) those who neglect to include the Indian histories and contributions in scholarly presentations” (1981, p. 21). A recent article in the *National Post*, entitled “As Universities ‘Indigenize’ Some See a Threat to Open Inquiry,” cites a number of professors who may fit one of these categories or otherwise question the usefulness of Indigenous knowledge or worldview. The author writes:

Some point to a politicization around Indigenous issues on campus that can be hostile toward critical thinking. Others are troubled to see universities hiring professors and admitting students based on race. And there are concerns that the embrace of Indigenous knowledge undermines a commitment to science (Hamilton 2018).

Hamilton refers to a City College of New York philosophy professor who worries that the sensitivity around guilt about treatment of Indigenous People that leads to “diminishing the quality of education” by elevating Indigenous knowledge to the level of science in classrooms. According to the article’s author, the professor says “It is no better than religious schools teaching creationism.” He also refers to a politics professor at Calgary’s Mount Royal University who says that Indigenous knowledge is not knowledge but rather it is spiritual belief.

In addition to writing about how a number of academics see the Indigenizing movement as being more about advocacy than scholarly work, Hamilton is another who talks about how Indigenous People are questioning or are outright attacking “the fitness of a white academic to teach Aboriginal history.” (As per our opening story #4). In spite of my disagreement, I recognize that there is a long history of distrusting education, and rightfully so. It is curriculum

that has maintained settler colonialism and the permanence of the settler-colonial nation state (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2013). Nonetheless, education holds power for transformation or status-quo and we have no choice but to change it. Without understanding the problems of the status quo itself, however, transformation is unlikely. This is why decolonizing must be widespread. Smith defines “decolonization” as “a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power” (p.101). She views decolonizing as a continual process. “The challenge always is to demystify, to decolonize” (p. 17). Furthermore, in addition to decolonizing academic research, she is also interested in decolonizing the minds of Indigenous peoples who have been corrupted by hegemonic education.

There is a need to understand the complex ways people were brought within the imperial system, because its impact is still being felt. The reach of imperialism into our heads challenges those who belong to colonized communities to understand how this occurred, partly because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity (p.24).

Smith does not talk much about “indigenizing” education per se. She does say “there are no limitations on the application of Smith’s principles in education which could become a fundamental aspect of an Indigenizing.” Citing her in the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, Louise et al write in “Indigenizing Principles of Decolonizing Methodologies in University Classrooms”:

The mistake often made by university faculties is to ignore the value that Indigenous methods of education could bring to standardized Western curricula. Isolating Indigenous knowledges within discrete classes or disciplines, for instance, occurs to the detriment of all learners, as Indigenous pedagogies and perspectives are thus marginalized...While (Smith’s principles) are presented as methodologies that can help Indigenous people move towards self-determination via research, it is clear that the potential for the overall philosophy is just as applicable to informing pedagogy within a university classroom ((Louie et al 2017. p. 22).

Gwawaenuk Nation member Bob Joseph, founder of the award-winning company, Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc. and co-author with his wife Cynthia of *Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples* (2017) help clarify the blurry distinction between Indigenizing and decolonizing. They write that “Indigenizing” is about helping non-Indigenous people become aware of the validity of Indigenous worldviews, knowledge and perspectives and respecting them as being equal to other views. It involves incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and doing into the education system. This contrasts with “decolonization” that also restores the Indigenous worldview, but instead of “teaching it” it merely exposing the false interpretations of history and the harmful perspectives perpetrated by colonization on Indigenous People while removing obstacles to sovereignty.

Devon Abbot Mihesuah supports this idea as well. in her edited book, *Indigenizing the Academy*. Her book also blurs the two terms, focusing on decolonizing educational systems by exposing problems of racism, territoriality and ethnic fraud. At the same time, many of the

chapters are about incorporating Indigenous values and perspectives into such disciplines as psychological, political science, archaeology and history as well pedagogy. She has also the colonialistic hegemony of Native Studies programs, revealing that just being Indigenous is not enough to get Indigenizing right (2006).

The Risks of Pan-Indigenism

So what is it that makes some scholars think that Indigenizing education is riskier for Indigenous People and their goals than a focus on decolonizing education alone? This gets to a legitimate concern the “Indigenous teachers only” folks have about the inappropriateness of non-Indigenous educators having a hand in the Indigenizing movement. It is one thing to expect that all people can eventually teach our original worldview, it is another to expect everyone can easily teach local, place-based (“indigenous with a small ‘i’”) knowledge. Whereas my work is with the Indigenous worldview that the great variety of First Nations hold in common and that all people have in our DNA, this is just a starting place. Indigeneity also vitally rests with local, place-based knowledge that exists in the traditions, ceremonies, stories and language of a particular First Nation. Teaching this must involve, when at all possible, local Indigenous elders who still remember the traditions and language that stem from the land. If such wisdom keepers are not to be found, then non-Indigenous teachers can and should engage students in research about the local language and knowledge as best as possible (while continuing with worldview reflection.) It may even be that in some places where the original inhabitants no longer exist or remember, people local may have to relearn and recreate their own Indigenous ways of living in attunement with the unique environment.

This notion is of course potentially dangerous. Monique Giroux warns non-Indigenous settlers with no prior connection to an Indigenous community and no access to traditional sources could become the new Indigenous people. She writes that “indigenize” as a verb might then no longer refer to Indigenous peoples at all (2017). This is one of the slippery slopes that must be carefully negotiated. Even my own work in Indigenizing education is at risk for going to far away from addressing local Indigenous wisdom keepers with my emphasis on worldview reflection Timothy San Pedro, in his review of my 2013 book about Indigenizing mainstream education, calls me on this correctly:

After reading this book, I wonder: What are the dangers in using Indigenous as a verb, to “indigenize?” What does it mean to “Indigenize mainstream education?” In the movement to a verb, it becomes an action upon another, rather than a change through internal reflection of lived experiences with our communities and families...What does Indigenizing education mean when it is delivered in classrooms voice of Indigenous Peoples? How do those “generalizable” tenets of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and paradigms translate when it is separated from the people and the places from which they originated? How might non-Native Peoples with few relations with Native Peoples embark upon this work? (2015 p.156).

Indigenizing education thus as these two parts. One teaches precepts all or most Indigenous communities hold via an Indigenous worldview. The other focuses on unique understanding of a particular place. The first can be easier to learn for non-Indian teachers but place-based knowledges can usually only come from the local wisdom handed down to those

original inhabitants of the land, if such individuals are still around. All the work that generalizes Indigenous wisdom can miss the wisdom of a particular place that can only come from those who speak the language that emanated from it and who know the stories and teachings of the local plants and animals. Indigenous wisdom cannot be transferred in a classroom without local wisdom keepers, unless there is, sadly, no choice, as there may be in some geographic areas where the original inhabitants either no longer exist or no longer know the language and stories. In spite of such risks, I maintain that we must do everything possible to engage all people in both forms of Indigenizing and decolonizing. The more non-Indigenous allies participate in Indigenizing education, the more likely we can preserve existing Indigenous cultures. “More than indigenizing, decolonizing requires meaningful political action on the part of the university, aimed at restoring Indigenous control over such lands and at supporting Indigenous rights to control and possess their knowledge, languages and cultures” (Hill, 2012, p. 21). We are all in the same sinking boat and we must work together. Moreover, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can do the work. Would not transformational learning about Indigenous beliefs, such as relate to the role of complementarity seeking; the importance of women; reciprocal and respectful relationships with other-than-human life forms; or understandings about generosity, courage and fearlessness, etc., inspire political action in behalf of Indigenous rights as proposing legislation? Would not learning about local Indigenous knowledge, such as extraordinary water-saving strategies based on spiritual assumptions about the sentience of water, motivate action and expose non-Indigenous approaches that overuse water?

We can find ways to give Indigenous individuals their voice and prioritize wherever possible, while at the same time taking advantage of the non-Indigenous educators potential for helping with this in particular and with the Indigenizing project for all people as well. There are just not enough traditionally raised Indigenous educators out there. There are too few Indigenous Indigenous leaders in the United States, Canada or Mexico, even those who still speak their original languages, who have not been corrupted enough by their own colonizing education, media, environments and religions. Until we can get educators to stop this colonizing, the problem will continue and understand the worldview problem, our boat will continue sinking.

Up until now, the majority of pro-Indigenous work in the world has been about efforts to address Indigenous problems like high suicide rates, preventable disease, low employment, discrimination, land theft and pollution, etc. There have been some successes like the Canadian suit that resulted in the publication of the *Truth and Reconciliation Report* (2015). It gives evidence of how boarding schools were genocidal and responsible for continuing historical trauma. However, such victories have been marginal in transforming contemporary life. Indigenous rights the world over are still largely ignored. How much more effective might problem-solving efforts be if more people come to learn that what Indigenous People have to offer the world? Remember that the 2019 UN report says this may be necessary for human survival? Waziyatwawin (Angela Wilson) writes that “Decolonization ultimately requires the overthrowing of the colonial structure, not about just making it more Indigenous friendly.” This is, she continues, because “the existing system is fundamentally and irreparably flawed” (p.4). Just trying to help Indigenous cultures survive is not going to be enough to save us. Indigenous worldview, values, local knowledges and relatedness perspectives are necessary partners with critical pedagogy in the decolonizing and Indigenizing work. Critical knowledge without spiritual recognition of the sacredness of Nature is insufficient to meet our current global challenges. E. Wayne Ross is an example of a scholar who knows this. His work is about “Flushing out and trying to change thought that is unchallenged, showing that things are not as

self-evident as they seem to be” (2017) and at the same time his efforts to bring Indigenous worldview into his social studies text books (2006) also reveals his understanding that decolonizing and Indigenizing also calls for the broader Indigenous worldview.

I realize the risk of decolonizing and Indigenizing movements, or at least the perception that they are underway, can serve as window-dressing while continuing destruction of Indigenous lifeways, language and land go unchallenged. We cannot operate from fear however. The question of who will do the Indigenizing and who will be Indigenized reflects fear. Misappropriation, superficial curriculum, “playing Indian” and New Age experimentation can easily be separated from authentic Indigenizing efforts. Honest recognition of the tragic failure of capitalistic exploitation and its movement into fascism cannot be faked. Without recognizing the interrelationships that are putting us into a mass extinction, emancipatory education cannot lead to sustainability. “As long as the political project of critical education fails to theorize the interrelationship between human consumption, capitalist exploitation, and the struggle for ‘democracy,’ it will fail to provide emancipatory pedagogies that are sustainable and pertinent for the global age” (Grande, 2004, p. 7). However, without worldview reflection that relates to the Indigenous and the dominant worldview, no criticality can bring forth healthy sustainability. Educators must gather all the resources available for such a monumental task as decolonization and Indigenization. We need as many “qualified hands on the deck” as we can get. If elder wisdom is not physically available, we must search for it in books and in life experiences with both cognitive and trance-based learning (ceremony). That westernized peoples must accept direction from traditional and reestablished forms of Elder wisdom “is likely to secure futures” if, says Sepie, “the focus is on Indigenous values that can shift us towards good outcomes for all living beings – how to live well, and sustainably, together” (Sepie 2018, p. 17).

Some Quick Suggestions for How to Indigenize Education Now

The first thing is for teachers to recognize how easy it is for us to be complicit in colonizing students. Just giving letter grades, for example, is a colonizing act that would be countered via Indigenous precepts. “An understanding of the subtleties of such inadvertent participation in colonizing education, whether intentional or not, is “crucial for every student, professor, and administrator who is either involved in Indigenous studies or who has Indigenous faculty or students in their departments” (Mihesuah, D. A., & Wilson, A. C. 2004, p. 34). With this in mind, I offer some suggestions I hope will help kick-start the reader’s commitment to this work.

Non-Indigenous teachers must make the distinction between pan-Indigeness and worldview reflection and local traditional knowledge, as has been pointed out. This involves understanding the common and vital precepts various First nations share while at the same time knowing that only local traditional Indigenous Peoples (or their writings) can bring forth place-based wisdom. There is no one “Indigenous culture.” Navajo learners will have uniquely different beliefs and ways of being than Lakota ones, for example. And of course within these groups, individuals will likely have uniquely diverse learning styles. At the same time, traditional cultures share a generalized worldview that contrasts significantly with the dominant one (along with some complementary aspects.) Worldview reflection is thus an important way for faculty to better understand when Western colonizing is operating. A simple “Indigenous and Western Worldviews” search yields ample comparative charts to help with this.

Generally speaking, traditional Indigenous education learning emphasizes that which works best for all of us. It includes: (a) cooperative environments, (b) use of imagery, metaphor, and storytelling with emphasis on visual learning, (c) integrative learning (valorizing intuition and bodily knowing along with other modes of cognition) (d) opportunities for independent (solo) reflection, and (e) holistic perspectives that are historically generated, problem-solving, and mutual interdependent. Learning relates to significant observation of another followed by private practice leading to confidence for public performance. It is best if classroom communication speaks around the subject rather than directly to it, leaving room for students to come to their own conclusions rather than that of the instructor per se. Wait time and silence are important. Students must also learn to “move comfortably among different cultures while valuing the unique cultural assumptions of their home, community and heritage” (Jacobs & Reyhner, 2002).

Indigenizing education also calls for embracing the mysterious and acknowledging the sacredness of its energies. Regardless of one’s religious affiliations, teachers can bring “spirituality” (giving sacred significance to all things) into the classroom. This means avoiding anthropocentrism and learning to recognize that sentience is all around in other-than-human life forms. Weave in when possible a less fearful understanding of death. Attempt to recognize the interconnections between physical, spiritual, emotional, communal, and virtue-based ideals of traditional Indigenous cultures. Be willing to consider Indigenous science when it conflicts with Western science. Encourage students to courageously truth-seek and do it collaboratively with them. Even in the academic world the Western emphasis on logical linear cognitive thinking must be balanced with what in many instances is the truth-seeking that comes from courageous exploration of the heart and of one’s unexamined beliefs.

With only the computer and an open heart, teachers can start Indigenizing by weaving ecological topics into coursework whenever possible. This includes recognizing the source of violence against people of all varieties, humans, animals, reptiles, insects, birds, plants, rivers, mountains, etc. Focus on local place-based priorities and whenever possible bring in local Indigenous elders to teach about them.

Another useful tool is the CAT-FAWN mnemonic for metacognitive worldview reflection. I have written about this extensively in *Point of Departure: Returning to our More Authentic Worldview for Education and Survival*. It simply shows how Indigenous worldview perspectives see Fear, Authority, Words and Nature in very different ways than cultures under the dominant worldview. Moreover, dominant cultural understandings of these four forces do the damage we see all around owing to how they influence outcomes when we are in unintentional trance states that make us susceptible to “Concentration-Activated Transformation.” This tool can help all students with critical, complementary worldview reflection and with actualizing transformation according to a healthier understanding of the four forces.

I close with repeating what the Cree Sun Dance chief, White Standing Buffalo, told everyone that first day at the University of Notre Dame’s Indigenous Sustainable Wisdom conference when some of my colleagues expressed concern about giving too much sacred information to the non-Indigenous audience. He said, “None of us really own these sacred ideas. They belong to the Creator. We can share because we are all related, and because our world is in trouble and needs everyone to do what we know can work.”

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