

WAYI WAH!

Indigenous Pedagogies

An Act for Reconciliation
and Anti-Racist Education

JO CHRONA

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and Anti-Racist Education

J O C H R O N A



SAMPLE PAGES

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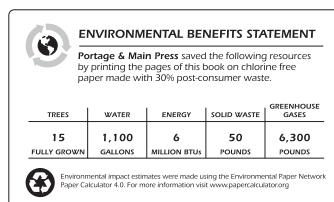
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This book is dedicated to the Indigenous educators and Knowledge Holders whose work I try to honour and build on.

It is for the women who have inspired me with their fearlessness, and those who continue to teach me with their quiet strength and grace.

This book is for those who have come before me, those still here, and those yet to come.

Thank you to the educators who have entrusted me with their words to share with you, and to the countless others who have responded to the Calls to Action in this country.

This book is for my mother.

And, of course, to J. I choose another 10 years.

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WAYI WAH!

(Let's go; it's time!)

1

WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

Setting Up Our Space in a Good Way

SITUATING OURSELVES

One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.

BEN OKRI, quoted in Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*

What is my story? What is your story? How does who I am affect these words I share with you? How does who you are shape how you receive these words? This is a good place to begin our conversation.

One important aspect of Indigenous knowledge systems is that they respond to, and honour, context.¹ Who I am, where I write from, and the land I am now on informs what I share with you. Knowledge and understanding are entrenched in relationship and connected to people and place.

¹ We know that how we use words matters, so I try to use words in ways that are respectful. Depending on the context, I use *Indigenous* or *First Nations, Inuit, and Métis*. When I use *Indigenous*, I am referring to all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. If I am referring to a specific First Nation, I will use the name of that First Nation.

Like other Oral Traditions that are the foundation of many Indigenous cultures, the practice of situating myself would usually be spoken. This would take place in a space shared with other people who would also be sharing who they are and the land(s) they come from; here, we would also honour the peoples on whose territory we gather. So, as I write this book, I wonder how we can translate that practice into this different environment.

I begin by acknowledging the peoples on whose Traditional Territories I currently live and work.

I am fortunate to be on the place of the ləkʷəŋən Peoples, specifically the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations, whose historical relationships with this land continue today. This place is also known as Victoria, British Columbia. It is not my first home, but it is by the ocean, so it connects me to where I was born. As this is a coastal community, I can imagine that the ancestors of this place had much in common with the ancestors of my mother's people farther up the west coast of this continent. As I think about those ancestors, I am also reminded of the resilience and strength of so many Indigenous Peoples who exist and thrive here on this land right now despite the forces of colonization.

I invite you to think about where you are at this moment. Think about whose traditional lands Canada has claimed. Think about the historical relationships that people have had with that land and how those relationships endure and evolve today. What is your relationship with the land? On whose Traditional Territory do you live? Work? Play? Is it unceded territory?² What does this mean for the folks who now inhabit it? What are the Indigenous languages of the places you inhabit? How are they thriving in our world today?

As who I am and where I write from informs what I share with you, perhaps it would be helpful to tell a little more about myself. Jo Chrona di waayu. Ganhada di pdeegu. Gits'm°eelm di wil 'waatgu. My traditional name is Ni' K'am Gyoos Nexl. I am Ganhada of Waap K'oom of the Kitsumkalum First Nation, a Ts'msyen (Tsimshian) community on the northwest coast of Canada. My mother and her

² Unceded territory is land that First Nations never legally gave to Canada. For more terminology support, see the glossary of terms in Kory Wilson's *Pulling Together: Foundations Guide*: <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfoundations/back-matter/glossary-of-terms/#Unceded_Lands>.

mother were also born to the Kitsumkalum First Nation, and my mother's father was Gitxsan from the Gitsegukla First Nation. I am also of European heritage. My stepfather was of Swedish and English ancestry, and my biological father of French and English ancestry.

I was born in Kxeen, also known as Prince Rupert, and have lived and worked in British Columbia most of my life. I did not grow up in Kitsumkalum. My step-father worked in mining, so our family moved from mining town to mining town in the province. Some of those small communities no longer exist.

In general, school was not difficult for me academically. I did well for the most part, as I loved to read and had a relative facility with language. But I attended seven schools in 12 years of education. Moving from place to place made things a little more challenging; being a tall, fat girl made the already difficult process of fitting in with new groups of peers even harder. I like to think, though, that the experience of moving around helped me learn to be adaptable. While I enjoyed learning, school ended up being something to get through until I decided what to do next.

I never intended to be a teacher or to work in education. I remember wanting to be a lawyer, perhaps because my mom's older brother had become a lawyer later in his life; he was the only member of my extended family who had even gone to university at that time. Somewhere along the way I got sidetracked and ended up teaching, with only a bachelor's degree and a letter of permission, in Faro, Yukon, a tiny mining town (and how I ended up a teacher in that remote place is an interesting story for another time). In a small K-12 school, I worked as an education assistant in the mornings, assisting one child in a primary grade who had significant hearing challenges and another in an intermediate grade with some developmental challenges. I learned so much from those two little ones.

My afternoons were spent teaching secondary students in two different courses. Let me tell you, that first teaching experience was not good. I was a horrible teacher—I bored even myself. I taught via the textbook in ways that replicated some of the dullest experiences I had as a student. That whole experience resulted in my thinking that I never wanted to be a teacher.

However, a few years later, I ended up back in post-secondary education and completed Simon Fraser University's Professional Development Program to obtain my teacher certification in British Columbia. I would like to say that it was

reflecting on and learning from that first teaching experience that led me to apply to a teacher education program, but that was not my main reason. I simply did not know what else I was going to do with my degree, and my life. And yes, there was a part of me that wanted to learn what it could be like to teach differently than what I had previously experienced and perpetuated. I remember telling my classmates that I would probably be the first of us to leave the profession. I was wrong—I am still here over 25 years later. Maybe it was the question I had about how I could have created better learning experiences for my students that has driven me to stay and continue to learn.

Most of my K-12 teaching experience was in Prince Rupert, a small town on the coast of British Columbia. As a classroom teacher there, I taught mostly senior English, communications, and junior humanities courses, with some French as a second language, counselling, and literacy support thrown in for good measure (the reality of smaller school districts). When I reflect on those years, I do so with longing to be working with young people again. I miss the youth who were able to inspire, irritate, amuse, and challenge me all at once. I also often wish I could go back and do better for them.

Those years of teaching created a foundation for later work, including being a faculty associate in a teacher education program; a policy analyst, advisor, and curriculum manager in Indigenous education; a curriculum developer and resource writer; and an Indigenous education workshop facilitator. In between fulfilling these roles, I completed a master's degree and worked for two years in a large urban school district as a District Helping Teacher in Indigenous education.³ These experiences helped me understand even more fully the difficult conversations we need to continue to have to create stronger and more responsive education systems.

During my career, I have been fortunate to work with, and learn from, educators in varying roles in the public education system and independent and First Nations schools. I have also had the privilege of working for the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), supporting educators in (and advocates

³ In this school district, District Helping Teachers are certified teachers with expertise in specific areas of education who provide professional development and other support to classroom teachers.

for) First Nations schools and First Nations learners, families, and communities in all education systems.⁴

Why does any of this matter?

I have not learned in isolation. My journey has been possible only because so many people have made paths I can follow, and because there are so many others whom I have learned alongside.

I have been gifted with opportunities to learn with, and from, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, educators, and learners. Through this, I have come to understand that the power to improve our education systems can be found in the knowledge systems and perspectives of Indigenous cultures. And I now also know that I have a responsibility to share what I have learned with others.

I can never presume to know everything about any of the work I have engaged in. In all of my experiences as an educator, I have also been a learner. I believe that by understanding ourselves as learners, we can be better teachers.

Because of where I am from, and where my professional life has been centred, my writing about Indigenous Peoples, education, cultures, and communities reflects contexts in British Columbia. While there may be commonalities in other parts of Canada, there are also, most assuredly, differences. Indigenous Peoples and communities are diverse. While there are some similarities in cultural foundations and ways of being in the world, we should not assume that what is true for Indigenous Peoples in one place is true for all Indigenous Peoples. Such assumptions support a pan-Indigenous narrative that erases the rich diversity within and among Indigenous cultures. For example, the continent that non-Indigenous peoples call North America is known by some Indigenous Peoples as Turtle Island. However, you will not hear me refer to this land as Turtle Island because that is not how it is known where I come from. Similarly, while the use of the circle to represent the connections and interconnectedness of numerous concepts is common to many Indigenous cultures, I do not refer to the Medicine Wheel because this specific concept of organizing Indigenous knowledges is not reflected in the knowledge systems of the community I belong to. If there is a first

⁴ FNESC is a First Nations-led policy and advocacy organization that works to support First Nations students and advance First Nations education in British Columbia. For more information, see <fnesc.ca>.

thing for non-Indigenous educators to understand, it is the significant diversity between and among Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

You may wonder why I refer to Indigenous Peoples in Canada, rather than Canada's Indigenous Peoples. It is important to think about what this possessive would imply: Indigenous Peoples do not belong to Canada.

I also want to acknowledge that I am just one voice of the many people who work in Indigenous education and who have strong, effective voices of their own. Their perspectives may differ from mine and from each other's. I do not presume to speak for any other Indigenous people who work in Indigenous education or anti-racism. It is not my place, nor do I have the right to usurp another's voice. I speak from my own context and based on what I have learned. That is why it is important for me to situate myself early in this book. I hope, though, that what I write reflects and respects what is also understood by others.

In writing this book, I acknowledge the privilege I am afforded because of what the concept of authorship confers in non-Indigenous cultures. I have a venue to share my voice in a world where many other people's voices are not heard. I have this opportunity to publish my thinking, but that does not mean that my ideas or insights are more valuable than those of the countless others working in Indigenous education and anti-racism who do not share their words in print.

As I write this, I wonder about your story. How do you bring your whole self and life experiences to how you receive and interpret my words? The power of sharing words is not only in what is written or spoken. There is also power in how words are received: in how a person takes them in, turns them over, assesses them for authenticity, and transforms them into their lived experience.

Reflection Questions

- What is your story of how you came to be where you are? Where did your parents and ancestors come from? What is your relationship with where you are now?
- What do you know about the First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis people in the area you live? Whose Traditional Territory(ies) are you on?
- How would you define your relationship to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples?

Don't worry if you don't have answers to these questions right now. It might even be better if you don't. Questions invite us to think. There is power in the words "I don't know." It is in this place of not knowing where we can create space to learn. The important thing is to remember and think about the questions, come to some answers, think some more, gain deeper understandings, and, hopefully, act to make a change.

Situating Yourself

Let us take a moment to briefly talk about the term *Reconciliation*. I discuss Reconciliation in more detail in chapter 3, but invite you to keep this concept in mind as you read the book. Think about how the ideas I share connect implicitly, or explicitly, to enacting Reconciliation in education. While it is not conventional to capitalize *Reconciliation*, I do so to emphasize the specific process addressing the harms of colonization on Indigenous Peoples in Canada. When I use this word, I am imbuing it with meaningful action rather than merely performative tasks.

The work of anti-racism and Reconciliation in education can be described as a blend of learning, self-reflection, challenging assumptions and bias, and taking action. It is also about modelling. For example, when I talk about situating myself

in terms of who I am, where I am from, and where I am now, I am modelling what others can do. Situating oneself as a classroom teacher or a formal or informal leader in a school, district, or provincial organization is no less important than me doing so now.

Everything is in relationship with, or in relation to, everything else. Understanding this relationality means being aware that we are shaped by more than the content of any learning environment; we are also affected by the way we interact with one another and how we move through the world in relation to each other. Situating ourselves by identifying who we are and our connections to others, and by acknowledging the land we come from and are now on, helps set up a space to work with each other in good ways. If we know each other better, we are more willing to listen to, and really hear, each other.

Reflection Questions

- Think about the contexts in which you live and work. How could you make the space for situating yourself and helping others share who they are in ways that extend beyond professional roles? Why might this be important?
- How could situating yourself positively affect your work environment? How could it affect your life outside of your work environment?
- How would you respond if others ask why situating ourselves is important?

The very least we can do is learn whose land we are on and why territory acknowledgments are so important. To me, territory acknowledgments are important because they remind me that I am a visitor, and that the land has been cared for and maintained by Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years. When I remember that I am a visitor, I remember that I want to use my time on the earth as wisely as possible. It helps me live in the present moment, respectfully and with intention.

— Lauren N., educator

By the time you reach the end of this book, perhaps you will have answers to these questions, and perhaps not. But, either way, remember the questions.

AN INVITATION

I've written this book to help non-Indigenous educators who are seeking to continue to learn about Indigenous pedagogies, Reconciliation through education, or creating Indigenous-specific anti-racist education environments. It is both for people who are new to these conversations and for those who want to expand or deepen their learning. It is for those people who want to understand how to help shape anti-racist education systems that respond to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learners while creating powerful learning experiences for *all* learners.

My intention is to provoke thinking, generate conversations, and support learning about Indigenous-informed pedagogical approaches. I share how moving forward with Reconciliation in education in Canada requires us to understand how to address forms of Indigenous-specific systemic racism. I also urge educators to take informed action to create better educational systems in ways that are truly transformational.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? I know it isn't. I acknowledge that these are complex topics. Honouring Indigenous-informed pedagogical approaches and creating anti-racist education systems is not accomplished by creating and implementing a lesson plan or reading one book. It happens when we commit to learning and doing differently. It happens when we work together.

Before I go any further, I need to share a few of my own challenges in writing this book. When folks get to know me well, they learn that I have quite an acerbic tongue. Don't worry, I have become skilled at curbing it in professional settings (well, at least I hope so!). But I do sometimes say things bluntly. An early reader of this manuscript indicated that I sometimes talk *at* the reader. Yes, that may happen. There are things that need to be said bluntly. I hope that when you encounter such areas of this text, you will understand why they are written as they are.

I hope that I have created in these chapters an invitation to take a walk and have a conversation with a good mind and a good heart. I acknowledge the one-sided nature of this conversation. I will share my thoughts and ideas, but it is up to you to make meaning based on who you are and the life experiences you bring to your interaction with these words.

This Is Both Professional and Personal

Professional learning in the areas of Indigenous education, Reconciliation, and anti-racism is as much a personal journey as a professional one. After all, our professional lives reflect our personal values and biases.

This learning requires the hard work of shifting perspectives and considering things we may have taken for granted about how our education system (classrooms, schools, districts, and provinces) should operate. This work is challenging because, to understand the changes that need to happen, we must look at the values that underlie the decisions we make that create (or influence) the system.

To move forward with Reconciliation and anti-racism, we need to understand the multifaceted nature of Indigenous education. We must also acknowledge the historical context in which many of us were raised and educated, which left gaps in our own knowledge and understandings of the cultures, histories, and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We must address these gaps. This learning necessarily extends beyond gathering or implementing classroom grade-level or subject-area resources. It includes looking at how racist perspectives are deeply embedded in not only education systems, but often our own beliefs. This kind of racism is challenging to eliminate unless we do the work of peeling back the layers to identify it.

Moving forward also requires understanding where we have come from, so I will briefly touch on a few of the contexts of our collective histories that inform and impact where we are right now.

Connecting Hearts and Minds

I approach this work with the understanding that we bring the totality of who we are to every learning opportunity. In Sm'alyax, the language of the Ts'msyen, the word for heart is *goot*, and the word for mind (which refers to our thinking as action and our thoughts) is *t'ilgoolsk*, which contains within it the root word of *goot*. The connection between these two words reflects the understanding that how and what we think are connected to our heart. Think about that for a moment. Take some time to imagine how we would perhaps be in this world differently if we understood the link between our hearts and minds—if we honoured our whole selves in our learning, rather than trying to compartmentalize who we are. It is in the link between these two words in Sm'alyax that we can understand that we need to bring both our hearts and minds to our work.

SOME STRUCTURAL GUIDANCE AS YOU READ

You will, of course, engage with the words and ideas in this book in ways that make the most sense to you. However, I have also included the following features that may be helpful in guiding your reading:

- **Reflection Questions**

These questions are intended to help you process the ideas presented in each chapter; you have already seen a few examples in this chapter. They offer moments for you to pause and think. They don't all have easy or "correct" answers. Deep reflection is a critical step in enabling people "to actually 'hear' a point of view different from their own, and to appreciate emotionally as well as cognitively each other's reality" (Senge et al., 2015, p. 28). I encourage you to take some time to think about the reflection questions. It might be helpful to keep a journal, where you can write down some of your responses and document, reflect on, and process your learning journey.

- **Taking Action**

In these sections, I suggest general actions for all readers, some specific actions for classroom teachers, and other actions for people in formal or informal leadership positions. The actions we take to support anti-racist education systems to engage with Reconciliation in education depend on who we are—our backgrounds and current contexts, and how we understand the world. Some of the suggested actions will be helpful for people who are in the beginning places of learning in Indigenous education and anti-racism, while others are more applicable for educators who are already engaged in learning in these areas.

- **Read, Listen, or Watch**

Included as part of Taking Action are suggested resources to read, watch, or listen to. These recommendations are intended to help inform learning and action. They represent only a **small sampling** of the wealth of available resources. There is not one single path that we all follow. Choose the actions and resources that make sense to your contexts and who you are.

- **Personal Reflection**

Throughout the book, I share my own experiences to help emphasize certain ideas. These personal reflections are not exemplars, but examples of how ideas have connected to action in my own life. My learning is messy and incomplete. I am often able to identify my learning after an experience or interaction, when I take the time to unpack what happened. I have come to understand that this learning never stops. I have also realized that at times I have to unlearn to learn, and even when I think I understand something, I may forget it only to have to relearn it.

- **Voices of Non-Indigenous Educators**

I believe in the power of centring Indigenous voices and knowledge in a society that has long denied it, so you might wonder why I created space in this book for voices of non-Indigenous educators rather than other Indigenous people. Because we live in a world that continues to centre and privilege non-Indigenous voices, that is an important question to ask.

However, I believe that the experiences of these educators can show how non-Indigenous people can move into, and sit in, places of unknowing and discomfort, where they can surface and examine their own deep biases so they can begin to engage in this work in a good way. These non-Indigenous educators, all of whom are working in British Columbia, model vulnerability and trust, and provide examples of how they have learned about, with, and from Indigenous Peoples and perspectives without trivializing or misrepresenting Indigenous Peoples, cultures, or knowledge systems.

DISCOMFORT: MOVING THROUGH THE FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES

Educators may come to this work with some trepidation. You may feel that you are not equipped to engage in Reconciliation or anti-racism work in your role in education. This is understandable. Educators in all parts of the system may be anxious about perpetuating misconceptions or stereotypes, making mistakes, or offending others. As educators, we know that not knowing something is not a problem; it is not wanting to learn that is a barrier.

We all want to do our work well, and the fear of making a mistake can mentally paralyze us into not engaging. It can be even harder to continue when we do make mistakes (especially in public).

I have made mistakes in the past, and I still do, both in and out of education environments.

Personal Reflection: Waap K'oom, Ganhada were hosting a Feast following a stone-moving for three people, including my late grandmother and aunt. It was at this event that my mother's brother was named Sm'oogyit of Waap K'oom. Our Ganhada house was being raised after nearly a hundred years of inactivity, and I was receiving my traditional name.

Nearing the end of the Feast, people were called as witnesses for the event.⁵ While they were speaking, a few of us Ganhada (as hosts of the evening) realized that some of the items that had been gathered to distribute to the guests had not been given out, so we rushed around from table to table, person to person, doing so. Moments later, the main host, who was facilitating the witnesses' sharing, called out to us to stop what we were doing. Instead of being quiet and listening to the speakers, we were making noise and being disrespectful.

I still cringe when I think about how I showed my ignorance of Protocol, but I also recognize that there is so much for me to learn from this situation, not only about my expected behaviour, but also about why I made the choice I did at the time. It has encouraged me to think about how I can make choices to let go of "getting things done quickly," instead understanding the benefit of responding to what is *actually* needed in a situation, such as taking the time to do things thoughtfully and respectfully.

Making mistakes and learning from them so that we can do better next time is integral to any learning process. It is the same concept that we help learners understand in our classrooms. Learning from mistakes is not a linear process. Learning is messy and complex. We can ask no less of ourselves than we ask of learners every day, which is to acknowledge that

⁵ The Indigenous principle of witnessing, which varies among First Nations, generally refers to witnesses being called to be the keepers of history when an event of historic significance occurs. This is not only to honour the Oral Traditions of Indigenous Peoples, but also to recognize the importance of conducting affairs and building and maintaining relationships face-to-face. Through witnessing, an event or work that is undertaken is validated and provided legitimacy. The work could not take place without honoured and respected guests to witness it. Adapted from <<https://nctr.ca/about/history-of-the-trc/honorary-witness/>>.

- there is always something new we can learn, and learning never ends;
- learning requires taking thoughtful risks;
- learning comes from working through the unknown;
- we will inevitably make mistakes; and
- we learn from our mistakes and do better next time.

As our work has an impact on others, we can mitigate our mistakes by asking respectful questions and apologizing when we offend others.

Reflection Question

- How might the tradition of situating ourselves affect how we interact with each other in circumstances where we make mistakes?

We challenge students all the time to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. If we are not demonstrating this, then how do we expect them to? If we are not demonstrating this, then how can we expect them to respect us? To trust us?

—Lauren M., educator

Integral to anti-racist work in education is the willingness to engage in learning that makes us uncomfortable. Challenging paradigms about education, equity, race, and Indigenous Peoples requires difficult conversations that make some people uneasy. It is important to acknowledge feelings of defensiveness if they surface. It is a common reaction when people's ideas and habits of thought and action are challenged. It is how we protect ourselves. Asking someone to stay in a place of discomfort is a big ask. But we often need some discomfort to learn.

We may also experience discomfort when we are in a place of not knowing. This can be especially difficult for some educators. Remember, though, there is a difference between being safe and being comfortable. To learn, we need to feel safe; otherwise, learning does not happen. However, safety does not mean comfort. Understanding racism and challenging biases is not comfortable work. It requires us to have challenging conversations. It requires us to sit in our discomfort.

This process is not about directing blame or assigning guilt. It is not about holding each other responsible for the past; it is about holding ourselves, and each other, responsible for what we do now. Being in this kind of emotional place is challenging because it requires a level of vulnerability. But it is in the spaces where we wrestle with unfamiliar ideas and thinking that challenges our preconceptions and assumptions that we can grow the most.

Remember, children and adults for whom our education system has not been a responsive place, and who experience various forms of racism regularly in schools and our larger society, live with discomfort and unease every day. They do not have the option of walking away from it.

If you experience discomfort when you read, think, or talk about racism in education, I ask you to recognize those moments and understand that they are important to examine. Sometimes, in an effort to defend our thinking or justify our actions, we lose the opportunity to grow in our understanding. Rather than rush to argue a point or dismiss an idea, sit with the discomfort a while—embrace it.

When we are called out, most of us, including myself, have the initial impulse to explain our intentions or offer reasons to shift focus or blame from our own actions. Explanations sound like excuses and intentions don't matter, so when your actions cause harm, take ownership Practice humility, compassion, bravery and honest self examination. (Newman [Hayalthkin'geme], 2018)

Reflection Question

- What fears might you have about doing this work? How can you respond to those fears in ways that do not shut down your learning?

I have made mistakes. I did a lesson and thought it was great, but then had an Indigenous learner come to me angry and say how horrible it made them feel. I responded by saying that I would never intentionally do anything to harm. But then I said to myself, well wait, I need to honour what they are saying. It is a humility piece I need to do. I realized that I needed to recognize that my intentions did not erase the impact on the learner.

—Heather D., educator

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Let's acknowledge that, as adults, our learning is our responsibility. It is not the responsibility of another person to educate me. We own our learning, or we own our ignorance—it is that simple. If we were not taught what we need to know now, we can lament that fact, but we cannot use it as an excuse not to engage in the learning we can do today. If we choose not to learn, we are responsible for that choice.

Part of that learning is recognizing the narratives that we consciously engage in, or unconsciously support, that place the onus for action on others to do something. People may fall back into narratives that uphold the idea that this work in anti-racist education can only be done if another group of people first does something to make it easier for us to engage in the work. This pattern of abdicating our responsibility is also a defensive posture. It maintains the status quo in our system.

Everything I include here is intentional. I am sharing what I have learned. It is up to you to decide how to receive it. The process of Reconciliation is a journey, and each individual's path is specific to their own (literal and metaphorical) place and learning processes. Some will begin with the learning they need to do about Indigenous Peoples, communities, cultures, and histories. Some might spend time understanding the full scope of colonization, including racist policies such as the residential school system and other laws designed to dismantle First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures and subjugate and assimilate Indigenous Peoples. Others will engage in learning more about the Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and histories of the land they are on. Some educators will focus on using their learning to actively incorporate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into learning environments. And others will undergo a paradigm shift toward acceptance and recognition of the strengths that Indigenous students and families bring with them into the classroom, school, and community. The key is to not avoid.

Advice to other non-Indigenous educators? Start. Get used to making mistakes and starting again. Dive into your own learning. Immerse yourself in stories and music and books. There is so much to celebrate about peoples who have been on this land since time immemorial. There is so much to learn.

—Brooke M., educator

Be aware of reciprocity in this work. Emailing an Indigenous Elder, support worker, language teacher, or District Helping Teacher to ask for information you could have googled yourself isn't equitable. Do some legwork and be focused when you seek out consultation. Reaching out for a clarifying point or to communicate a roadblock you've encountered is a good way to show that you are dedicated to the learning process. It doesn't waste people's time and shows you have made an investment to learn yourself. It is our job to educate ourselves and be respectful and grateful when time is afforded to get us caught up.

—Lesley G., educator

Taking Action

For Everyone

- Be patient but not complacent with your learning. Start somewhere, but do not let your beginning place be where you stop. Ask yourself, “What can I learn next?”
- Commit to continued learning. Learn, reflect, share. Repeat cycle.
- Recognize when feelings of discomfort arise, but don’t use them as a reason to stop learning.
- Find people to encourage and support your learning.
- Educate yourself about *local* Indigenous Peoples and Nations, including community and Nation name(s), languages, and traditional and current forms of government. In addition to the communities themselves, many school districts, post-secondary institutes, and other education organizations have people and resources to help with this learning. Online searches about the local area are a very easy first step.
- Learn about the Protocols where you live for how, and when, traditional Indigenous territories should be acknowledged.

Read, Listen, or Watch

Read

- *First Nations 101*, by Linda Gray (2011).
- *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada*, by Chelsea Vowel (Portage & Main Press, 2016).

SAMPLE PAGES

2

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IS NOT MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

DEFINING INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Language shapes thought and affects how people respond. The way we think influences the way we speak and the other way around. Changing how people talk actually changes how they think.

LOUISE STOLL, "Language for Learning Leadership"

When we share ideas, it is important that we have a common understanding of the words we use. Indigenous education encompasses two concepts:

1. The work of educators in all parts of an education system to identify and support the needs and achievement of Indigenous learners. This includes identifying and eliminating systemic barriers to equity and recognizing and responding to the diversity of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learners in ways that honour who they are and where they come from.
2. The work of ensuring that all learners and educators engage in learning about the Indigenous Peoples, communities, cultures, and histories in Canada. This requires not only learning *about* Indigenous Peoples but also learning *from* Indigenous Peoples. It also means understanding how to create the changes needed in our education systems to meaningfully respond to the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission's recommendations and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

For me, Indigenous education means

- recognizing the value and importance of collaboration when our society is based on an adversarial and competitive model.
- that as a non-Indigenous educator, the history I have learned was incomplete and often untrue.
- learning that my sincere belief in education as the great equalizer in society is inaccurate, and while it still has great potential, we have so much more work to do.
- a vision of a more positive, inclusive, and accessible system for all learners.
- learning about the value of the Trickster.
- questioning everything I have experienced in education and understanding that the values of our education system that I took for granted as a singular reality for all people everywhere were in fact created by a particular group of people that assumed superiority over others and imposed their values on others.
- ensuring equity, with all learners having success, not just a privileged few.
- as a non-Indigenous educator, having humility and being willing to learn and make mistakes and to listen.
- being okay with not being an “expert” in all things as a teacher or administrator.
- sharing responsibility for and access to our classrooms and schools with parents and community members.
- learning to listen and always asking, “What can I learn from this child, parent, relative, Elder?”

—Naryn S., educator

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION AND BEYOND

No education system is culturally neutral. Education systems are developed to (generally) reflect what is valued by the people who create them. In Canada, education systems evolved from the post-industrial British model of education, which was designed for a specific place and purpose. These systems have changed to some degree, but still reflect the priorities of the people who create(d) and work(ed) in the system, along with those who, while not actively part of the system, exert(ed) influence on education policy.

There is increasing understanding that effective education systems need to respond to all the learners they serve and ensure that they see themselves reflected in the curriculum and resources, and in their learning environments. This process, referred to by many researchers as “culturally relevant” or “culturally responsive” teaching, has been identified as a necessary element of student success (Allen & Labbo, 2001; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Young, 2010).

Education systems that develop from a homogeneous society and context are usually culturally relevant to that place and time. They invariably reflect the cultural assumptions, social mores, and worldviews of the people/society that create them, and in that case can be seen as culturally responsive or culturally relevant. We often only begin to understand the need for culturally relevant or culturally responsive education when an education system that has developed in one context is imposed on learners from different contexts. When this occurs, we see inequity in learning outcomes, often accompanied by disengagement from culturally or racially defined groups of learners.

Nicol, Archibald, and Baker (2012) define culturally responsive education as “an approach to teaching and learning that facilitates critical consciousness, engenders respect for diversity, and acknowledges the importance of relationships, while honouring, building upon, and drawing from the culture, knowledge and language of the students, teachers, and local community” (p. 5). Culturally relevant or culturally responsive education, a vital part of the anti-racist work needed in our education systems, requires

- a deeper understanding of the concepts of identity and culture and how these intersect with learner success in the school system, and

- the awareness that for educators to develop an understanding of that intersection, they must first be able to identify how their own cultural values and identities influence their pedagogical beliefs and practices.

Is the goal to create a culturally neutral system? No. That is an impossibility. We each exist within culture(s). If we interact with the world, we create cultures that reflect what we value. In education, this includes what knowledge or knowledge systems we value, what we consider important to teach and learn and how we believe this should be done, and what processes we feel education systems should follow and how we think they should be structured. The goal is to understand when certain cultural values underpinning a system are not inclusive and responsive to the learners in that system. Then we can make more informed choices about how to create a better system for all.

The lack of culturally relevant or responsive education is apparent in Canadian education systems that have caused social-emotional, physical, cultural, and/or spiritual harm to so many Indigenous learners for generations. In previous years, when educators engaged in conversations about Indigenous education and learners, the discussion generally reflected an approach based on a deficit model of education. If Indigenous children did not achieve K-12 educational outcomes, individual learners and their families and communities were blamed. Children were seen as having deficits that needed to be addressed or “fixed.”

Creating culturally responsive education environments for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learners is *one* of the ways we begin to address the harms done by colonialism and the attempted assimilation of Indigenous Peoples. Through their learning experiences, Indigenous learners need to see and hear that they and their families, communities, histories, and cultures are valued and important.

Reflection Questions

- How are local First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis cultures reflected in the explicit and implicit curriculum of your school(s)?¹
- How are local First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis cultures reflected in the learner resources in your school(s)?
- How are local First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis cultures reflected in the physical environments of your school(s) and school district buildings?

If Not Here, Then Where?

What if you do not work with Indigenous learners? If there are few or no Indigenous learners in a classroom or school, is there still a need to ensure that all non-Indigenous students learn about, and from, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, cultures, and histories? The short answer is yes. This is where we go **beyond** the need for cultural relevancy in a classroom or school context. This is about a nation being responsive to the original inhabitants of this land.

Personal Reflection: Several years ago, I was part of a small group of English language arts (ELA) teachers from across British Columbia who were gathered to discuss potential directions for revisions to the K-12 ELA curriculum as part of a large education transformation process. The Ministry of Education representative shared with the group a number of general principles that were guiding the transformation. One of these was an increase in Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the revised curriculum.

¹ In the context of this book, *local* refers to the Indigenous Peoples on whose Traditional Territory(ies) the school(s) or school district operates.

A long-time teacher who was part of this group was not completely comfortable with this announcement. He said, “I understand the need for cultural relevancy and cultural responsiveness. If I have Indigenous learners in my class, they need to see themselves reflected in the classroom. But I don’t have any Indigenous students. There may be two in the entire school. I have students whose families have been in Canada for multiple generations and students whose families have come to Canada from different countries around the world in recent years.” He then asked, “Why is Indigenous content and perspective going to be specifically mandated in the BC curriculum, but not the heritages of all other students in our schools?” He suggested that if Indigenous content was specifically mandated, then every other cultural heritage should be mentioned or we were privileging one heritage over another.

I thought about this for a minute before responding. I knew that this was going to be a common question in the years to come.

I asked him to think about the places in the world where his students or their families had come from, whether they arrived last week or had been in Canada for over 150 years.

I asked if the languages of those places are still being spoken in those places.

I asked if the knowledge systems of the people of those places were still being taught and learned in schools there.

I asked if the written and oral literatures connected to the land of those places was still growing and thriving.

He thought about these questions for a moment before nodding his head and responding, “Yes, yes, and yes.”

I reminded the whole group that this (the land we now call British Columbia) is the only place in the world where the languages of the First Nations of this place exist, where the literatures of Indigenous Peoples spring from, where the knowledge systems of First Nations here are rooted in the land. If their languages cease to be spoken here, if the knowledges and perspectives are not taught and learned here, they do not exist elsewhere in the world.

The teacher came to speak with me a little later that day. He said, “I get it,” and asked rhetorically, “If [the learning does] not [take place] here, then where?”

The conversation described in my personal reflection highlights the unique work of Indigenous education in Canada. Indigenous education is not multicultural education. Multiculturalism in Canada, in its popular interpretation, recognizes, celebrates, and embraces existing cultures from around the world. Officially, multiculturalism was a political strategy made into policy in 1971 “as a way to address contesting language, cultural, and land claims within the nation, and it has since been widely explained, defended, and critiqued” (St. Denis, 2011, p. 307). Understandably, many people still use that framework to emphasize the need for us all to embrace a culturally diverse society. Our humanity is deepened when we do not seek to merely “tolerate” cultural difference, but value and celebrate the richness that cultural diversity brings.

However, attempts to embed Indigenous education within a conversation about multiculturalism deny the distinctness of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and undermine actions to acknowledge Indigenous rights. Not only do First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples not have representations of their cultures elsewhere, but trying to embed First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples into the multicultural narrative ignores, or tries to deny, specific land-based rights that Indigenous Peoples have in Canada.²

A document designed to help educators in Manitoba create inclusive and equitable classrooms and schools for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learners and all learners includes the following:

² For more information about land and rights, see Government of Canada, *INAN: Section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982—Background*: <<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/inan-jan-28-2021/inan-section-35-constitution-act-1982-background-jan-28-2021.html>>; University of British Columbia, “Land and Rights,” Indigenous Foundations: <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/land_rights/>; and *The Government of Canada’s Approach to Implementation of the Inherent Right and the Negotiation of Aboriginal Self-Government*: <<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100031843/1539869205136>>.

The psychological, social, and multi-generational damage caused by being marginalized and excluded in your own land, by having your land appropriated, and by having your freedom and rights systematically denied or restricted is immense, deep, painful, and long-lasting. The sovereignty and freedom [First Nations, Inuit, and Métis] peoples enjoyed before the arrival of Europeans was appropriated by the new colonial government. Their traditional education and governance systems, their ways of life, their languages, ceremonies, communities, and even their children were targeted for assimilation, and became managed through oppressive federal policies. (Manitoba Education and Training, 2017, p. 13)

When we address the lack of knowledge and understanding about the communities, cultures, histories, and rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, we will have an education system that is responsive to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis learners. When we ensure that *all* Canadians know the truth of our collective histories and understand the contemporary contexts of the diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples (including the unique legal relationships between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and the rest of Canada), we create the conditions to move forward as a country in a good way.

To me, Indigenous education means

- recognizing the importance of collaboration, hearing stories, making space for different perspectives, learning local history, and building relationships with local First Nations;
- challenging deficit thinking about Indigenous learners;
- moving from place-based learning to place-conscious learning;
- taking the time to build relationships with your students; and
- exploring identity and making connections to curriculum for all learners.

—Heather D., educator

Be brave. I think about some of the things I said and taught years ago, and I cringe. This is a reality of the work. Intention is important but you are going to mess up. As always, it's how you move forward that matters most.

—Lesley G., educator

Reflection Questions

- Why is it important for Indigenous learners and their families to see themselves reflected in the physical environments of schools and district sites?
- How do you think seeing Indigenous cultures authentically reflected in curriculum and resources would change the education experiences of Indigenous learners and their families?
- Why do you think it is essential for *all* students and educators to learn about, and from, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, cultures, and histories?
- How do you think Reconciliation is supported when non-Indigenous learners see Indigenous Peoples authentically represented in curriculum and resources?
- What does having local Indigenous Peoples authentically represented in the physical environments of schools and district sites mean to you?

Taking Action

For Everyone

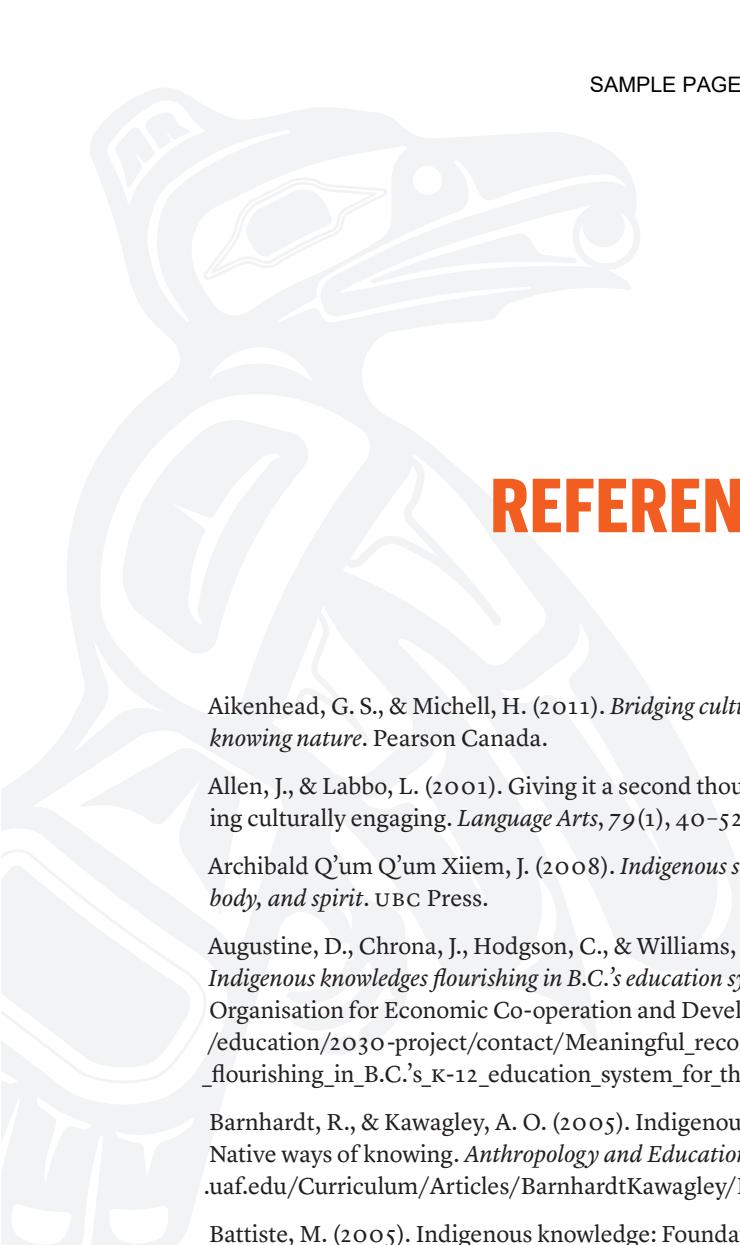
- Seek out opportunities to learn from local First Nations, Inuit, or Métis communities, cultures, histories, and contemporary contexts. Participate in Indigenous events that are open to the public.

- Learn about Indigenous territories in other parts of Canada and the world. While it may have a few inaccuracies, the Native Land Digital website is a good place to begin: <<https://native-land.ca/>>.
- Read more books written by Indigenous authors. A simple online search for “Indigenous authors in Canada” will generate a lengthy list from which to choose.
- Watch more films created by Indigenous filmmakers. Check out the National Film Board’s Indigenous Cinema page: <<https://www.nfb.ca/indigenous-cinema/>>.
- Check out what resources local post-secondary institutes may have to support your learning about Indigenous Peoples.
- Take a free online course focused on Indigenous Peoples in Canada, ideally offered by an education organization in the province or territory where you live. The following are examples of such courses:
 - The University of British Columbia’s Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education is a six-week massive open online course (MOOC) designed to help learners envision how Indigenous histories, perspectives, world-views, and approaches to learning can be made part of the work in classrooms, organizations, communities, and everyday experiences in thoughtful and respectful ways.
 - The University of Alberta’s Indigenous Canada course is a 12-lesson MOOC that explores Indigenous histories and contemporary issues in Canada from an Indigenous perspective and examines issues facing Indigenous Peoples today from historical and critical perspectives.

Read, Listen, or Watch

Read

- “Silencing Aboriginal Curricular Content and Perspectives Through Multiculturalism: ‘There Are Other Children Here,’” by Verna St. Denis (2011). <<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1176&context=aprci>>.



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