

Thoughts on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Education

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Bryan's (abbreviated) Story



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Wondering

How might we reimagine our classrooms in and through a lens of (Indigenous) Knowledge Systems?

Background

- We cannot address Indigenous students without thinking about their connections to the federal government;
- The relationships are intertwined in powerful ways;
- The Indian Act of 1879, the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869, and the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 frame relationships between First Nations peoples and “the Crown” in powerful ways.

More Background

- As a result of the political status, among other things, the federal government has certain commitments to tribal nations and their citizens;
- We cannot address First Nation peoples and their education without understanding the complexities of the intersections with the federal government;
- Promises in exchange for use of lands.

The 4 Ts

Tribal Sovereignty

Treaties

Trust

Territory

Tribal Sovereignty

- Tribal Sovereignty is the inherent right of tribal peoples to engage in the process of creating futures of their own making.

Treaties

- Treaties are agreements between equals made by the federal government and different entities;
- Affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act (1982)
- 70 Treaties are recognized by Canada between 1701 and 1923.

1752 Peace and Friendship Treaty Between His Majesty the King and the Jean Baptiste Cope

- It is agreed that the Articles of Submission and Agreement, made at Boston in New England by the Delegates of the Penobscot Norridgwolk & St. John's Indians, in the year 1725 Ratified & Confirmed by all the Nova Scotia Tribes, at Annapolis Royal, in the month of June 1726, & lately renewed with Governor Cornwallis at Halifax, & Ratified at St. John's River, now read over, Explained and Interpreted, **shall be and are hereby from this time forward Renewed, Reiterated, and forever Confirmed by them and their Tribe**; and the said Indians for themselves and their Tribe and their Heirs aforesaid Do make & Renew the same Solemn Submissions and promises for the Strickt observance of all the Articles therein contained as at any time heretofore that been done.
- That all Transactions during the late War shall on both sides be buried in Oblivion with the Hatchet, and that **the said Indians shall have all favour, Friendship & Protection shewn them from this His Majesty's Government....**
- ...It is agreed that the said Tribe of Indians **shall not be hindered from, but have free liberty of Hunting & Fishing as usual**;
- That a **Quantity of Bread, Flour, & such other Provisions as can be procured**, necessary for the Familys, and proportionable to the number of the said Indians, shall be given them half yearly for the time to come; and the same regard shall be had to the other Tribes that shall hereafter agree to Renew and Ratify the Peace upon the Terms and Conditions now Stipulated.
- **the said Indians shall upon the first day of October Yearly**, so long as they shall Continue in Friendship, **Receive Presents of Blankets, Tobacco, and some Powder & Shot**; and the said Indians promise once every Year, upon the first of October to come by themselves or their Delegates and Receive the said Presents and Renew their Friendship and Submissions.

Trust

- The recognition of the unique relationship between tribal nations and the Canadian Government;
- Connected to agreements in treaties, laws, statutes and executive orders;
- Also connected to lands.

Territory

- Land; some of it ceded; others not ceded;
- These fall under reserves, but there are other connections to land as well.

First Nations Education

- Intended to civilize and assimilate;
- To control.

A Turn Toward Schooling

- What is the role of schooling?
 - Some argue it is to prepare young people for the workplace;
 - Others say it is to prepare children for the world in which they are going to live.

What do we learn in schools?

- Content though prescribed curriculum;
- Make friends (or not);
- Socialize;
- Become “good” citizens;
- To see difference;
- To categorize and sort;
- To see individuals (often in relation to one another);
- To make judgments about capabilities;
- Tied to a zero-sum thinking mentality and structure;
- Lots and lots of other stuff.

What is the purpose of Schools?

- Given what is on the previous slide, might we be interested in reimagining what we teach and what we—and our students—learn?
- How might we reimagine our classrooms?
- Schools can be sites of possibility, rather than sites of foreclosure.

Knowledge Systems

- One way to create possibilities is by considering the role and purpose of schooling and the ecologies of our classrooms through a conceptual framework of Knowledge Systems;

The Ecology Knowledge Systems

- Knowledge systems provide a way to think about the ecology of our classrooms: as teachers, our students, our place, our curriculum, our school, our community;
- Ecologies—or the intersections, relationships, and chemistries of environments are great ways to think about knowledge systems;
- And our classrooms.

What is a Knowledge System?

(ahem, and why should we care!?!)

- Knowledge systems are tools that allow us to think about—and visualize—the circulation and re-circulation of knowledge broadly defined;
- It traverses in and through many places;
- Often the status quo;
- Often invisible, like the air we breathe;
- Sometimes air is visible, however...
 - It gusts; it gets thinner, it is polluted by things around and in it...

When we will talk about knowledge systems!?! systems!?!

- I've been talking about them;
- I've been circling around them;
- I've told you about how they're embedded in our schools;
- What I haven't done is tell you what they're comprised of in a systemic and systematic way.....

Finally!

- There are five components that comprise knowledge systems:
 - Epistemology
 - Ontology
 - Pedagogy
 - Axiology
 - Cosmology
 - They overlap and intersect, although I'll talk about them separately

Epistemology

- In short: This is how we think about ways of knowing
- We might ask: How do we come to know what we know?; What is knowledge?
- Resides in our brains;
- On paper;
- On the internet;
- In nature;
- In our bodies;
- Knowledge is ubiquitous.

Ontology

- In short: This is how we think about ways of being
- We might ask: How do we be?; What are our realities? What are the ways we are?
- They shift;
- Migrate;
- Often located in place;
- Realities are shaped by what we know and the context in which we know it;
- Knowing and being are deeply connected;
- Being is ubiquitous.

Pedagogy

- Often thought of as how we think about and engage the process of teaching; **BUT**, it is how we think about the combined processes of teaching and learning;
- We might ask: How do we think about the processes of teaching and learning?; And to what end?
- Stories teach;
- So do places;
- Teaching and learning are in motion; they're verbs;
- They are ubiquitous;
- Teaching and learning are intimately tied to knowledge and being;
- So much beauty in the intersections here.

Axiology

- Traditionally, axiology has been rooted in the aesthetic and larger conceptions of beauty;
- I tend to think of it as exploring what is good, true, right, and beautiful;
- We might ask: What do we value?; What is good, true, right, and beautiful?;
- Values undergird knowledge systems;
- They guide our decisions and actions;
- Values are lived; they are also verbs, and they are ubiquitous.

Cosmology

- Traditionally, this has been rooted in astrophysics to explain the origins of the universe;
- Sound mysterious...and theoretical;
- We might consider, though, origins. Or beginnings;
- We ask: What is the origin?
- There are genealogical concerns here;
- Temporal too.

The questions together

Epistemology

How do we come to know what we know?; What is knowledge?

Ontology

How do we be?; What are our realities? What are the ways we are?

Pedagogy

How do we think about the processes of teaching and learning?; And to what end?

Axiology

What do we value?; What is good, true, right, and beautiful?

Cosmology

What is the origin?

What Happens When we Think about Indigenous Knowledge Systems?

- IKS are **empirical**; there are millennia of observations and understanding patterns (usually of the natural world);
- IKS are **sensual**; they live in and through our senses—and they're multi-sensory;
- IKS are **cumulative**; they span generations; tied to survival, making IKS exponential;
- IKS are rooted in **humor**; in and through fun, mess ups, and tragedies;

What Happens When we Think about Indigenous Knowledge Systems?

- Connected to and located **in place**;
- IKS are **lived and embodied**;
- **They are verbs**;
- **Relational; responsibility** emerges, leading to **reciprocity**.

Commencement

- If we are going to engage in the work of teaching (and learning), we need to make the invisible visible;
- Schooling is historic; there is a genealogy of how we engage in our work;
- Our classrooms are rooted in relationships; are we open to consider additional responsibilities?;
- When we move from knowledge as a noun to conceptualizing it as a verb, we can imagine new classrooms.