

# American Indigenous Epistimologies

**By The Wombats:  
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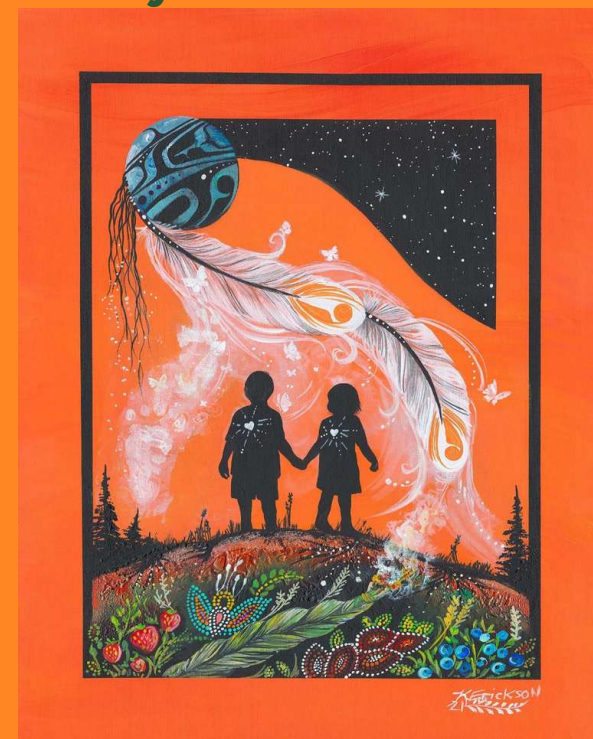
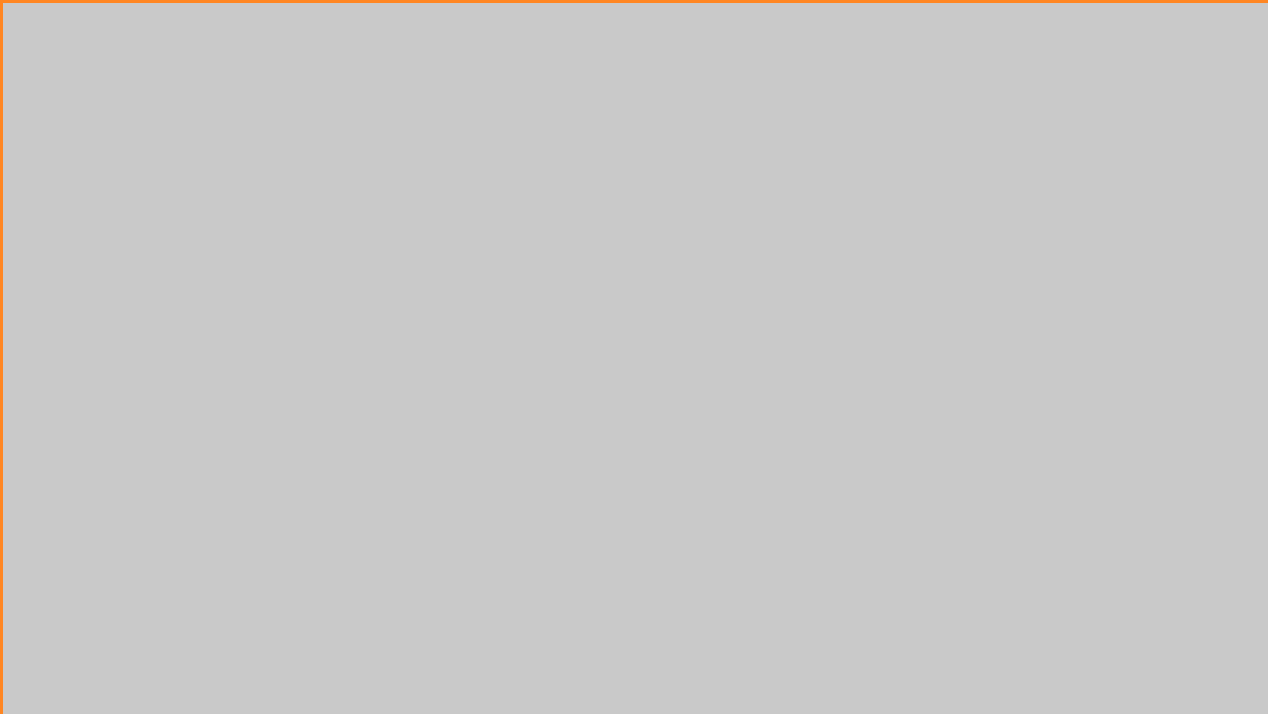
**Hah oh  
Tewa for breath in**



## **Please Stand for the Honour Song:**

**The honour song belongs to the people of the Secwépemc Nation. We acknowledge all of the Elders and knowledge keepers who have shared their culture with us.**

**We honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being, our future youth, and the youth of the past who were survivors of Residential Schools, and for the youth who didn't make it home.**



**THE JOURNEY HOME BY  
KAREN ERIKSON**

# Land Acknowledgement:

**WE WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE ARE LOCATED ON THE TRADITIONAL LANDS OF THE TK'EMLÚPS TE SECWÉPEMC WITHIN SECWEPEMCÚL'ECW, THE TRADITIONAL AND UNCEDED TERRITORY OF THE SECWÉPEMC. WE ARE GUESTS HERE ON THESE UNCEDED LANDS, AND ARE THANKFUL TO HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE PRIVILEGE TO WORK, PLAY AND LIVE HERE.**

**AS TEACHER CANDIDATES WE WILL HONOUR ALL INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING AND BEING, RESPECTING THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE BEEN EDUCATORS AND CARETAKERS OF THIS LAND SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL. WE WILL WORK TOWARDS INDIGENIZING OUR PRACTICE, AND WILL CONTINUE TO QUESTION AND REFLECT UPON OUR TEACHING PRACTICE, WHILE RECOGNIZING HOW COLONIALISM SLIPS INTO OUR CLASSROOMS.**

# Summary:

**Simplified, epistemology is the study of how we acquire knowledge. This branch of philosophy, created by Aristotle, looks at how we have come to know what we know. As Cajete (2005) points out, the American Indian language has no word for epistemology, nor does any Indigenous culture worldwide. This is because epistemology, as a concept, is a Westernized colonial construct. Nevertheless, Cajete (2005) suggests we can use the idea to help us understand Indigenous education. Knowledge transmission in Indigenous cultures doesn't happen in a brick and mortar institution, but rather it is acquired holistically through "relationships between one's social group and the natural world" (Cajete, 2005, p. 70). Tribal education arises naturally through the interconnectedness of the environment, community and the spiritual realm.**

**Although Indigenous cultures worldwide vary in their cultural practices, educational epistemologies are fairly interconnected, and are rooted in the seven foundations of tribal education: environment, mythic, visionary, artistic, affective, communal and spiritual. Each foundation flows into the next in such a way that if you were to look at only one of them, you would be taken into the "very heart of the tribal education experience" (Cajete, 2005, p. 74). Everything holds meaning, and only requires "a cultivated and practiced openness to the lessons that the world had to teach" (Cajete, 2005, p.77). Therefore, teaching extends beyond the formal. It emerges gradually through observations and experience, sacred stories, participating in ceremonies, dream interpretation, apprenticeships, and artistic expression. As Cajete explains, "they embody a quest for self, individual and community survival, and wholeness in the context of a community and natural environment." (Cajete, 2005, p. 72)**

**“ART ITSELF BECOMES A PRIMARY SOURCE OF TEACHING  
BECAUSE IT BOTH INTEGRATES AND DOCUMENTS A PROFOUND  
PROCESS OF LEARNING “ (CAJETE, 2005, P.75).**



**ALL FABRIC  
PURCHASED AT 4  
GENERATIONS AND IS  
100% CREATED BY  
INDIGENOUS ARTISTS.**

# Passage 1:

**Mitakuye Oyasin (we are all related) is a Lakota phrase that captures an essence of tribal education because it reflects the understanding that our lives are truly and profoundly connected to other people and the physical world. Likewise, in tribal education one gains knowledge from firsthand experience in the world and then transmits or explores it through ritual, ceremony, art, and appropriate technology. The individual then uses knowledge gained through these vehicles in the context of everyday living. Education in this context becomes education for life's sake. Indigenous education is at its very essence learning about life through participation and relationship to community, including not only people but plants, animals, and the whole of nature (Cajete, 2005, p. 70)**



## Thought of the Day:

I'm sure glad I learned about parallelograms in school instead of how to do taxes. It's really going to come in handy this parallelogram season.

## Passage 2:

**Therefore, various ceremonial practices formed a complex for the formal teaching and learning of sacred knowledge that was founded on experience and participation in a tribal culture. Initiation rites occurred at graduated stages of growth and maturation. Important initiation ceremonies and accompanying forms of formal education were integrated with the natural physical and psychological transitions occurring at the end of early childhood; puberty; early, middle, and late adulthood; and old age. Ceremony was a lifelong process of introduction to sacred and environmental knowledge, graduated and programmed in such a way that individuals were presented new levels of knowledge when they were physically, psychologically, and socially ready to learn them. (Cajete, 2005, p. 72)**



# INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

*Mitakuye Oyasin*

Lakota phrase:  
We are all related.



## SOCIAL GROUPS

Every situation provided a potential opportunity for learning (Cajete, 2005, p.71)

## NATURAL WORD

The sacred views of Nature are the foundation on teaching and learning (Cajete, 2005, p.70)

Characterized, processed, expressed

## ELEMENTAL

Nature permeates and contextualizes the foundational process of teaching and learning. (Cajete, 2005, p.70)

## 7 FOUNDATIONS OF TRIBAL EDUCATION

Extending environmental orientation, these orienting foundations may include the Environmental, the Mythic, the Artistic, the Visionary, the Affective, the Communal, and the Spiritual.

## FINDING FACE, FINDING HEART, AND FINDING A Foundation


That learning is ultimately a subjective experience tied to a place: environmentally, socially, and spiritually. (Cajete, 2005, p. 71)



# How are our schools still so far away from the educational legacy of Indigenous Peoples?

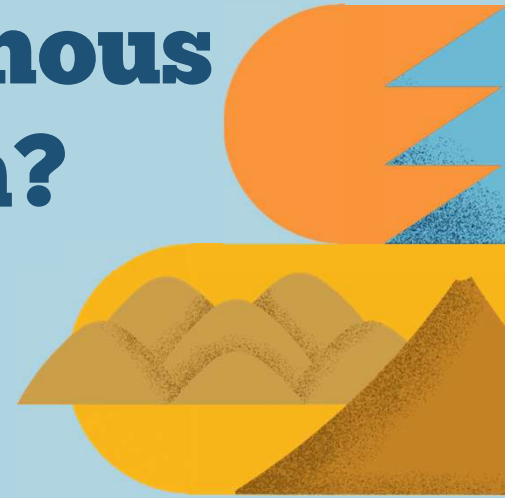
Western epistemology may have troubles connecting the 7 foundations of tribal education as a branch of the philosophy. The governing bodies have woven the latter into Canada's education system. However, Indigenous ways of teachings have been around since time immemorial. In order to decolonize the Canadian education system, the educational legacy of Indigenous people needs to be better implemented in our schools. Although it often seems the government is not on the same page, as educators there are steps we can take.

As Dr. Susan Dion says, just because the teacher is not Indigenous, they can't just ignore it: the "perfect stranger". If you don't know ask. She continues to say, teachers need to commit to "Anti-Racism."



# How can I respectfully bring the educational legacy of Indigenous peoples into my classroom?

- Land Acknowledgment
- Connect with your local community
- Invite Elders into your classroom
- Professional development opportunities
- Teach the honour song
- Display Indigenous artwork in your class
- Teach students the difference between appreciation and appropriation
- Breaking down the calls to action
- Don't be the "perfect stranger"
- Have those "uncomfortable conversations" to make a safe place
- If ever unsure, ask.



# Epistemology:

The philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge. Cajete said in the second paragraph that this word does not exist in any Indigenous language, so I found it odd that this was the title of the writing. However, the writing focuses on Indigenous education: relationships and your participation in life are the key aspects to learning (Cajete, 2005, p.70) that is a life long process. In other words you origin.

For our classrooms, this means that “every situation provides a potential opportunity for learning (Cajete, 2005, p.71)”; that is not just learning through the curricular competencies the government tells us to teach, but learning happens through the core competencies of life.

# Endogenous:

Oxford dictionary says that it means having an internal cause or origin. Cajete says that Indigenous education is endogenous education. Meaning that you are in charge of your own learning (quest for self) by increasing awareness and developing over time. You will become whole with your connections and relationships with the community and your natural environment.

This relates to teaching in that we are not just teaching the information, social and emotional learning is so much more. The relationships and experiences will help our students learn and grow.



# **Environmental education:**

**Cajete says that personal development and technical skills are acquired through participation in the life of the community; with people, plants, animals, and the whole of nature (Cajete, 2005, p. 70).**

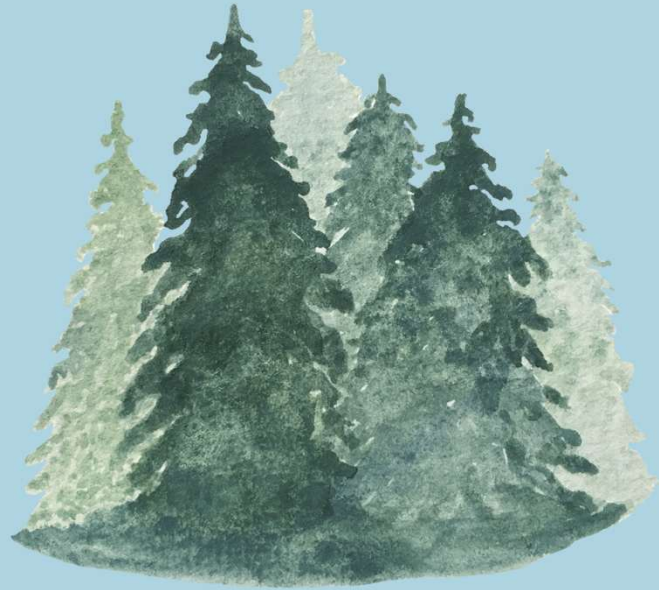
**When I think of environmental education I think back to my outdoor education where experiential learning, inquiry-based learning; curiosity and problem solving, helped me become the person I am today: So much more than a textbook or essays could have done.**

**Although taking our class outside to learn isn't always ideal, I think we need to keep environmental education in mind: foster experiential, inquiry-based, and problem solving learning in our future classrooms.**





# Activity Time! Exploring our Relations



# How do our experiences and relationships teach us?

- American Indian teaching and learning places great focus on learning through an individual's unique experiences and relationships. Individuals are encouraged to look for meaning in everything but especially the natural world (Cajete, 2005, p. 77).
- Relationships both with social groups and the natural world should be reciprocal (Cajete, 2005, p. 70).
- Hands on learning that contributes to the community is emphasized but reflection of experiences is important to deepen learning (Cajete, 2005, 70).



# Deepening our learning through creative synthesis

Cajete claims that after one gains hands on experience it is important they “transmit or [explore] it through ritual, ceremony, **art**, and appropriate technology” (Cajete, 2005, p.70). Additionally, these experiences should be explored in ways that allow individuals to apply their new knowledge in their lives.

Art can allow us to express meanings, knowledge, and emotions in symbolic ways.

It is important to recognize that two people may have vastly different interpretations of the same experience depending on their previous ones. School and learning cannot be separated from everything else.

# Creative exploration of relationships

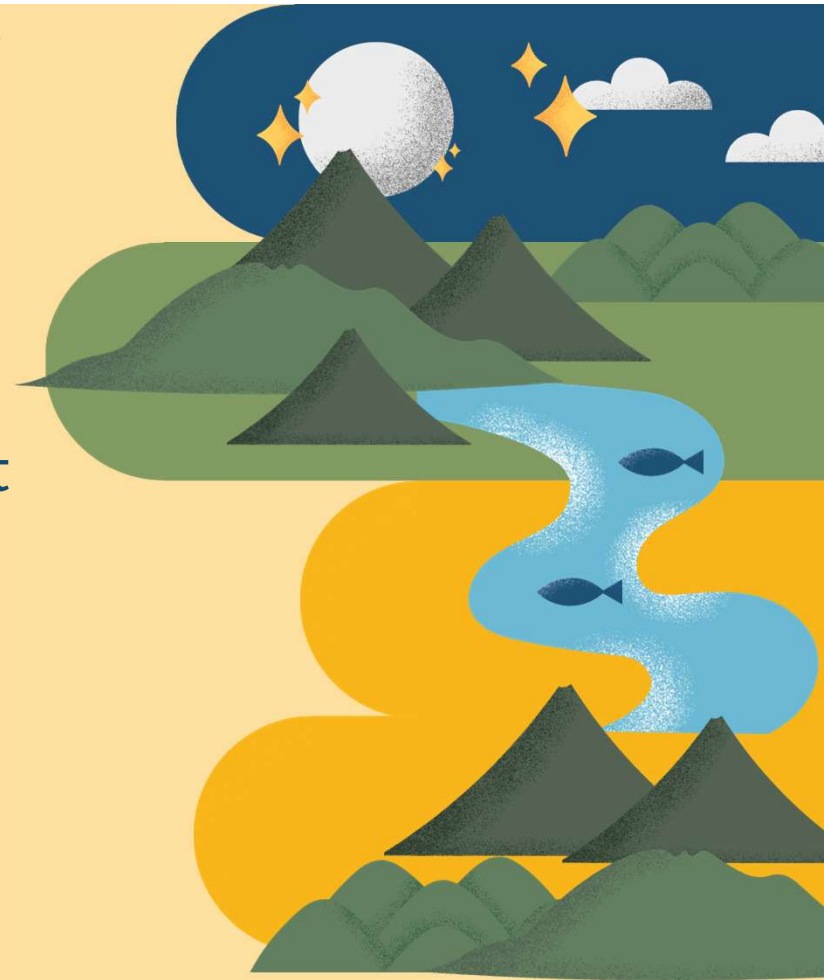
## Guiding questions

Who/what have you learned from and what have they/it taught you?

- Land (tmicw), community, family (k'wséltkten), friends (stemtemét), spirituality

How is your relationship with the above reciprocal?

**You can use picture, magazine cut outs, words, poetry, etc to explore these questions.**



# How could we use this activity with students?

- Could be used in conjunction with social studies units on community and science units on earth and natural resources.
- Allows students to reflect on their relationships and their roles and responsibilities as individuals, community members, and people on earth
- Allows students to engage with a abstract topic in a way that makes sense to them (freedom of artistic representation)





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