

# Anishinaabe Pedagogy

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*My intention is to contribute to an understanding of how local and distinct cultures contribute to Aboriginal education as a conceptually growing phenomenon in the Canadian education system. This purpose is to illuminate Anishinaabe pedagogy, to illustrate its benefits for learners, and provide possibilities for further implementation within educational contexts.*

*An Indigenous storywork methodology (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009) is used to identify those critical moments that shaped my understanding, appreciation, and articulation of Anishinaabe pedagogy. Indigenous storytelling creates a context or a window into the life-ways and life-experiences of particular peoples. It builds on lived experience and allows the teller and listener to draw meaning from the story through one's critically reflective centre. For me, this is a personal and professionally reflective moment that aims to share my school and work experience.*

*I focus first on that which overshadows our existence as Anishinaabe people and then share four stories that illuminate Anishinaabe pedagogy. My discussion includes a personal analysis, identifying what I have gained from these stories, and which continues to impact my work today as an Aboriginal education consultant. I then give examples of how I use the teachings and pedagogical tools from my school experience to support my work as an Aboriginal education consultant.*

*In conclusion, I recommend a place-conscious lens to support the development and implementation of Aboriginal education. This ensures the integrity and authenticity of Aboriginal education initiatives, by allowing Aboriginal peoples to be the tellers of their history, culture, and perspective.*

There is much to celebrate, as there have been 40 years of development in Aboriginal education in the public school system to give voice to the original peoples of North America/Turtle Island. At the same time, there is a need to define what the term Aboriginal education is within Canadian educational contexts, particularly for those involved with teaching and learning. Furthermore, in attempts to define *Aboriginal education*, there has been little attention paid to the distinction between the pedagogy of local First Nations' cultures and the institutionalized field of Aboriginal education. As a resident of south-central Manitoba, I turn to the local Anishinaabe culture to examine what has been extracted from the life-ways of this cultural community, to contribute to what is perceived and being taught as *Aboriginal perspectives* in Winnipeg schools. My intention is to contribute to an understanding of how local and

distinct First Nations' cultures contribute to Aboriginal education as a conceptually growing phenomenon in school systems. In doing so, I aim to provide a backdrop from which the following can be further explored:

- an examination of the importance of understanding local and distinct Aboriginal perspectives
- the use of traditional ways of knowing, teaching, and learning as critical leverage for assessing and evaluating what is being produced and consumed as Aboriginal education
- a consideration of how to use place consciousness and a storytelling pedagogy to integrate authentic forms of Aboriginal perspectives
- a forum through which various stakeholders (teachers, curriculum writers, teacher educators, administrators, community members, local knowledge keepers) can engage on a much deeper level, as we look at Aboriginal education initiatives within each of our local spaces
- starting points, including frameworks, which could assist with curriculum development and lesson planning initiatives.

### *The Issue*

To begin, the fact is that “teaching Aboriginal studies in education that is respectful and decolonizing while advancing Aboriginal perspectives is a relatively new experience in most Canadian schools” (Fitznor, 2005, p. 3). Further to this point, use of the homogenous term *Aboriginal education* can overshadow and simplify the diversity that exists amongst Indigenous nations in Canada. This can occur when our teachers do not have the knowledge to understand how local First Nations' ways of teaching and learning contribute to our understanding and implementation of Aboriginal education. What is problematic, as seen from our collective past, is that non-Aboriginals educated in Manitoba and Canada have already learned about Indigenous people from the lens of Western epistemology—an outsider perspective that is different from multiple Aboriginal/Indigenous perspectives. In many cases, these learning sites had a hand in creating negative stereotypes and in developing a misunderstanding of Canada's Aboriginal peoples (Fitznor, 2005; Kirkness, 1992, 1999; LaRoque, 2010; RCAP, 1996). For example, Indigenous nations were renamed by archaeologists and categorized in cultural area groupings that were based on similarities in their subsistence lifestyles and cultures. Unfortunately, as Indigenous nations were muffled in the telling of their own existence, such descriptions became the reference points for teaching and learning practices of Aboriginal peoples.

Although the word *Aboriginal* provides a common denominator to capture three collective but distinct groups (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) in Canada, it is yet another form of racialization whereby social scientists have

had a long history in categorizing and naming Indigenous peoples (St. Denis & Schick, 2003; St. Denis, 2007). This is entrenched in Western practices and worldviews. In comparison, it would be ridiculous to go to Europe and call the people there *the Europeans*, making no distinction between the diversity of nations. In fact, one wonders if these are the same frames of reference that teachers currently use when they teach about Aboriginal peoples. This is of particular importance, since these are the teaching and learning practices that we aim to transform, by creating space for the authentic voice and presence of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples to emerge.

Without clarity, our Aboriginal education initiatives can become a mishmash of information that continues to misinform our average Canadian learner. For example, the integration of “The Seven Teachings” has become one of the latest topics to be embraced by a number of schools within Winnipeg and the surrounding area. Over a five-year period, I have seen this initiative grow and, in many cases, shape shift from school to school. I noticed that these teachings were being taught and showcased in schools as “The Aboriginal Seven Teachings” or “The Seven Teachings”. In both cases, the titles overshadowed the Anishinaabe origins. Identifying the “Anishinaabe Seven Teachings” as Aboriginal teachings assumes a pan-Aboriginal perspective that can mislead students into believing that all Aboriginal peoples across Canada maintain such teachings and that they are all the same, which is simply not true. This is one example that led to my need to illuminate our distinct Anishinaabe identity, as we are part of the original peoples of Turtle Island/North America. So, who are the Anishinaabe?

### *The Anishinaabe*

Although some literature has been written about Anishinaabe culture (Absolon, 2009; Johnston, 2003; Pitawanakwat, 2009), it has been noted that there are few sources that attempt to define Anishinaabe pedagogy (Battiste, 2002). There are three related peoples who embrace the term Anishinaabe: the Odawa, the Ojibwe, and the Potawatomi. All three speak *Anishinaabemowin*, the language otherwise known as *Ojibwe* and, in some places, identified as *Salteaux* (Benton-Banai, 2007; Pitawanakwat, 2009).

As noted by Pitawanakwat (2009), the Anishinaabeg (plural) lived around and west of the Great Lakes when they first came into contact with Europeans. Colonization dispersed descendants over a vast geographical area that now includes Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta in the north; and Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Kansas, and Oklahoma in the south. The process of colonization changed the boundaries of the Anishinaabeg through population decimation, relocation, and displacement. The most drastic change was the establishment of the reserve system, which dispossessed the Anishinaabeg of all but one percent of their traditional territory (Pitawanakwat, 2009, p. 8).

In Manitoba today there are 66 reserves populated by five language groups, including the Cree, Ojibway, Dakota, Oji-Cree, and Dene. My own sense of identity is rooted in the communities that my parents come from. My father is from Camperville/Pine Creek First Nation, an Anishinaabe Ojibwe-speaking community. My mother is from Vogar, Manitoba, situated next to Lake Manitoba, which is another Anishinaabe/Métis community. Over my ten years as an Aboriginal education consultant, I have evidenced that a majority of cultural initiatives in Winnipeg schools tend to be Anishinaabe-centric in nature, perhaps due to the fact that by geography, the Anishinaabe- or Ojibwe-speaking First Nations' communities are situated geographically closer to Winnipeg and its surrounding area. As you move further north into Manitoba, you will find the Cree-speaking communities (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2012).

Upon reflection, I realize that my own experience with Anishinaabe culture has greatly influenced my work as an Aboriginal education consultant. Taking the time to reflect on what guides my work allows me to remember, as well as to appreciate, that which contributes to my sense of identity as an Anishinaabe/Métis woman. Because this paper aims to focus on Aboriginal education, teaching, and learning within public education, I will focus on those school-learning experiences that help me to understand and appreciate what I see as Anishinaabe pedagogy.

In our developments and implementation of Aboriginal education, much can get lost in translation as we conceptualize and implement Aboriginal education (Dion, 2009; Kanu, 2002, 2005). As a growing concept, we must recognize the contributions of distinct peoples. By illuminating Anishinaabe pedagogy, we can steady this Aboriginal education lens to see what is being extracted from the life-ways of this cultural community that get lost in translation between these formal and informal learning spaces. This may add clarity to our perception of Aboriginal education, by examining the ways of teaching and learning outside of Western thought. It is therefore crucial to dig deeper, moving us from a topical Aboriginal education lens to unearth Anishinaabe pedagogy. In order to achieve this focus, I now share four stories that have shaped my understanding of that which is Anishinaabe. In sharing these stories, I also honour the work of my teachers who, each in their own way, have dedicated their lives to preserving and reciprocating our Anishinaabe knowledge and identity. Their stories have been life giving.

#### *Dan Thomas' Story: Four Original Laws of the Anishinaabe*

The first story I will share is one that I heard at Argyle Alternative High School in a Grade 11 history class. Dan Thomas, an Anishinaabe educator and curriculum writer (developing Native Studies curriculum for Manitoba Education and Training), was invited to the class as a guest speaker to talk about *Aboriginal education*. At first, what I saw was an Aboriginal

man sharing a story that has existed amongst the Anishinaabe people since the beginning of time. It was a story about the original laws that were given to the Anishinaabe people. If followed, these teachings would help the Anishinaabe maintain life on “the good red road” or, in other words, *Mino-Pimatisiwin*, a beautiful path that was left behind by our ancestors. In hindsight and from an educational perspective, it made me conscious of my own existence as an Anishinaabe person and anchored me to a geographical location on Mother Earth. This gave me a sense of place and created a stronger foundation, as it connected me to roots that ran deep into Mother Earth. I also began to see a distinct nation of people that was hidden in plain sight. This was a critical learning moment for me in many ways, and I knew it was unlike anything I had experienced before within the context of public schooling. I was accustomed to learning about people in faraway places or through the lens of a distant past. What Dan Thomas brought to the class that day did not come from a textbook. It came from a story that had been passed down, from generation to generation. The first teaching or law was sharing/caring; the second, kindness; the third, honesty; and the fourth, faith. Dan used the land, the plants, and the animals to represent each teaching. This helped him to illustrate the teaching while helping me to retain this knowledge. Overall, it increased my understanding of the relationship I have with other life forms (i.e., plants, animals, Mother Earth). In this sense, knowing how I am an interconnected part of all of creation is a valuable lens with which to live. It helps me to naturally position myself within the world around me. This perspective has had value in my personal and professional spaces. It has also oriented me to connect with my family, culture, and community so as to learn more about myself as an Anishinaabe person.

As I now reflect on this experience, I can see the pedagogical value of this Anishinaabe storytelling methodology. The story naturally engages the learner holistically; I was thinking, feeling, and would later come to act on what I had heard. For example, I take note of how the teaching of honesty was reinforced with the image of a tree. The tree represents, to each of us, our own sense of integrity as we walk this Earth. We were told to remember that the trees are a reminder to us that we must walk with honour. The teaching stated that we can walk through life making good or bad decisions and, although we may think that we can get away with bad decisions, it is each and every one of us who must carry this knowing in our heart and in our mind. When we walk through life, we can always find a tree that represents how crooked or how straight we have walked. It is a teaching on being self-aware and responsible with our actions. We must carry ourselves through this physical world and carry our conscience with us. The trees act as a reminder to be moral as we move forward in life. As I now see, the educational outcomes are to instill moral values within a socialization context and to understand the humility<sup>1</sup> of one’s existence

among all of creation. Dan's teachings were neither abrasive nor authoritarian. There was learning that occurred that cannot be measured easily using Western means of often standardized assessment. In many ways, I view these learning experiences as being more important than the content I learned in my history course that year. More importantly, his words were freeing, as they created a context wherein I had the freedom to choose and to learn from my own life experience. For me, this story was the beginning of a journey that would anchor me to my own life existence.

*Myra Laramee's Story: The Medicine Wheel*

The second Anishinaabe story I heard took place in the same year as Dan Thomas' story, and was delivered by Myra Laramee, an Anishinaabe educator who worked at Argyle School. She shared teachings about the Medicine Wheel with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike. The Medicine Wheel is an ancient symbol that originates with First Nations peoples. Today, many First Nations peoples use the Medicine Wheel as an educational tool for various teaching and learning purposes. There are layers upon layers of teachings that are contained within this learning framework (Bopp, et al., 1984). However, Myra used this wheel to show us our makeup as human beings. She drew a circle on the chalkboard with four quadrants, deconstructing a whole person by sectioning the parts into four domains. The east represented our physical self, the south our emotions, the west our mind/cognitive self, and the north our spirit self. It was a new theory, a concept and illustration, which I had not previously seen. She wanted each learner within the room to take notice that each of us was more than our physical selves. These teachings turned our attention toward our inner spaces, and helped us to recognize that we were also emotional, mental, and spiritual beings. She wanted us to see that we had more to nurture and develop than our mental self; we had a responsibility to nurture all aspects of our being, including the emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual domains.

The outcome of that day was the planting of a seed within me that has continued to grow over the years. It helped me to see that, as Indigenous peoples, we have teachings, learning models, learning theories, and ways of thinking that help me to understand myself as a person and a learner. It was the seed of self-awareness. Personally, it was a new orientation to life and learning. The image I saw on the board that day was simple yet profound. It is a useful educational tool for teachers and learners alike, as it orients learners to those inner spaces and can focus needed attention to those spaces that can also support learning. In hindsight, I realize that the Medicine Wheel framework was a powerful learning experience; often, much of my attention as a student was oriented to ideas and knowledge that did not stay with me through the years. Graham Smith (2003) refers to this as the *politics of distraction*. In some cases, I agree; I recall my own

learning experiences were oriented to learning facts and stories that were not relevant to me, with the effect of my attention being oriented away from my inner and immediate spaces. What I experienced with Myra's presentation was different: it was a critical learning moment that attuned me to my immediate spaces. It forced me to reflect critically on my being, as I was, right at that time. It was a learning moment that allowed me to experience my life more mindfully and critically from that day forward.

Overall, the Medicine Wheel is a pedagogical tool that places learners at the centre of their own life-world. It attunes learners to relate to the world around them from their inner and immediate spaces. It is a holistic, metacognitive learning process that heightens self-awareness. It is a visual tool that helps learners to understand the nature of being, and it can be used to help all students achieve a greater sense of self. Although it can be considered a First Nations learning tool, it is non-discriminating in that it helps learners to interpret the world from their own life experiences. This holistic approach is a powerful way to learn. It provides a framework to decipher between thoughts, feelings, and actions, and it places learners at the critical centre of their own being, to relate to the learning at hand and the world around them.

#### *Garry's Story: The Clan System*

The third story was told by Anishinaabe Elder and educator Garry Robson. I first heard the stories of the Anishinaabe clan system in a public school classroom. The clan system was illustrated as a seven-pointed star with an animal that represented a clan or animal totem at the end of each star point. Garry helped us to understand that the star represented a social governing system, and that it also identified how each clan contributed to the whole of the community. Interpreted from a modern lens, the Anishinaabe had doctors, teachers, spiritual leaders, hunters, warriors/protectors of justice, and philosophers. Although the clan system could have been presented as a governing system that existed in the distant past, the stories that Garry shared brought this system to life, illustrating that it was alive and among us today. For example, as Garry shared his own traditional name and clan with us, he also shared that it had taken years to come to such knowing and that it was through continuous reflection that he found his place within our cultural community. What I recognize now is that this was also an unspoken invitation to find our own place among our own life-worlds. What I heard in Garry's story was a lifelong journey illustrating his contemplation as an Aboriginal man. It had taken him years of living to come to a place of self-knowing. He also illustrated that self-knowing developed from a context. This cultural context allowed his own presence and identity as an Anishinaabe person to emerge. It allowed him to exist as he was, as an Anishinaabe man. His traditional name and acknowledgement allowed him to create this space not only in his psyche, but also in these cultural

and literal spaces for learners. In a sense, his story provides a road map by which we can each learn to grow from our own roots. Today, Garry is recognized as a respected Elder who has a long history of working in the education system. This helped to shape the role he would come to play in his cultural community as well as the role he plays as an educator in the education system.

*Luke's Story: The Anishinaabe Prophecy Song*

As a student of *Children of the Earth*<sup>2</sup>, I signed up for a culture course and was introduced to Luke Arcouette, who became our cultural teacher. Learning for this course took place in Luke's home. Although I was his student for only a short while, he played a significant part in introducing me to an extended cultural community. At the age of 17, Luke taught me how to make my first hand drum, which set me on a path to connect with and utilize my voice. Luke was a strong advocate of connecting youth to their cultural roots. He shared songs, stories, and personal experiences, and took us to other cultural learning sites<sup>3</sup> that allowed me to stay on this cultural learning path. One of the songs I learned from Luke was the Anishinaabe prophecy song. The prophecy song is a slice of a larger story, a message and an account of Anishinaabe history. It speaks of the different eras that the Anishinaabe people would live through, beginning with a prophecy that provoked a migration from the eastern part of Turtle Island/North America. The story eventually takes us to our present location in time, identified as *the awakening*. Luke often emphasized the importance of youth in this story. As I reflect on my time in this course, I realize that, as an outcome, Luke wanted us to see that we had a role to play in the remainder of the story. The message given was that First Nations youth would help to pick up what was left behind by our ancestors, to make our nations strong again. This story was introduced as the "The Morning Song", a piece of the Seven Fires Prophecy of the Anishinaabeg. I continued to learn more about this prophecy through ongoing community sings<sup>4</sup> and other cultural events. The song is a calling from the ancestors to the Anishinaabeg people, telling them to wake up from a deep sleep<sup>5</sup>.

This story gave me a new lens to interpret the world around me, and had a significant impact on me as a young Anishinaabe/Métis woman. An example of this new lens was how I interpreted the Meech Lake Accord, an attempt to change the Canadian Constitution. At issue was the fact that Aboriginal peoples were overlooked in these negotiations and demanded that the Accord be rejected on this basis. What I saw in this experience was historic for two reasons. First, it was a reaffirming movement for Aboriginal people across Canada, as it brought thousands of Aboriginal people together at the Manitoba Legislative grounds in 1990 in support of Elijah Harper, a key player in the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord. Second, I also saw a people rise to sound their voice, whose collective actions spoke louder than words.



It was a sign that a reawakening was occurring. This experience opened my eyes to the unique and sometimes contentious relationship Aboriginal people have with Canada's government. I was able to view this experience through a new lens, and I interpreted this gathering as the collective awakening foretold in the Anishinaabe prophecy song. Since then, Aboriginal groups across Canada continue to organize themselves, again and again, rising up to sound their voice. The people are now awake. Overall, these stories reconnect the umbilical cord that was severed as a result of oppressive laws and policies, such as those that made residential schools a reality.

### *Discussion*

In sharing these four stories, I recognize, like others (Archibald, 2008), that story is a cornerstone of many Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. How, then, do we utilize local stories as pedagogical supports? First, I must acknowledge that it would not be the same to read these stories from a book compared to hearing them in person. As I have experienced, hearing these stories moved me. They touched my heart and inspired me to take action. It created a context in which I was able to interpret the world around me and with me in it. Over time, that context has staying power, and I was able to move back and forth between my inner and outer spaces. For example, it helped me to consider my own personal story within the context of a grand collective narrative. From an Indigenous perspective, the power of story is the art of placing learners at the critical centre of their own being and life-worlds. It is a practice that I see as being at the heart of Anishinaabe pedagogy. Within this way of learning, an animate learning space is necessary. For example, Elders and oral storytellers brought our existence as a people to life. They carried knowledge and traditions that "function as the collective memory of the people" (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p. 9). The stories I have shared are an example of the perspectives, histories, and teachings that live on within the life-ways of a people, carried by knowledge keepers who act as living libraries. This knowledge, in many cases today, cannot be found in print material, further reaffirming the need for parent and community involvement (Aboriginal Education Directorate; Atleo, 2003; Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006, 2009; Coulter, 2009; Davidson-Hunt, 2009; Manitoba Education, n.d.)

From a Western lens, Anishinaabe pedagogy in practice is not subject-centred, as it is in Western curriculum where content and subject matter receive the primary emphasis (Battiste, 2002). Rather, it is learner-centred, subjective, and relies on relational management (Absolon, 2009). It has a humanistic focus and is aimed at exploring the interrelationships between all things within a critically reflective paradigm. Moreover, it takes into account feelings, attitudes, and values that can add affective components to the conventional subject matter curriculum with a focus on knowledge and skills acquisition.

The dilemma in looking at curriculum implementation and integration from a Canadian schooling or curriculum construct is that, often times, learning is a process that begins with something tangible: a document of learning outcomes, new materials, courses of study, and the like. In comparison, Aboriginal education, and more specifically, Anishinaabe pedagogy, is learner-centred, holistic, and animate (Battiste, 2002, 2004; Blood, 2009; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). In practice, it includes building "respectful relations, building on experiential learning, listening well, allowing space, story-telling and story-making, supporting quaternity, dialogue, positionality, relevance, reciprocity, reflectivity, and utilizing a strong Elders-informed, ecologically situated, creative, visual-auditory learning space within a self-governance philosophy and natural world context" (Kaminski, n.d., p. 8).

If we use the *First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model* (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007) as our lens to understand what is common about First Nations' ways of teaching and learning, we would see that there is a belief that learning comes from experience: from the self, and from interactions with family, ancestors, one's clan, the community, the nation, culture(s), traditions, the natural world, and other nations. Within this model, the teacher is viewed as only one of the nurturing or teaching guides. Mentors, counsellors, parents, Elders, and the environment can all facilitate learning on some level. More importantly, each of these knowledge sources is just as valid as the next, and none is more important than another. It is, therefore, important to consider how to access these resources, as they live among the people and not in a textbook. For the Anishinaabe, much of this is embedded in language, cultural practices, and in the relationship a people have created with each other and the land (Battiste, 2004; Blood, 2009; Laramee, 1990; Pitawanakwat, 2009; Thomas, 2012). It is therefore crucial to recognize that learning occurs from experience and builds from the relationships we have with all that exists in the life and world of our students: life-world.

Next, we must consider what may help teachers integrate *Aboriginal* perspectives in a respectful, authentic, and effective manner. As stated earlier, it is important that teachers start with what is local. It is also important to consider what gets adopted into the schools from local First Nations' cultures and what gets lost in translation (Dion, 2009; Smith, 2003). This can help to steady our lens as we conceptualize and implement *Aboriginal perspectives*. As a start, teachers could consider where their schools are situated and work to connect with local First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Second, teachers could consider using the Canadian Indian Treaties, if they exist, as a lens to position oneself within the context of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations (Fitznor, 2005). This leads to the recognition that our schools are located on the traditional homeland of Indigenous nations. Teachers might want to consider which languages are spoken in the communities that are near their schools.

A place-conscious perspective is a useful lens in understanding how to maintain the integrity of Aboriginal knowledge sources. It can be used to understand local ways of teaching and learning that inform our modern conceptions of Aboriginal education. For example, Kanu (2005) argues for a return to traditions or that which can inform how we conceptualize educational curriculum and practice. Utilizing this lens, along with local resources, can take one through a process of recovering aspects of a past, to recognize how traditions continue to exist within our local spaces. A place-conscious lens extends beyond our modern landscape to consider how to bring local knowledge and pedagogy forward. It helps to steady our lens when we use a historical and cultural lens to support the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. This can support the work of cultural brokers, teachers, educators, curriculum writers, and others responsible for integrating Aboriginal perspectives, as it digs deep enough by using a place-/land-based reference to connect with local knowledge structures (e.g., people, places, processes, ceremonies).

As Kanu (2005) notes, it is an opportunity to return to the past so as to move forward, combining the best of what our past has to offer as we integrate Aboriginal perspectives. She points out that this is not some nostalgic return to earlier traditions but instead useful for the critical leverage that it can provide, as we measure and assess our current initiatives. Utilizing a place-conscious lens allows teachers to use facets of critical thinking (Freire & Machado, 1987; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1988) to question what is being produced and consumed as Aboriginal education. In this case, it creates an understanding of how we each contribute to what is being fabricated as Aboriginal education. Working with local peoples can maintain the integrity of knowledge, allowing Aboriginal peoples to be the tellers of their own existence, of their past, present, and future.

#### *Application*

Within my own work as an Aboriginal education consultant, I have attempted to bring these ways of teaching and learning into focus. I have utilized the stories, experiences, and cultural practices to help me define Aboriginal education. In my workshops, for example, I engage teachers in processes they might experience if they were to learn in a traditional or cultural setting. My goal is to have teachers understand and appreciate the pedagogy of our people by utilizing the strategies that are employed within our cultural communities that foster learning. For example, when possible, I engage teachers in a smudging ceremony to illuminate the pedagogy of this learning strategy.

I first provide enough information to understand how to engage in the process of smudging. I point out that this can be considered as one of the first strategies used within our cultural communities, not only for spiritual or cultural reasons but for the teaching and learning process it supports.

From a pedagogical lens, I articulate it as an anchoring, self-assessing, and gathering activity, helping to ground learners to the learning ahead. It can also be considered as an assessment tool to help learners take ownership of and responsibility for the forward movement of their learning. It creates an opportunity for learners to see themselves holistically and to see that, as learners, we each have physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual resources within us that can either support or hinder our learning. We are more likely to support the learning process if we bring all aspects of our being into consciousness and cohesion.

In order to understand the pedagogical value of this learning strategy, I aim to enhance the pedagogy of this process and its connection to teaching and learning. For example, I make reference to how I and others have heard smudging described as an act of purification or cleansing; when you bring the smoke to the ears it is to signify an acknowledgement of the sensory ability and to bring forward your ability *to hear good things*; when you bring the smoke to your eyes, it is *to see more clearly*; and when you bring the smoke to your heart, it is to open the heart to feel a connection to the learning and *to feel good things*. This is a useful walk-through of what to do with the smudge, as it brings consciousness to the senses and internal spaces.

I should point out that in places where I cannot smudge, I use a paper and pencil activity to walk teachers through the same process. I draw a circle with four quadrants and write the four aspects of self (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual). I place questions in each section to help focus our attention on each of these four aspects of our being. These questions help solidify my expectations but also bring clarity to the usefulness of this activity. For example, in the eastern quadrant I focus on the physical aspect of their being. I ask them to consider how we are each prepared to participate physically in the learning of today. Did we get enough sleep or did we eat a good breakfast? I also ask teachers to consider how they have come to learn about the topic at hand. I have them consider whether they have gained their knowledge from a book or through human contact. Has it been on their personal time or work time? This questioning approach, I believe, helps them to assess their investment in the topic at hand by considering what physical action they have taken to support their learning.

In the south quadrant I focus on their emotion. I ask them how they are feeling about being present today or how they feel about the topic at hand (e.g., residential schools, integrating Aboriginal perspectives, the Anishinaabe Seven Teachings). I ask participants to consider what they are feeling, as I want them to identify their comfort level. Are they curious, excited, anxious, or ambivalent? This helps teachers to consider their comfort level with the topic. I then remind them that we all have things that are happening in our lives that can emotionally draw our attention elsewhere. I ask them to consider how children come to class on days when things may not be well at home. If we ask children to give us their undi-

vided attention, then we as their teachers need to know how to do this ourselves. I ask them to take a moment to give thought to that which may emotionally distract them but to put it aside for the time being. A quick sharing circle is also a useful strategy to acknowledge those personal things that monopolize our attention. It gives us a moment to think, share, voice, feel, and then move on with our day.

In the west quadrant, the place of (meta)cognition, I ask them to think about the topic at hand and how they relate to that topic. What do they think about what they know and how they have come to know? At this point, it is also important to consider how they feel, as this brings awareness to their comfort level. This is a self-assessment process that helps them to identify exactly where their feelings are before we dig into learning. I ask them to consider what they want to learn that would move their learning forward. Now that I have taken them through their physical, emotional, and mental selves, I then ask them to consider their energy, the life-force, and what it is that they bring with them in the form of spirit. I describe the part of them that holds their inner-most beliefs, their world-views, the life-purpose that sets their intentions into motion. I use the metaphor that was provided by Dr. Gregory Cajete (1994) to help solidify what I mean by spirit. It also helps me to illustrate how the spirit can be used as a learning resource if we allow ourselves to acknowledge and draw from this well. At a very basic human level, aside from religion and culture, the spirit is described as the wind and the light that we each carry within us. Together, this inner wind and inner light represent the makeup of our spirit. The wind is what I metaphorically view as our intentions or will. As an example of how to utilize this wind as a learning resource, I share a story about our students. If our students are not focused for the day, their energy can be pulled in 50 different directions. This conflict has the effect of students coming to class carrying a wind like that of little tornadoes. I then ask teachers to consider whether it is our responsibility to help students focus their intentions for the day. The very process I am taking them through, this self-assessment, gathering, and grounding activity, is a strategy they can use with their own students each and every day to help them focus.

I compare their inner light to our inner compass. It is the light that helps us to focus our attention and intention. Sometimes this light can be inspired, especially when learning is relevant, meaningful, or exciting. Activating this inner light attunes our students to learning targets. It is why many scholars have followed Dewey's suggestions for student-centred learning, as it builds on students' interests and values experience as learning.

In First Nations' cultures, acknowledging the spirit is a natural part of learning (Cajete, 1986, 1994; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Thomas, 2012). By giving teachers/learners the opportunity to assess and create an intention for learning, it gives students the individual freedom to choose to be present and to learn. The Medicine Wheel framework and a place-

conscious lens create the space to orient and position oneself to the day, to learn with and from each other, as a relational pedagogy. Understanding the pedagogy of smudging can provide students the opportunity to participate actively in the process, and to help each learner create a learning plan that can set their intentions into motion. After some discussion and explanation of the spirit, I ask them to consider if they have already walked through a self-assessment of three of the four parts of their being. Now oriented to the fourth domain, the spirit, I ask my learners to focus their energy by writing a learning intention for the day. The act of writing their own learning intentions focuses their beliefs about the level of commitment that they have to their learning for the day.

Anishinaabe ways of teaching and learning help the learner to see themselves holistically, which gives them an opportunity to choose to be fully present: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. To make use of the spiritual domain of our learners we must first acknowledge this part of being.

This way of teaching and learning goes hand in hand with understanding our ecological relationship to all that exists in creation. In fact, when one looks at what is common about First Nations' ways of teaching and learning it can be understood as a pedagogy of relations (Battiste, 2002; Blood, 2009; Thomas, 2012), a place-conscious lens that can bring to light that education from an Anishinaabe perspective that is not just a function of knowledge and skills acquisition but a function of understanding a way of being and acknowledging our human relations to all that is within and around us.

In terms of amplifying Anishinaabe pedagogy, it is important to recognize what sets Anishinaabe pedagogy apart from other First Nations' cultures. My conclusion is that in living our language, culture, and relationship to the land, space and being create this distinction. For example, in cultural learning spaces certain Anishinaabe prayers, songs, and stories are used in the geography of the Anishinaabeg. Although there are many similarities in carrying out a smudging ceremony, the stories and protocol can set each nation apart from one another. For example, within an Anishinaabe sweat lodge ceremony one will hear the Ojibwe language (the language of the Anishinaabe) and stories that use Anishinaabe motifs and teachings. In a Dakota sweat lodge you will hear a Dakota language, and their songs, stories, and prayers that will guide the learning process. Stories illuminate specific voices that are representative of a people. Without this clarity, we run the risk of being counter-productive in our efforts to advance Aboriginal education. In the worst case, we may trivialize or misinform our students about distinct Aboriginal peoples.

The point of the matter is that much is being hidden and subdued when we fail to look beyond modern and Western notions of Aboriginal education. We must distinguish between local First Nations and consider

what is being extracted from the life-ways of distinct peoples and what is being taught as Aboriginal education. To alleviate misinformation, the first step is to adopt a place-conscious, historical, and cultural lens. Doing so takes us outside of an anthropological perspective to authentically define peoples. This place-conscious perspective takes us back to Anishinaabe ways of teaching and learning, to see what existed here locally prior to European contact. Centring our attention on pedagogy as opposed to learning content brings us closer to strategies that can be employed to engage learners.

The task of integrating Aboriginal perspectives presents unique challenges and opportunities. As one example, to utilize Anishinaabe pedagogy one must step outside of the lock-step approach to teaching and learning that defines much of formal schooling. We must consider that the ways of teaching and learning of the Anishinaabe and Euro-western cultures are fundamentally different. In Anishinaabe culture it is difficult to separate traditions from education or spirit from learning, as these are interwoven animate features of learning (Battiste, 2002, 2004). This interconnection is a characteristic element of the Anishinaabe culture that sets it apart from the precepts of Euro-western structures of education. In some respects, it is a different way of teaching and learning since its focus is much broader. The content and learning strategies emerge organically as they evolve from the situation, intentions, and resources at hand. This is a non-technical, non-prescriptive approach to teaching and learning. It deviates from the norm of transmitting knowledge and skills within a technocratic approach.

In conclusion, my need to define Aboriginal education in definite terms serves Western ways of teaching and learning that are often standardized and static. By digging deep to acknowledge what informs my own understanding of Aboriginal education I realize my understandings of it did not come from a book. It came from experience. It came from amplifying a local voice and a local presence. Anishinaabe pedagogy is a relational pedagogy that is bound by understanding all our relations. This relationship starts by understanding ourselves first as beings, as learners. For the purpose of meaning making I used it here to amplify my own experience. I believe that the accuracy and legitimacy of what is Aboriginal may be lost if we rely solely on print materials to understand and integrate Aboriginal perspectives. In practice, Anishinaabe pedagogy connects me to the resources of this geography, to interact with the people and relationships that act as a vessel, encapsulating that which is distinct, beautiful, useful, and forever Indigenous to this land.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I must point out that humility is one of the Anishinaabe Seven Sacred Teachings.

<sup>2</sup> The first urban Aboriginal education and public high school in all of Canada.

<sup>3</sup> For example, he took me to Strong Earth Mother Lodge, which I recognize as a site designated to revive local cultures. It was here that I was able to experience my first sweat lodge experience, participate in traditional ceremonies, and learn more songs that were accompanied by history and teachings.

<sup>4</sup> Community sings are identified here as informal community gatherings that take place in our homes. I also recognize these as community and cultural revitalization efforts.

<sup>5</sup> The deep sleep is a metaphor for the loss of culture, language, and traditions that were outlawed as a result of imposed government legislation.

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