

Restorative Education: Relearning Traditional Ways of Learning

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## INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning is a spirit of mind which holistic, reflexive, reflective, and emergent. Personal growth and transformation-based pedagogy in contemporary education has been progressively attenuating since the western colonization of Canada. Indigenous values, virtues, practices, sacredness, ways of knowing, richness, and traditions associated with culturally diverse and unique social entities were eradicated and suppressed. Conventional structured, theory-based approach of education has eroded the human spirit of learning through iterative discipline and regurgitation.

Despite the humanistic tendency to form personal, social, and environmental connections as an individual, education has failed to incorporate these instinctual drives for too long, with many generations of learnings not having the opportunity to an interconnected and meaning education. Reimagining contemporary education can only happen by distilling and reintegrating transformative way of knowing and mindfulness which embraces, fosters, and connects the human spirit to the heart and mind of our soul through storytelling, traditional ecological knowledge and wisdom (TEKW), oral tradition, dance, food, inquiry, and the environment.

Despite generational trauma, inequality, segregations, discrimination, and cultural crucifixion of culturally rich and sacred aboriginal ways of knowing in the past, Canada has just recently acknowledged and invested in aboriginal education, attempting to restore, promote, and reintegrate the sacred teachings of our traditional elders in all Canadian citizens.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Before formally starting this reflection, I would like to acknowledge my place and identify. I am Michael Yue and I am currently living in Prince Rupert, BC, on the unceded, ancestral territory of the Ts'ymsyen First Nations of the Pacific North Coast. I born and raised Canadian, originating from Surrey, BC. My family and ancestral lineage originated from Caton in the Gaungzhao province of China. I was ethnically and culturally brought up as a bilingual Chinese Canadian. As a young adult, I have travelled and meandered through various northern communities in BC on my journey of personal growth and happiness. I have experienced Musqueam culture, I learned Gitxan traditional ways of knowing, and I have been transformed by Tsimshian indigenous practices. Of all the places I have seen, smelled, heard, tasted, and touched, and experienced, Prince Rupert is a place which I now call home. A home is a place where someone greets you. In this personal journey of epistemology, inquiry, love, and memories, I am finding my sense of space, place, and belonging.

## **ABORIGINAL IMPORTANCE**

Each one of us have at least one proclaimed story, quest, adventure, journey, experience, transformation, and/or epiphany in our life. These narratives sculpt the perception of virtues, values, identity, and personality of every individual. And together, they unite and connect us with one another. As a Canadian, all lives matters; this includes aboriginal lives. Have you ever felt victimized, racialized, discriminated, and mistreated? Have you ever lost a family member due to alcoholism? Have you ever lost your identity as an individual? Have you ever had to make the choice of embracing or hiding away heritage? Have you ever felt stripped away? These systematic and trauma-induced realizations and emotions are not unique to a few aboriginal people, but rather many.

Generationally poor systematic mental health of many aboriginal families across Canada has resulted in the decay and fragmentation of first nation culture. Many faced and continues to face these self-existential questions and emotions which are generationally and systematically induced. Only by truth and reconciliation of aboriginal ways of knowing can the severed connections be reformed and progressive to the social justice and wellbeing of all indigenous and nonindigenous people of Canada.

### **EDUCATIONAL DELCONIZATION**

Based on the Indigenous Corporate Training (ICT), decolonization and indigenization are described to be a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power and native influence, respectively. Root (2012) states that current educational standards and acknowledgments are highly white, westernized, and Eurocentric. Graveline (1998) writes that decolonizing involves resistance and survival, cultural renaissance, self-determination, empowerment, healing, revitalization, and reclamation of voice. The need of culturally inclusive, comprehensive, and traditional acknowledgment and integration of education is required to holistically bind the fragmentation of learning from Eurocentric colonization.

### **INTROSPECTION INTO ABORIGINAL EDUCATION**

After reading Battiste (2017), Calderon (2014), Newbery (2012), Root (2012), and Tuck (2012), I gained many insights into the personal, aboriginal, social, cultural, historic, pedagogical, and environmental importance of the sacred beauty of traditional indigenous knowledge (IK) and empowerment. As a nomadic Chinese Canadian in the past, I have finally found a place that resonated with me – a home -- a sense of place which is more than just a space.

## **PERSONAL GROWTH**

I have been exposed to an array of diverse and dynamic first nations tribes through my journey in central and northern BC. I participated, and I have grown; I have been enlightened and transformed. To part-take in ceremonious smudges, peace offerings, stories from elders, making bannock, having oolichan grease, constructing Haida drums, and participating in crest dances, I have changed my way of knowing; I have changed my perception and criticality of my personal epistemology. A way of knowing which is holistic to our spirit, mind, faith, and environment.

## **CONNECTIONS**

The Title, "*This Land is Our Land? This Land is Your Land,*" from Root (2012) was a powerful message and perceptive into the examination of entitlement. Our Land implies that the earth is shared between western colonials, natives, and the environment; however, Root juxtapose this view to Your Land instead which highlights and signifies the disconnect between the relationship of land, relationship, and culture from post Eurocentric colonization. Root, Tuck and Yang (2012) reinstates the uncomfortable, but important discussion of decolonization of western education and values.

From personal anecdotal experiences of indigenization of aboriginally-rich, rural communities, I have learned to live with others, not just some. This idea of personal growth and lifelong learning is reflected in our spirit. Dion (2007) highlights that this aligns with bodies and our awareness in order to learn from an Elder, where the spirit joins with the physical body to become body, mind, emotions, and spirit. I have transitioned from a mind of learning to a soul of learning. This relationship of myself has allowed me to grow and foster a stronger relationship with my values, virtues, friends, family, environment, and others.

This lifelong journey has transcended to my critical pedagogy, infusing place- and land-based education, environmental empathy, relationship-centred learning, and reflection-based epistemology. Calderon (2014) believes that the intersects of interdisciplinary and multimodal pedagogy are necessary for holistic, empowering, and transformative learning.

### **OUT OF PLACE OR OUT OF PHASE?**

As a novice educator, I have taken an array of indigenous education courses from the University of British Columbia (UNBC) and the University of British Columbia (UBC) in my journey as an emergent learner. However, practicing, embracing, and teaching culturally sensitive and appropriate traditions has lingered discomfort, especially in communities which are predominantly aboriginal by ancestry. *Do I know enough? Is it appropriate to relay this information as an Asian Canadian? Will I anger them? Do I have the right to talk about these things? Am I an indigenous educator?* All these questions kept running through my mind and I didn't know how to approach these concerns.

### **INDIGENIZING EDUCATION – CONNECTING THE SPIRIT**

Through relationship building with locals, I have learned that there is no monolithic category or dichotomy of “yes” or “no,” but rather, “what” or “how.” They taught me to not worry as intentions of faith and will is more important than mastery and competency. “We grow as a person, and I grow with you. Any attempt to indigenize teaching to be more impactful for natives is the best remedy for hope. Teach with your heart and values, and the rest will follow; they will follow as well” was a powerful dialogue between the principal and I in Prince Rupert. And as I taught with my heart and will, *we* were empowered. I didn't know Sm'algyax; and I didn't know Tsyshian, but I knew about love and strength.

In the first month of school, a grade 10 student told me that “When people found out about my culture, it was like all of the sudden it altered who I was as a person.” This changed my perception on indigenous education. Teaching the soul is teaching how to love. And thus, empowerment-based, transformative education of rapport is necessary and beneficial for all, often iterating that the needs of aboriginal students are good for all students – *something that is good for indigenusness students is good for all students.*

## **REFLECTION**

Having learn a lot of aboriginal culture, and significance, and ways of knowing through immerse exposures to rural indigenous communities, I have gained a strong appreciation to continue my journey as an educator for all students within and beyond the classroom community of my profession. As a Canadian educator for all students, decolonization is absolutely necessary to retransform and invigorate the quality of education across the nation. Unifying and non-discriminatory motives of educational acknowledgment, practices, pedagogy, and learning are required for a better Canada, which includes and strengthens aboriginal sacredness through truth and reconciliation. Only by progressive steps to decolonize Eurocentric and westernized education to more holistic, multifaceted, interdisciplinary, and interconnected ways of knowing, can education truly transform the quality of life of all global citizens on Earth.

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