

Teaching Philosophy

Excerpted from Nomination for Teaching and Learning Award for Indigenous Ways of Knowing
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Our teaching philosophies come together around five shared principles:

“Starting with Story” allows us to centre Indigenous voices, knowledges, people, and experiences in our teaching and learning

During our years of engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems, communities, literatures, and scholarship, we have come to know that stories are at the heart of our work. Stories embody communities and their ways of knowing, being, and doing in an appealing form—reaching the heart, not only the head. Stories are inherently relational, in that a teller and listener are drawn into relationship with each other and with the story being told. And because relationships call for mutual responsibility, storytelling as a mode of sharing knowledge draws people into reciprocal webs of connection. Thomas King’s oft-repeated line at the end of each chapter in the *Truth about Stories* lecture series is an illustration of this principle. King (2003) tells the reader that the story is “yours. Do with it what you will . . . But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (p. 29). When deciding how to engage others in the work of Indigenous education, then, *we believe in starting with story*. This principle affects everything we do, from designing courses (thinking through narratives), to selecting materials for teaching and learning (listening to Indigenous voices through literary texts), to working for social transformation (changing what stories people tell about Indigenous communities). Stories are a key way into relational work.

We know we cannot do transformative work alone; we need to come together in a spirit of relationality and reciprocity

Relationality is an Indigenous principle and a way of understanding that guides our professional and scholarly practice. At all times, we name ourselves as learners and invite teachers on a journey with us—a journey with a sensibility of intellectual humility and relationality, and an orientation toward decolonization and reconciliation. In doing so, we trouble the colonized notion of teacher as expert, for we believe that it is important for students to leave the class with an awareness of their own positioning in relation to Indigenous communities and a feeling of respectful readiness to engage in Indigenous education—rather than with a strict set of attained content knowledge. We share Dwayne Donald’s (2016) notion of *ethical relationality* as “an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (p. 535). We model to our students that feelings of vulnerability and being unsettled make us open for growth, and can open up space for new relationships and possibilities, which are a foundation for social change.

Social responsibility is at the heart of our work; we are working for better futures

We see Indigenous Education as a field that serves Indigenous communities and Indigenous-settler relationships; therefore, this work is necessarily tied to Indigenous and relational theories of change

(Tuck & Yang, 2014), such as *decolonization, reconciliation, and resurgence*. In the context of studies in education, we believe it is vital for teachers to consider the social significance of their professional practice and their scholarship, as well as the impacts that they will have on learners, families, and communities. Informed by Indigenous ways of knowing, we must be responsible to the ongoing struggles of Indigenous communities to resist colonial violence, to heal in the wake of colonial histories, and to revitalize pedagogies, knowledges, cultures, and lifeways. We see our task as working to nourish Indigenous communities and knowledge systems, while challenging racism and colonialism, alongside fostering open and reciprocal relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples. This impetus for social responsibility informs all of our collaborations.

We work together through courageous collaboration to disrupt hierarchies and build capacity across our teams and projects

We acknowledge that learners come from varied backgrounds and have diverse learning needs and styles. In our educational work, our students' experiences, strengths, and whole selves are welcomed at the table and are valued for what they are. We create teaching spaces *where traditional hierarchies are disrupted and where knowledge flows in both directions*—between teacher/student, researcher/research assistant, expert/new learner, and Indigenous/settler. This guiding principle is courageous work as it disrupts colonial forms of knowledge, requiring us to unlearn some of the ways we were schooled (rote-learning, assessment driven, teacher as authority). Building capacity to do this work requires that connections be drawn across cultures, languages, and ways of knowing, and that respectful forms of collaboration and rich conversations are always privileged. Each new student or team member that we work with brings an invitation to connect. Each new mentorship opportunity likewise comes with the invitation to learn something new ourselves. Demonstrating these forms of collaboration in our practices is especially important given our work with preservice teachers. We believe in the importance of building capacity for teachers to take up this courageous work in their own future professions.

We walk our talk, embodying commitment to our work in everything we do

It is not enough to espouse the principles that matter to us; we must dance them into practice every day. We are both big believers in an *ethic of care and meaningful mentorship*, for instance: but what does that look like in practice? One example is that the mentorship of Indigenous graduate students and new teachers is not limited to paid work on projects. The modern pandemic / digital equivalent of an open-door policy or frequent visits over tea is that we are often chatting with team members on our shared text thread, celebrating accomplishments or happenings important to them. When it comes time to write or present, we involve our team members, giving them a chance to develop their presentation skills, and to share authorship on reports and publications. Recently, for instance, we were only allowed four people on the presenter roster for a webinar; we lobbied to have our team alongside us instead of leadership from our faculty. Similarly, if our community partners need something from us, we show up! On a date that we had planned a meeting with our Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) Indigenous education partners, explained below, we arrived and found them in a meeting with school board leadership, led by Elder Wanda First Rider. Instead of pushing for our agreed-upon meeting time, we sat and listened alongside and watched for opportunities to speak in support of the strong work being done by the Indigenous education team, and to show respect for what the Elder was sharing. We knew what our primary role was and that was to be good collaborators and listeners. The work we do requires constant humility and reflexivity (which we realize is difficult to show while compiling an award nomination). We are very aware that we cannot

do this work alone and are constantly in motion, connecting outwards to work and learn from and with others.