



Introduction to Indigenous Knowledge

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Overview

What is Indigenous knowledge?

- From where does it originate?
- Why does it matter?
- Attributes of Indigenous knowledge
- Why Truth and Reconciliation matter

Indigenous Knowledge

What is Indigenous Knowledge?

IK comprises **all aspects of life and living** and is deeply tied to community and culture.

IK is the **accumulated** wisdom, technology and experience of Indigenous Peoples (Little Bear, 2009)

Systemic in that it encompasses everything that can be thought or observed (Battiste, 2005)

IK is **both process and content**, in that it addresses both what and how things should be done, therefore making it normative as well by embodying the culture's values in its teachings.

IK is indigenous to this land and is the **North American intellectual tradition** (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 4, p. 112).

Indigenous Knowledge

From where does it originate?

Knowledge—like everything else—emanates from the Creator (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 4, p. 108).

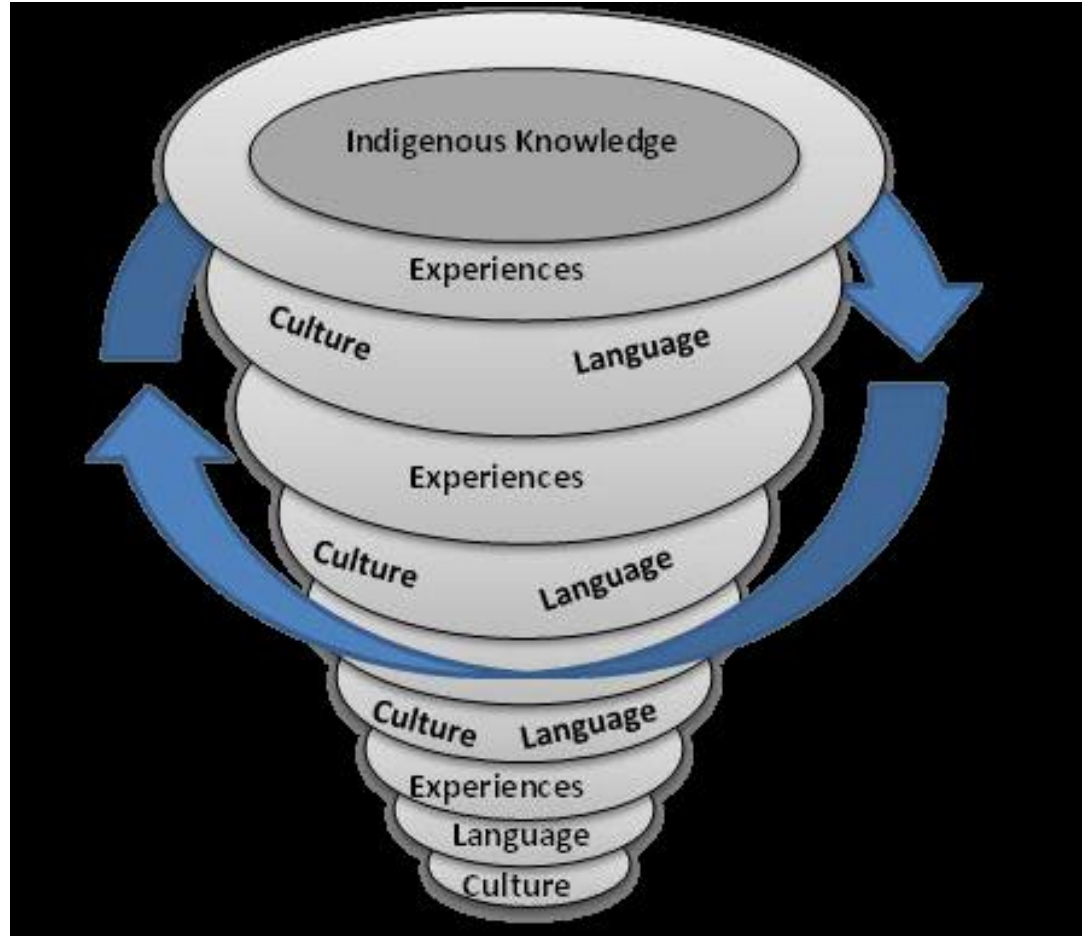
Objective knowledge comes **directly from the Creator** and “is the source of the sacred laws that govern relationships within the community and the world at large. It is the source of the traditions and sacred ceremonies. It tells one **how to lead a good life**” (RCAP).

- Prayers, dreams, visions, insights

Subjective knowledge is acquired through experience in the physical world; it is **learned by doing** and is therefore subject to experience (RCAP).

- Relationships with Community, Natural world (creatures, spirits, land, all lifeforms)

Indigenous knowledge
grows out of
experiences mediated
by language & culture



Indigenous Knowledge

Communal & Collective



The Old Ones experienced **inwardness** as a totality that created community as “a **physical manifestation of the life force**” and people became empowered to “become the ‘culture’ of accumulated knowledge” (Ermine, 1995, p. 105).

The community is essential in its function “as repository and incubator of total tribal knowledge in the form of custom and culture” (Ermine, p. 105), knowledge that evolves out of Indigenous peoples’ connection to the mysterious force that connects all of existence.

“Cree narrative memory is a large, intergenerational, collective memory” (McLeod, 2007, p. 8).

In the Cree way, “collective narrative memory is what puts our singular lives into a larger context” (McLeod, 2007, p. 11) as we tap into the knowledge within us and allow it to change our understanding and interpretation of the world.

Indigenous knowledge does not live somewhere external to Indigenous people; it is within us and it germinates and grows within community.

Indigenous Knowledge

Primary Orality



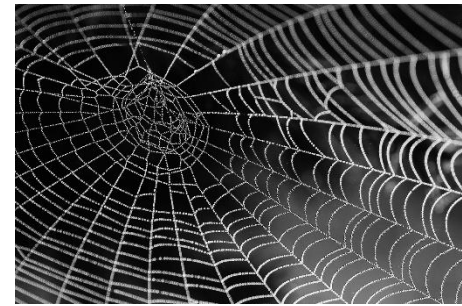
Primary orality describes the “systems of **Cree language use and Cree thinking patterns** [which] determine and guide all forms of social interaction and individual development” (Weber-Pillwax , 2001, p. 152).

Primary orality, along with full understanding, **continue to structure contemporary Cree concepts and realities** (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 156).

Moving from orality to literacy is not just a matter of language translation; it involves **a different way of thinking, communicating, and relating**, but the primary consciousness is still an oral one.

Indigenous Knowledge

Relationships



Within the domain of energy and spirit, the “**interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance**” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 77).

Our **relatedness to Earth** and all of its other inhabitants puts us in relationship with everything, including inhabitants of the spiritual realm of existence.

These **relationships** with the Creator, the natural world, the animals, and with other human beings are all described in Aboriginal languages, which are considered sacred gifts from the Creator for our use (RCAP, 1996).

The fundamental insight was that **all existence was connected** and that **the whole enmeshed the being in its inclusiveness**.

In the Aboriginal mind, therefore, an immanence is present that gives meaning to existence and forms the starting point for **Aboriginal epistemology**.

It is a mysterious force that connects the totality of existence - the forms, energies, or concepts that constitute the outer and inner worlds. (Ermine, 1995, p. 103)

Indigenous Knowledge

Space and Time



The idea of all things being in **constant motion or flux** leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the world.

If everything is constantly moving and changing, then one has to look at the whole to begin to see patterns.... Constant motion, as manifested in cyclical or repetitive patterns, **emphasizes process as opposed to product**.

It results in a concept of time that is **dynamic but without motion**. Time is part of the constant flux but goes nowhere. Time just is. (Little Bear, 2000, p. 78)

“Indigenous people tend to envision their collective memory in terms of space rather than time” (McLeod, 2007, p. 6). Our **stories are rooted in a sense of place**, the sense of place that connects us to one another as communities and to the rest of creation.

Indigenous Knowledge

Land and Place



Indigenous knowledge is also tied to particular lands and to particular places on the land (Battiste, 2002, p. 2).

The relationship that Aboriginal people have with Turtle Island is “governed by rules and principles formed in the distant past”, that “the **Creator preordained how that relationship should be** and provided the tools and the means to live a life that expresses that relationship” (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 4, p. 101).

Tribal territory is so essential because the **Earth is literally our mother** – the source of being for Indigenous people – and our being cannot be separated from her. (Little Bear, 2000)

There is a connection between the ceremonies and activities performed in conjunction with the Earth’s cycles and the need for creation to be renewed according to a set pattern. “**Creation is a continuity. If creation is to continue, then it must be renewed**” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 78).

Indigenous Knowledge

Paradigms



Aboriginal paradigms include ideas of **constant flux**, all existence consisting of **energy waves/spirit**, all things being **animate**, all existence being **interrelated**, creation/existence having to be **renewed**, **space/place** as an important referent, and language, songs, stories, and ceremonies as repositories for the knowledge that arise out of these paradigms. (Little Bear, 2009, p. 8)

Indigenous knowledge is **derived from communal experience**, from **environmental observation**, from **information received**, and from the **visions attained** through ceremonies and communion with spirits of nature. (Cajete, 2000, p. 190)

Indigenous Knowledge

Characteristics

1. indigenous to this land;
2. from the Creator;
3. the source of the sacred laws that govern relationships;
4. the source of the traditions and sacred ceremonies;
5. the guide to leading a good life;
6. a methodology for interpreting the world;
7. both content and process (what should be done, how things should be done);
8. an embodiment of the values of the people;
9. based on a consciousness of primary orality;
10. embedded in the cumulative experiences and teachings of a people;
11. embodied in a web of relationships;
12. exemplified by accumulated wisdom, technology, and experience;
13. knowledge of inner space and outer space;
14. grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown;
15. evolved from the connection to the mysterious force;
16. large, intergenerational, and based on collective memory;
17. tied to lands and places on the land;
18. tied to space and place more than time;
19. grounded in particular places;
20. holistic;
21. cyclical;
22. dynamic;
23. inherited;
24. generalist;
25. process-oriented;
26. systemic;
27. normative.

Indigenous Knowledge

Principles

1. we are all **related** (all existence is connected);
2. all existence consists of energy/spirit (everything is animate/alive);
3. a **mysterious force** connects the totality of existence (inner and outer worlds);
4. life is in **constant flux**;
5. **community** is a physical manifestation of the life force;
6. the whole enmeshes the being in its **inclusiveness**;
7. good **relationships** are essential;
8. we are in relationship with the **land** (including animals, plants, elements);
9. **Earth** is literally our mother (where creation occurs);
10. all creation must be **renewed**;
11. the quest for knowledge must be **inward**;
12. we rely on **spirit power** rather than physical power;
13. understanding must be grounded in the **spirit**;
14. **prayer** is a principal way of seeking knowledge;
15. **dreams** are a fundamental way of knowing;
16. **ceremonies** are elemental ways of learning and knowing.

Indigenous Knowledge

Examples



Example of Indigenous record of events

Example of natural record of events →



TREE STUMP HUMAN FINGERPRINT



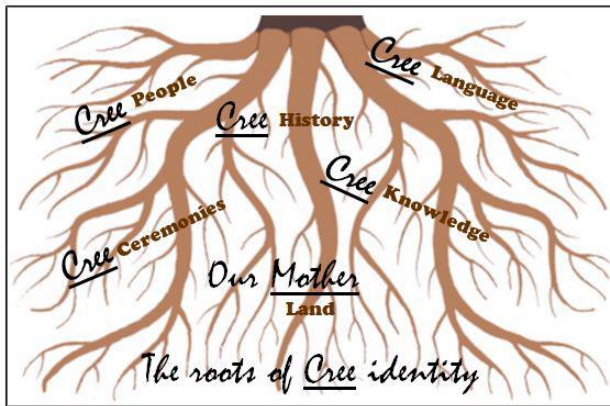
We are nature

Indigenous Languages

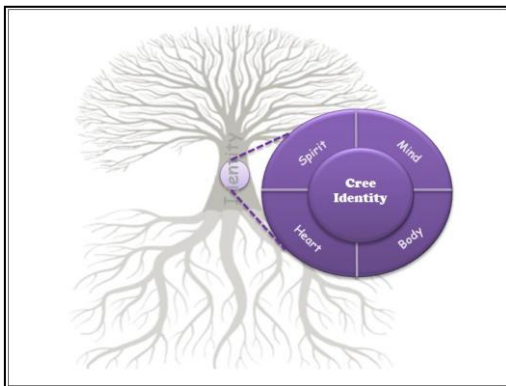
- **define the world** and experience in cultural terms, thus shaping our worldview;
- **capture a worldview** specific to a culture;
- pass on what it means to be a **member**;
- **provide meaning** to life;
- provide deep and lasting **cognitive bonds** that affect all aspects of Aboriginal life;
- live deep within our **socialization processes** and therefore are not easily eradicated;
- have a **spirit or soul** that can be known through the people themselves;
- have cultural **philosophies and beliefs embedded** within them;
- **embody** the way a society thinks;
- give us a **vocabulary** through which to explain our existence.

Cree Identity & Culture

Identity has roots



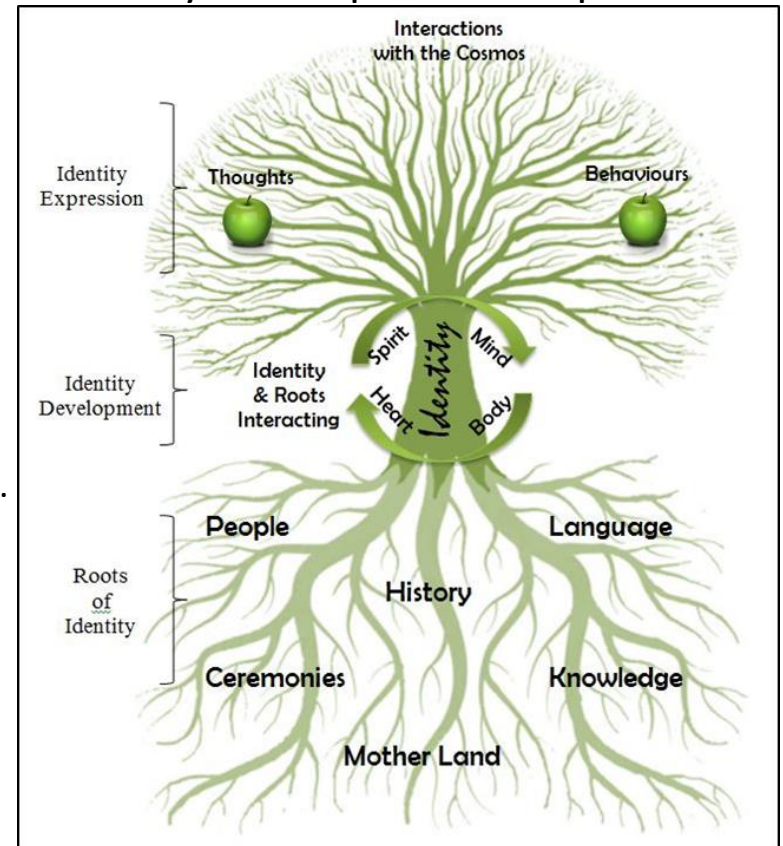
nehiyaw: four-part person



Purposes

- Locate** being as belonging to a People;
- Protect** thru connection, knowing, & belonging;
- Guide** in fulfilling purpose of living balanced good life.

Identity Development & Expression



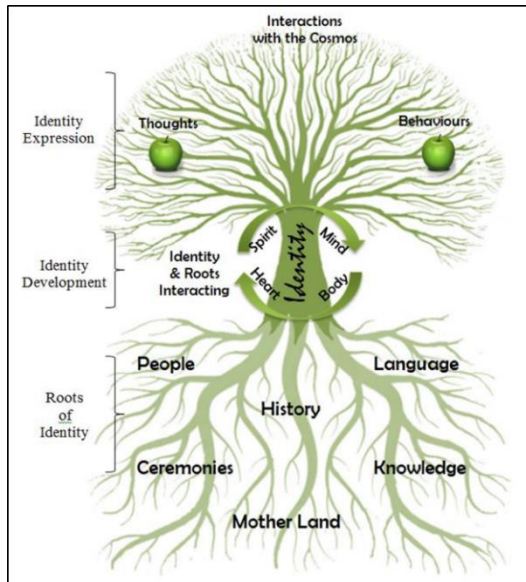
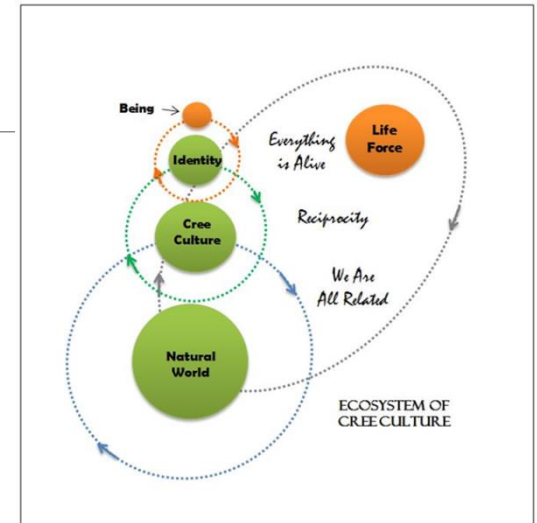
Cree Identity & Culture cont.

We are born with identity

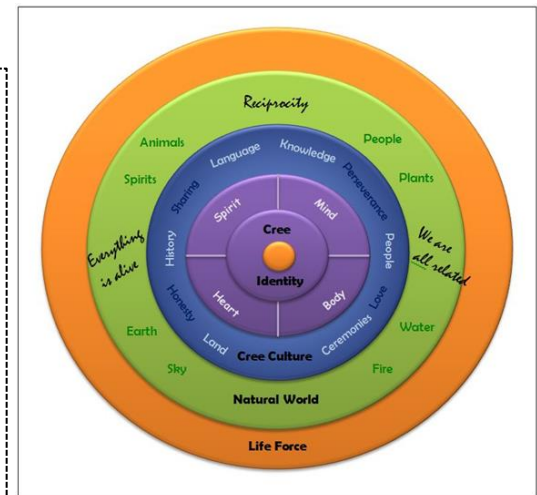
Identity encoded in physical, mental, emotional, spiritual being at birth.

Identity develops through interactions with roots in cultural ecosystem.

Identity & culture function in reciprocal, reflexive relationship with each other and Natural World.



Individual is a being-becoming-in-community-in-a-place-in-the-world, unfolding in a process of growth leading to a Way of Life rooted in a core reality.



Weeping birch lesson

Why is it not thriving?



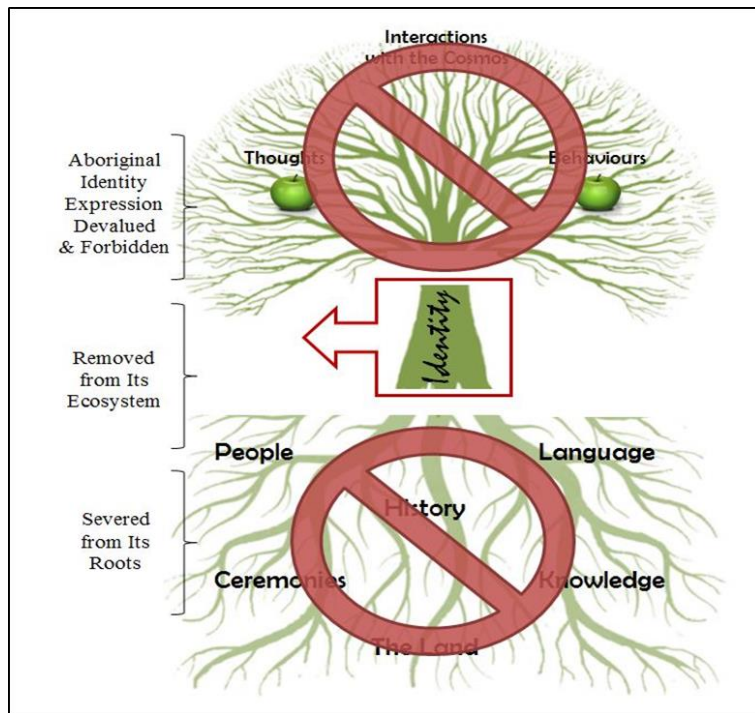
Weeping birch lesson

What does it need?

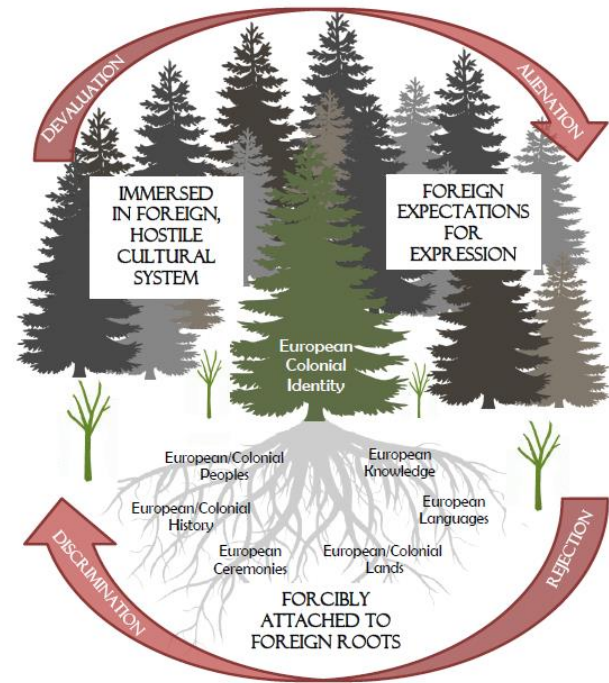


Colonial Assault on Identity

Labelled as *Indians* and assigned colonial value as inferior to European identity.



Cut off from roots; removed from ecosystem; expression forbidden

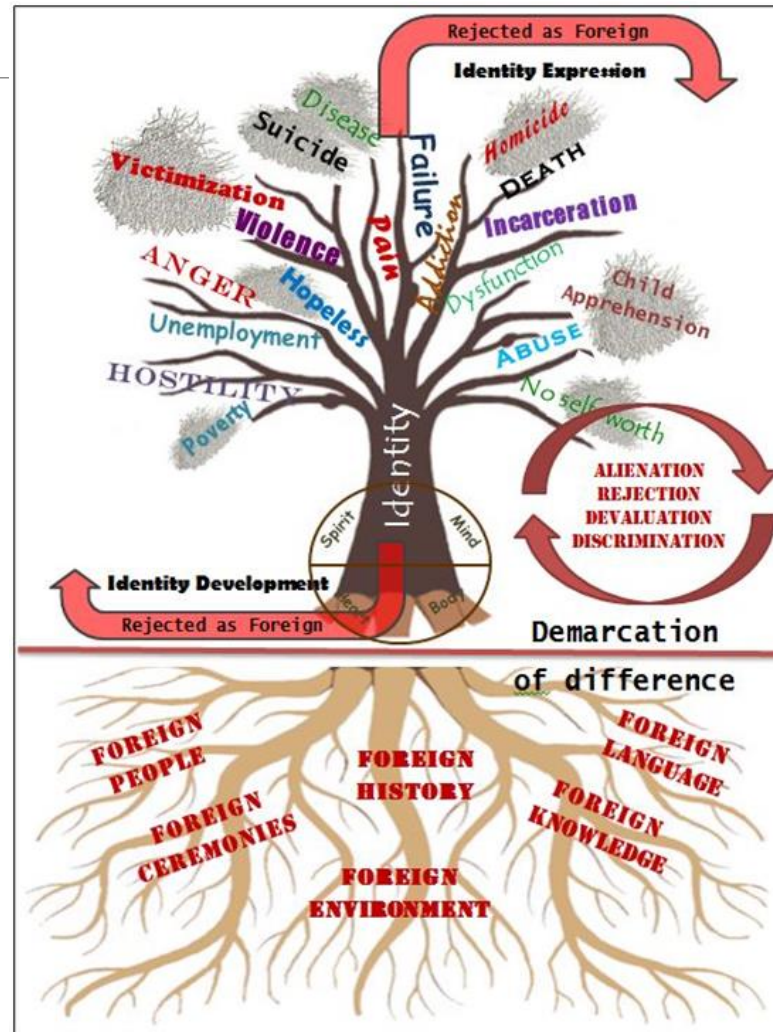


Immersed in foreign & hostile system; foreign expectations for expression

Identity Uprooted

Distorted, under-developed identity leads to diffusion, which, under continued assault, results in dysfunctional expression and disease.

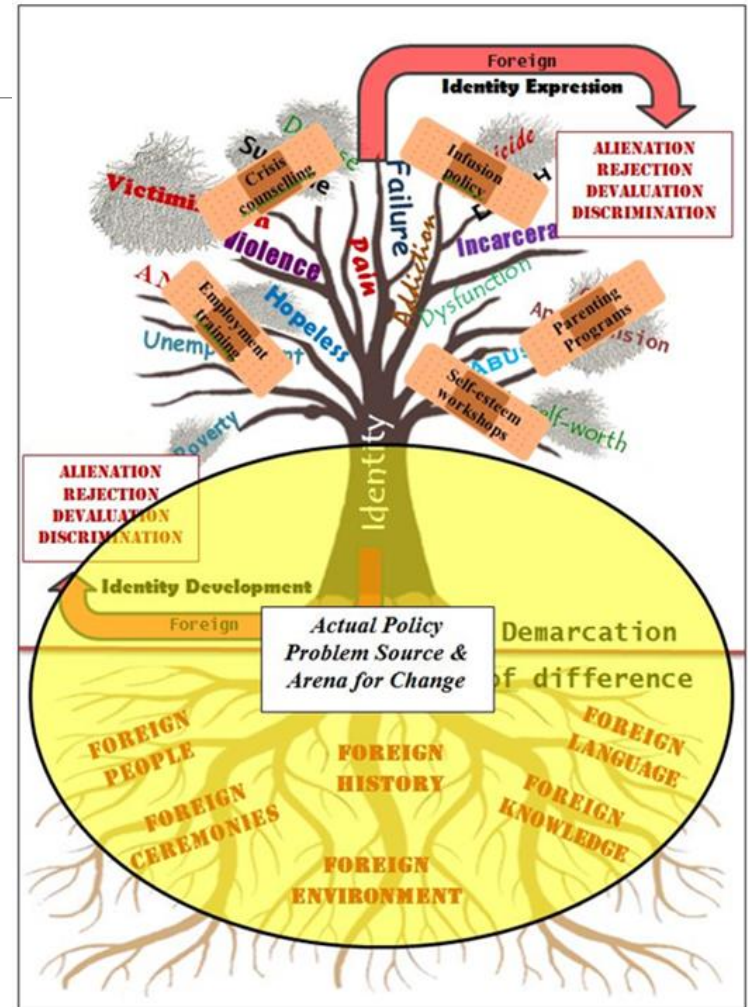
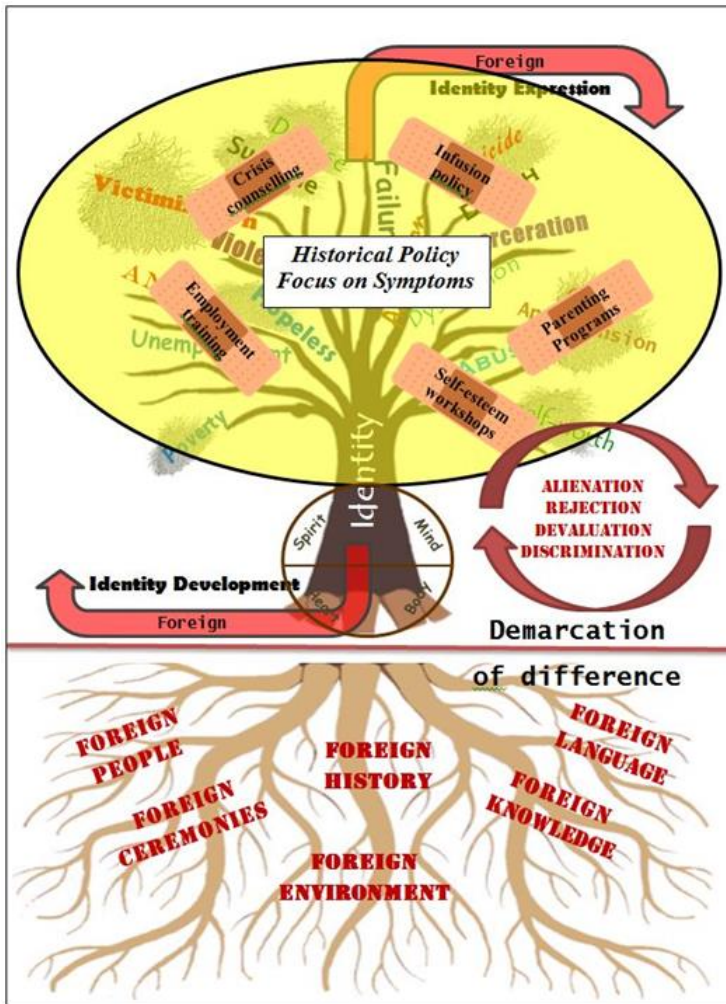
Still considered inferior and rejected by hostile society



Blamed for outcomes of assault on identity; confirmation of inferiority

Savages who can read and write...

Shifting the Policy Focus



Indigenous Pedagogy

“For our people, there was only one goal for all education; to ***produce a human being.***”

Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley, Yup'ik educator

For the Pueblo people, the foundations of learning take many forms.

They take the form of the hundreds of **dances** we perform during a year.

They take the form of our **teachings** to our children about their **relationships** within their communities.

Ultimately, the goal of Indigenous education is to **perpetuate a way of life** through the generations and through time.

The purpose of all education is to instruct the next generation about **what is valued and important** to a society.

Given this orientation, **children** are the most important focus of Indigenous education. (Cajete, 2000, p.184)

Indigenous Pedagogy



Teacher is **facilitator** of learning experiences rather than knower of all things.

Land and place are primal to learning and understanding.

Creation is our **primary teacher**.

Teaching and learning occur within **relationships** between teacher/student, subject/student, land/student, spirits/student.

Learning is a **holistic endeavor** that requires engaging all aspects of the student and teacher to develop understanding and skills in four realms of being (**mental, physical, emotional, spiritual**).

Indigenous Pedagogy



Identity development is critical component of Indigenous education requiring **interactions with and in roots of identity and cultural ecosystem** (people, ceremonies, history, knowledge, language, land).

Ceremonies are central to learning and development.

Indigenous **languages** are repositories of knowledge, markers of belonging, mediators of understanding, provide foundational meaning for life.

Learning is **lifelong process of *being/becoming***.

Getting started

Why?

What motivates you to want to include Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing in your courses?

What?

What do you already know and what do you want to learn?

What is the history of the relationship between your field of study and Indigenous knowledges/peoples/histories?

Where?

Where are you and who are the peoples of this place?

Who?

With whom do you have existing relationships/how can you develop connections?

How?

Choose an area of focus that you would like to explore and seek out knowledge from the Peoples of this place.

Getting started

- Choose a theme from each area of focus and go deep.
- Work in learning groups to maximize learning potential of your time.
- Find resources that present Indigenous perspectives on the themes.
- Evaluate resources: Who is speaking? Where are they positioned? Who is seen/heard? Who is not? Why? (critical thinking)
- Acknowledge sources of knowledge/understanding/teachings.
- Do not fall into trap of 'evaluating' cultures and beliefs. (watch language here)
- Commit to your own learning and professional development.
- You will get out what you put in.