

INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION

Dan Roronhiakewen Longboat, Andrejs Kulnieks, and Kelly Young have been developing an “integrative framework” wherein there is a role for “oral history” in “social and eco-justice-oriented education,” in service to “reconciliation of past Ontario history/social studies curricula.”¹ Drawing upon Indigenous teachings, they have formulated “12-R’s” that characterize their curriculum theory: “reconciliation through relationship, respect, responsibility, reverence, resilience, reciprocity, restoration, resurgence, renewal, regeneration, revitalization, and remembrance.”² Oral history will be heard across the curriculum.³

Mindful of the Canadian Accord on Indigenous Education that asks teacher educators to “respond to the needs of Indigenous peoples and all Canadian learners,” of the 2007 Ontario Ministry of Education’s policy framework for Aboriginal education, and of the 2009 issuance of resources for teaching about Aboriginal peoples Longboat, Kulnieks and Young formulate a curricular framework integrating “practices of oral history for social and eco justice-oriented learning.”⁴ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young have worked to

develop an understanding of storytelling and narrative inquiry as vehicles for oral history-oriented education and an understanding of the importance of learning by story and nature. It is through our integrated framework that we articulate the role of oral history for social and eco-justice-oriented learning by evoking a new paradigm for developing a relationship with local places whereby public systems of education can provide an opportunity for learners to explore.⁵

They acknowledge earlier efforts to develop a “framework that brings together two knowledge systems into an Indigenous Environmental Studies and Sciences Program,” a “framework that integrates Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges as it lends itself to a pedagogical approach to oral history education.”⁶ “We believe,” they add, “that this integration involves understanding history as nonlinear.”⁷

Oral tradition, Longboat, Kulnieks and Young explain, requires the authorization of the “speaker’s role in conveying cultural truth” by “higher authorities who bestow their responsibilities to journeyman practitioners who communicate established cultural practice.”⁸ Simultaneously “sacred and cosmological,” they continue, “oral traditions do not vacate responsibilities to ancestral continuities that locate these traditions from Creation.”⁹ Specifically, “storytellers in oral traditions apprentice with Elders and practitioners to qualify for maintaining oral tradition.”¹⁰ Its purpose is the provision of “spiritual nourishment as a central aspect of intergenerational continuities,” a “symbiosis between ancient knowledge and the

deeper meanings not portrayed in media representations.”¹¹ Such symbiosis is in service to “restoring our relationships between humans and humans and humans and the Earth.”¹²

Longboat, Kulnieks and Young designed a course – titled Sustainable Indigenous Communities – taught in the Indigenous Environmental Studies and Sciences Program at Trent University (located in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada). In this fourth-year course students undertake “self-directed research” on “community” (for instance, economy, education, food production, housing, energy); they are challenged to “work independently and then collaboratively to design a sustainable community.”¹³ To help students understand “sustainability,” Longboat, Kulnieks and Young make available “selected oral recitations, from traditional Indigenous teachings, or as we refer to them as lectures on the ‘foundations of Indigenous knowledge and thought’.”¹⁴ They reference Chief Oren Lyons from the Onondaga Nation, who was key to the creation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), who summarized “their 30+ years of work together could be distilled into four words: ‘value change for survival’.”¹⁵ “Those simple, yet powerful words,” Longboat, Kulnieks and Young comment, “provide the necessary guidance for Western culture to begin a process of social change to head off the path of ecological collapse we are currently on.”¹⁶ To “operationalize sustainability to avoid catastrophe,” they ask: “does it not make sense to learn from the peoples, cultures, and knowledge systems that embed sustainability in their core values?”¹⁷ With this question in mind, Longboat, Kulnieks and Young ask students to study traditional Indigenous knowledge ... that ha[s] enabled human beings to ‘live in place’ in a sustainable way for millennia.”¹⁸

“What is fundamental to the vision and mission of Trent University and to the Indigenous Environmental Studies and Sciences Program,” Longboat, Kulnieks and Young summarize, “is the critical and vital importance of learning ‘from’ and not just ‘about’ Indigenous practices of sustainability,” a distinction they believe can enrich “learning opportunities for sustainability.”¹⁹ They cite Anishinaabe educator Art Beaver’s concept of “indigagogy,” a “system of learning that enables real learning and facilitates and engages a multiplicity of student learning styles and approaches.”²⁰ Their approach is summarized in the 12-R’s noted earlier, which they describe, starting with relationship.

“*Relationship*,” they note, is “one of the most essential teachings,” emphasizing that “we are made of everything that exists in the cosmos and hence we are connected to everything that exists,” embedded in the “sacred web of life,” in “relationship to and with everything that exists, the seen and unseen.”²¹ Relationship is “active and has to be created, cultivated, maintained, as it changes over time,” and includes relationships with “our Ancestors, Future Generations, Earth, and Spirit,” as well as with “the Life Energy or the Power of Life and the necessity of us working for the continuance of Life itself.”²²

Second is *respect*, a “value we portray in everyday life,” one that starts with ourselves,”²³ e.g. self-respect. “Regardless of how we were brought up, what happened to us, what we may have done in the past,” they explain, “respect is necessary for understanding ourselves and re-envisioning our future,” and it provides a “moral compass for our decision making and hence our behaviours.”²⁴

Like respect, *responsibility* has “many definitions ... but what is missing most often is [its] operationalization,” that is, “manag[ing] ourselves in relation to the world around us.”²⁵ They cite “ancient teachings” that tell us that “Our Creator ... gave us our ‘Original Instructions,’ ... among them to listen to “our greatest teacher” that would “provide everything we needed to live a ‘good life’.”²⁶ I am reminded of George Grant’s affirmation that “I am not my own.”²⁷

Reverence means “engaging with the very essence of the sacred with veneration and awe,” including (they reference David Suzuki) “wonderment and astonishment.”²⁸ “From an Indigenous perspective,” they explain, reverence represents a “positionality emanating deep love, appreciation, and gratitude that is exemplified by one’s mind, body, and spirit, a “Way of Life” that “empowers the continuation of Life.”²⁹

Resilience is the “ability to recover,” yes the “ability to survive through hardships,” but “more than that,” as it implies “understanding” that “as human beings, like everything in Creation, have a purpose to fulfil and that this purpose works together with everything else to enable Life to continue.”³⁰ Those obstacles human beings encounter that block the “path of fulfilling our destiny, that is, Life,” require resilience, the capacity “not to be dissuaded or discouraged.”³¹ They cite “our great teacher, Mohawk Elder, and Statesmen, Tom Porter,” who says “to never ever give up,” to “recover and set ourselves back on the path and continue working for the continuation of Life, not just human life but all Life.”³²

Reciprocity represents “understanding and engaging in a sacred relationship with Creation,” Longboat, Kulnieks and Young tell us, appreciating that “our lives as human beings are totally dependent upon Creation for our food, medicines, birds, animals, trees, water, etc.; even the air we breathe all come from Creation and every element works to sustain Life.”³³ *Restoration* represents our “capacity as global human beings to elevate our consciousness and bring our knowledge together collaboratively to resolve, remediate, and restore life to elements of creation we have destroyed.”³⁴ Not only must we “repair the damage and restore ecological function,” but also “revitalize human spiritual integrity,” as without “becom[ing] ‘real human beings’ again, we will just have to repair and restore again, over and over through the millennia.”³⁵ *Resurgence* represents “rebirth or revival of what it means to be a ‘real human being,” our “opportunity to relearn and reaffirm our understanding of relationships with each other and Creation, and of our responsibilities to work for Life.”³⁶

Renewal means to “remake, rebuild, and to revitalize again,” requiring us to “first must remake ourselves.”³⁷ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young link remaking oneself with the season, with spring specifically:

Spring is a renewal of life that has been dormant over winter that revitalizes itself again. The pattern is set for human beings within modern society. Our job is to learn what that means and to realize that what we are doing right now is not working, at least not for the long term, not for us as human beings, or for nature.³⁸

Renewal is followed by *regeneration*, a “regrowth of a new way of life for modern society,” one that is “ancient,”³⁹ as Indigenous knowledges are. *Revitalization* represents “breath[ing] life into the world, so that all Life can continue,” breath encompassing “our words, thoughts, and actions ... necessary to restore and re-enable Life to continue.”⁴⁰ Now “that the ecological function of Creation is now being placed in jeopardy and that inappropriate human actions caused the damage,” Longboat, Kulnieks and Young explain, “human action now needs to restore the damage and to work to enable the life energy force to revitalize Life.”⁴¹

“*Remembrance* is the final and most important ‘R’ to remember,” they assert, as “throughout human history, we have chosen to forget what has happened, and when we do, we allow, encourage, and promote history to repeat itself again.”⁴² “By remembering that our actions have consequences,” we can intervene in what we do, remembering, above all, that “the ultimate purpose of life is to work for the continuance of Life.”⁴³ They conclude: “It is our responsibility to remember our Ancestors, the Future Generations, the Earth our Mother, and the Creator of Life.”⁴⁴

“The 12-R’s,” Longboat, Kulnieks and Young report, are derived from “Haudenosaunee principles embedded in Indigenous teachings which envelop human principal values and lessons about how to live.”⁴⁵ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young advocate for “integrating Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum,” in addition to studying chronological human history, as Indigenous teachings, they assert, “do not come from human minds, nor have they been created.”⁴⁶ “Knowledge evolves through a repository from spiritual places, trees, animals, birds, prophets, dreams, [and] visions,” they explain, and it is orality that “connects humans” to “Creation.”⁴⁷ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young conclude: “Our outline of the 12-R’s teaches us how to build respectful relationships with each other and the Earth,” and “educators need to learn these, teach them, and integrate them throughout the curriculum.”⁴⁸ That will mean “building healthy relationships between humans,” an undertaking to which “human spirituality is integral,” enabling “ecological restoration,” e.g. “repairing damage to Earth systems.”⁴⁹ Rather than encouraging competition, curriculum needs to emphasize “our commonality, that is, the Earth, respect for Earth processes and relationships,” enacting “love, compassion, joy, health, respect, spirituality, [and] integrity.”⁵⁰ The “oral tradition is important in the classroom,” imparting capacities for “communication processes throughout life,” asking educators to “provide

opportunities for students to develop their abilities to tell the stories that are historically referenced but to also explore their own stories.”⁵¹

COMMENTARY

As Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators of environmental education, Longboat, Kulnieks and Young reflect upon the 12-R’s that frame environmental knowledge and sustainability, as these are understood within Indigenous oral teachings. Inspired by these teachings, the 12-R’s testify to the interconnectedness of all living things, invoking Indigenous understandings of environmentalism upon which practices sustainability are predicated. Integral to these understandings are the 12 R’s.

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- Wang, Wanying. 2020. *Chinese Currenre, Subjective Reconstruction, and Attunement: When Calls My Heart*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 183.
 - ² Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 183.
 - ³ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 183.
 - ⁴ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 184-185.
 - ⁵ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 185.
 - ⁶ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 185.
 - ⁷ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 185. While few (any?) professional historians would assert that history is linear in any simplistic sense, surely some sense of linearity – chronology – is prerequisite to understanding the present, e.g. the violent removal of Indigenous children from their homes to residential schools was followed by efforts to reprogram culturally these children, precipitating ongoing injury, pain, and cultural devastation. There is linearity here.
 - ⁸ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 185.
 - ⁹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 185.
 - ¹⁰ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 185.
 - ¹¹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 185-186.
 - ¹² Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 186.
 - ¹³ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 186.
 - ¹⁴ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 187.
 - ¹⁵ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 187-188.
 - ¹⁶ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 187-188.
 - ¹⁷ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 188.
 - ¹⁸ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 188.
 - ¹⁹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 188.
 - ²⁰ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 188.
 - ²¹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 189-190.
 - ²² Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 189-190.
 - ²³ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 190.
 - ²⁴ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 190.
 - ²⁵ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 190.
 - ²⁶ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 190.
 - ²⁷ Quoted in Pinar 2019, 111, n. 23.
 - ²⁸ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 190-191.
 - ²⁹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 190-191.
 - ³⁰ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 191.
 - ³¹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 191. In this sense, resilience is related to resolve: Pinar 2015, 180.
 - ³² Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 191.
 - ³³ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 191.

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- ³⁴ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 191.
- ³⁵ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 191-192.
- ³⁶ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 192.
- ³⁷ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 192. Subjective reconstruction is a key concept in curriculum studies: see, for instance, Wang 2020.
- ³⁸ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 192.
- ³⁹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 192.
- ⁴⁰ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 193.
- ⁴¹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 193.
- ⁴² Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 193.
- ⁴³ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 193. The concern for consequences is also a hallmark of the American philosophy associated with William James, John Dewey, and others. For a recent and succinct – often autobiographical - articulation of American pragmatism, see Kaag 2014, 2020.
- ⁴⁴ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 193.
- ⁴⁵ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 193.
- ⁴⁶ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 193.
- ⁴⁷ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 193.
- ⁴⁸ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 194.
- ⁴⁹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 194.
- ⁵⁰ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 194.
- ⁵¹ Longboat, Kulnieks and Young 2020, 194.