



Indigenous Worldviews and Principles of Learning

Although First Peoples worldviews vary from community to community, the following elements have a place within the worldviews of many Indigenous peoples.

Respect for Traditional Knowledge: Respecting and preserving traditional knowledge is paramount in many Indigenous communities, even as modern information and technologies are embraced . Traditional knowledge is based on teachings and experiences passed on from generation to generation. It is rooted in the spiritual health, culture, and language of a community and can serve as an authority system. Children are taught that traditional knowledge is a way of life and that wisdom is using traditional knowledge in good ways.

The Role of Family and Community: In many past and modern Indigenous communities, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, Elders, and the greater community share the responsibility for educating children. Historically, Indigenous peoples valued collectivity and community over individualism. An individual is free to determine their own course in life, but every person is responsible for understanding their role in the community and how their actions affect other people and everything else in creation.

Significance of Elders: Elders are considered vital to the survival of Indigenous cultures. Elders play a vital role passing on traditional knowledge to students. Holistic teachings and counselling from Elders brings continuity to students' lives—they learn from Elders both in and out of school. Elders have been, are, and will continue to be the keepers of knowledge and they are always to be treated with great respect and honour.

Importance of Values: Values can differ across communities but the understanding of a set of values that everyone in a community can share is central to many Indigenous cultures. In the Circle of Life books, values are based on the Seven Grandfather Teachings, although these values are common across many Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. They are wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth.

The Oral Tradition: Among Indigenous peoples, the oral tradition is an important way to pass on cultural and traditional knowledge. Elders, especially, pass knowledge this way. Teachings and knowledge are passed on from one generation to the next through the spoken word which might include narratives, factual accounts, songs, dances, and laws. In addition to expressing spiritual and emotional truths, the oral tradition provides a record of literal facts and events.

Connection to the Land: Aboriginal cultures believe that humankind must live in accordance *with* the land, because the land has stories to tell. Humans are neither above nor below others in the circle of life, and many Indigenous worldviews assume that all life forms and the land are interconnected. The survival of each is dependent on the survival of all others, so a sacred responsibility to protect the land is paramount.

Significance of Balance: In many Indigenous cultures, spirituality, personal health, community health, and the health of the environment are understood to be interrelated. Maintaining a balance of these aspects is very important. In education, the balanced approach addresses the whole student, encompassing their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual capabilities in relation to all living things.

Respect for the Group Process: Group work and cooperation is valued in many Indigenous communities. Each person is responsible for helping the learning community to accomplish the task at hand in a good way. That is, by listening to one another respectfully and speaking without fear, anger, or impatience. In the classroom, there should be a recognition of the value of group process (for example, being especially sensitive to the time it takes for groups to come to consensus or to the teachable moment).

Interaction with Community: Community resources are integral to creating a learning environment that reinforces worldviews such as the importance of family, community members, Elders, and natural features. Engaging directly with the local community through field studies, interviews, and the involvement of guest speakers provides rich learning experiences for students.

Importance of Listening: Listening skills are paramount to Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. Listening is critical in traditional cultures as the first step in committing something to memory, for language learning, for learning the protocols to follow in a variety of situations, and in hearing important sounds in the natural environment. Each student should strive toward listening beyond personal thoughts and assumptions. Whenever possible, look for ways to incorporate thoughtful, meaningful listening activities in the classroom.

Experiential Learning: Learning and understanding through experiential means is very important in Indigenous education. Rather than relying on teacher-led discussions, experiential learning is inductive, student centred, and activity oriented; it emphasizes learning rather than product and is motivational for students.

Importance of Silence: In traditional Indigenous cultures, silence has a particular value and purpose (for example, to demonstrate respect or to discipline and strengthen the body and mind). Silence is recognized as an important part of thinking and learning processes because silence offers opportunities for personal reflection. It is recognized that there is value in finding stillness and quietness amidst our busyness and the need to know.

Mentorship: In Indigenous education, peer mentors often help other students. Peer mentors serve as role models and sources of information, and they can relate to the learning challenges other students face. Because they speak the same “language,” peer mentors can help create a more relaxed learning situation. Peer tutoring can benefit all students, both when they tutor and when they are the ones being tutored.