

Indigenous Worldview and Codes of Conduct

“All human knowledge is related to the creation of the world and the emergence of humans; therefore, human knowledge is based on human cosmology.”

- Gregory Cajete, Tewa educator

While every Indigenous community is unique, some similarities have been self-described when understanding Indigenous worldview. Leroy Little Bear's *Five Tenets of Native Science* below describes how the land dictates the ways in which all of creation interact. Clare Brant's *Codes of Conduct* below describes the ways in which people interact specifically with each other. For Indigenous Peoples, all of these interactions are interconnected and are learned orally from the very first stories, passed down by expert knowledge keepers since time immemorial.

Leroy Little Bear is a member of the Blood Tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy and a respected educator. Among his many teachings are the *Five Tenets of Native Science*. These give insight into the ways in which Indigenous Peoples experience the physical world.

The Five Tenets are as follows:

1. Space/land
2. Constant Motion/Flux
3. All is Animate and Imbued with Spirit
4. Relationship
5. Renewal

Land, or the ecological context is at the core of Indigenous worldview as land provides the specific context for the living principles of each community. To be in constant interaction with the land means developing a deep understanding of it. This knowledge is passed on through Creation stories. (Belanger 2014, 10).

The notion that **all things are in constant motion and in flux** comes from the need to know the rhythms of the earth in order to survive. This need forced people to be acutely aware of changes and make adjustments or adaptations when necessary. Cycles of seasons, migration patterns, and flash flooding are a few reminders that prove the creation is in a constant state of flux and that some changes can be unpredictable or dramatic.

Accepting change as inevitable and unpredictable creates a foundation of stability or expected preparation and flexibility. Trickster stories help to prepare for unexpected and dramatic changes as the goal then is to strive for balance in chaos. (Belanger 2014, 11-12). The third tenet that all is animate and imbued with spirit simply means that **“everything is alive...that creation and its various manifestations are imbued with spirit since all of creation is of one spirit.”** In this way, all things are connected and relatable. Since all things are relatives to all things, Indigenous Peoples see creation as one big family! To that end, it makes sense that we are responsible for the well being of the collective (Belanger 2014, 13).

Notions of the collective help us to understand the fourth tenet: **relationship**. A proactive approach to maintaining and forging good intimate interactions with creation that go beyond human and family reinforces Indigenous meanings of existence. In other words, it is important to sustain personal relationships with all beings as they are in connection with one another. Anticipating that what one will meet now will be met again on the other side of the web of existence teaches to be good and thoughtful (Belanger 2014, 1315).

Notions of **renewal** come from the understanding that **creation is continual and must be renewed so that balance is perpetually maintained**. With this in mind, it is important that Indigenous people tell and retell the creation story, sing and re-sing songs and observe or participate in ceremonies to actively take part in renewal. Restorative ceremonies include fasting and making offerings. From the ecological perspective, renewal is achieved through good stewardship of the earth. This is called “maintenance...in the harmonious operations of creation.” (Belanger: 2014, 15-16).

These tenets give the sense that “in creation one is never alone” (Belanger 2014, 15).

The work of late Mohawk Clare Brant informed the *Royal Commission on Indigenous Peoples* (1996) how these values are translated into Indigenous ethics, or codes of conduct. They are:

1. **Non interference** which respects that each person has the right to personal growth and independence without fear of coercion. Non interference helps to maintain harmony within communities as it is non confrontational, respects personal privacy, promotes self reliance, and teaches personal agency. Teasing and storytelling are common examples of teaching without interfering.
2. **Emotional Restraint** which promotes self control and aims to curb outbursts that may be disruptive to the group dynamic.
3. **Sharing** which ensures that no one party is substantially more powerful in the group in terms of material wealth.
1. Secondary to these codes are:
4. Emphasizing **doing things when the time is right**, rather than by the clock
5. **Avoiding public expressions of praise**
6. **Ordering social relations** according to complex rules
7. **Learning by doing**, or teaching children by **observing and participation** rather than direct instruction (Belanger: 2014, 17-19)

The values or beliefs fundamental to this worldview include the belief that there is a natural law that cannot be altered by human action and to which human beings must adapt; the obligation to maintain harmonious relationships with the natural world and those to whom you are related; personal responsibility to adhere to strict behavioural codes; and an ethic of sharing, which involves returning gifts to human and other-than human relations to **sustain the balance of the natural order**. - Clare C. Brant

Two themes you will hear about in the reconciliation process are:

Colonialism, which depended on the construction of the **idealism** of settlers, which ultimately denigrates the value of the pre-existing populations of diverse cultures, languages and nations. This act forms all Indigenous People into the “other” which dehumanizes them and deems them inferior. (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012).

And, **paternalism**, which is “the attitude or actions of a person, organization, etc., that protects people and gives them what they need but does not give them any responsibility or freedom of choice (agency).” (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

The question “Who decides what Indigenous People need?” is at the core of reconciliation, because so far, the Canadian Government has been in charge of the answer, an answer that Indigenous have been rightfully resisting.

Differences between Euro and Native concepts of **land** “ownership” and resource management inform these answers as well. The European concept of assimilation clashes with the Indigenous ethic of **non-interference**. A disconnect between literate vs. oral traditions challenges the validity of promises and agreements. In this way, paternalism has been at the heart of the colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada since contact. The Indian Residential School System is one example of the many ways in which a paternalistic worldview misguided people to attempt to fully absorb Indigenous into the Canadian body.

We invite you to identify yourself culturally and any other way you want to. Since we come from various cultures and backgrounds, how do we relate inter-culturally?

Paternalism and colonialism have infiltrated systems of relating and engaging between Eurocentric and Indigenous neighbours. As we learn about the effects of the Indian Residential School System, we can reflect on the origins of our own experiences and assumptions, and celebrate the unique ways our **stories** have come back to a new beginning. Reconciliation is a timely opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous to **renew relationships** and restore **balance**.

Frideres, James S. and Gadacz, René. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. 9th Ed. Toronto: Pearson, 2012.

Belanger, Yale D.. *Ways of Knowing: An Introduction to Native Studies in Canada*. 2nd Ed. Toronto: Nelson Education, 2014.

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