FROM A DEEPER PLACE

Indigenous Worlding as the Next Step in Holistic Education

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Holistic education, grounded in a fundamentally different worldview, reflects very different assumptions about education and school.

(Ron Miller, 1997, p. 5)

Indigenous education embodies these principles more deeply . . . When Indigenous people speak about our relationship to earth and the universe, it does not come from the head but from a much deeper place.

(Four Arrows & Miller, J. P., 2012, p. 3)

The Need to Go Deeper

My goal in this chapter is to introduce ways to deepen present implementation and future research relating to principles shared by holistic and Indigenous education that can help us find ways to regain balance in our world before it is too late. Such principles are ultimately about “holding a sense of the sacred, valuing the web of life, and educating the whole human being” (Four Arrows & Miller, 2012, p. 9). Miller’s words reflect his recognition of the connection between the Indigenous worldview and the field of holistic education.

The holistic ideal can be traced back to Indigenous cultures. In general, the Aboriginal or Indigenous person sees the earth and the universe as infused with meaning and purpose and not as cold and impersonal as in the modern worldview.

(Miller, 2009, p. 291)

Unfortunately, implementation of this holistic ideal has fallen short of what we need to achieve in education, with non-anthropocentric connections not matching those of the Indigenous worldview. In a review for this chapter, I’ve noted that most holistic education publications focus on body–mind–family–social community–art–pluralism–health without an authentic and consistent engagement with the other and often greater than human relations. When “web of life” concepts are mentioned, authors seem limited by hegemonic assumptions relating to financial and technological considerations for human benefit. Kopnina (2014) critiques this problem, writing, “Mainstream neoliberal discourse tends to maintain instrumental and essentially anthropocentric attitudes toward environment, subordinating ‘natural resources’ to economic and social objectives” (p. 6).
Kopnina’s scholarship generally falls into the field of critical pedagogy. The problem with it is that it tends to address the problem of anthropocentrism with more of it, focusing on attacking oppression and fostering democratic orientations as opposed to an increased focus on the natural world *per se* for solutions. Such critical pedagogy is, in some ways, a cousin to holistic education, but misses the spiritual interconnectedness dimension (Jacobs, 1997). O’Sullivan (2005) complains about this when he writes, “My major criticism of critical pedagogy is the pre- eminent emphasis on inter-human problems frequently to the detriment of the relations of humans to the wider biotic community and the natural world” (p. 411). Gustauo, Stuchul, and Prakash (2005) are equally explicit about this problem when they say that critical pedagogy oriented interventions into Indigenous cultures often lack a deep understanding of their nature-based, holistic worldview.

We might forgive the field of critical pedagogy for this omission, but not holistic education. It is understandable perhaps that, to the degree that most holistic educators operate from a non-Indigenous worldview, they will fall into anthropocentrism. In fact, this may be why there are so few holistic education programs even being implemented in the world. I could not find statistics to verify this assumption but I did call Jerry Mintz, long time director of the Alternative Education Resource Organization, to find out. I recently asked him how many alternative schools actually do holistic education. After a long description of statistics, he concluded: “I might say that maybe 5–10% could be called holistic.” An extensive study on interdisciplinary research in higher education (Van Noorden, 2015) shows a similar lack of integrated or holistic perspective when he writes that, worldwide, 9–13% of all the scholarly publications reviewed showed any reference to a journal outside of the particular field of study targeted. Interdisciplinary curricula is an aspect of holistic education because it encourages students to make connections between disciplines.

Thus I contend to move holistic education to its intended “deeper” orientation, we must return to our original non-anthropocentric worldview and begin to think and speak accordingly in the classroom. Mika (2017) refers to such languaging as “worlding” the Indigenous. Mika, a senior lecturer at the University of Waikato and author of a new book on Indigenous metaphysics and “worlding”, also refers to the unfulfilled Indigenous realization of holistic education rhetoric.

However, a second problem is the fact that Indigenous worldedness has not comprised much of the corpus of holistic literature. The authors of holistic education are still too human-derived and, alongside that, advocate too strongly that a thing is individually *there*. In that, it reflects the metaphysics of presence.

(p. 27)

Mika is supportive of holistic education as a twenty-first century paradigm and he pushes it further toward the deeper goals of the Millers as expressed in the opening quotes using Indigenous Nature-centered perspectives. Students of Mika refer to such perspectives when they write in the journal, *International Education Studies*, “Holistic education seeks to connect the part with the whole and is founded upon a deep reverence for life and for the unknown (and never fully knowable) source of life” (Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabad, & Liaghatdar (2012, p. 185).

Mika (2017) goes deeper with his own description:

Broadly I mean by *worlding* and its variations *worlded* and *worldedness* the following: one thing is never alone, and all things actively construct and compose it. As one thing presents itself to me others within it may appear and hide, but even if I cannot perceive them (which I cannot) we can be assured that they are there. An object that I perceive is therefore fundamentally unknowable. I can speculate on it and give it a name, but all I can be certain of is that it is mysterious precisely because it is “worlded.” I can experience the thing in its full force without actually sensing that influence, but talk of knowledge is only minimally useful when we are
considering it. I am no more familiar with any one thing than if I had never encountered it. Indeed, I experience an aspect of the worlded thing and its mystery when I meet the limits of my ability to say much about it, or when I realize that I cannot fully know it. Perception is given rise by the formation of the self with the full force of all things in the world. Moreover, I can talk about the thing, or more precisely, I am discussing it as if I am a part of it.

(pp. 6–7)

Such worlding requires that we incorporate a worldview reflection into our holistic education classrooms. We must investigate the wisdom of our dominant worldview and its human-superiority assumptions to determine where and how it may impede the optimal utilization of holistic education. This is something that Greg Cajete, John Lee, and I did in looking at how the dominant worldview lens guides neuroscientific conclusions. We discovered that the dominant worldview deters even neuroscientists from realizing the truths of Indigenous wisdom via their “observations” and interpretations of laboratory experiments (Four Arrows, Cajete, & Jonmin, 2010). Looking at fundamental Indigenous worldview beliefs we found that much of Western science comes to faulty conclusions by looking at experiments through the Western lens. Such is the power of a worldview and why this worldview reflection is crucial for our holistic understanding of how we have managed to be on the verge of a mass extinction.

The English word, “worldview,” comes from the German word, “Weltanschauung” that means “to see the world.” It is not the best word to use when describing an Indigenous worldview that does not rely upon an understanding of the world by only what it can see. This does not align well with Indigenous ways of comprehending reality but it may be the best word available. I use it as per de Witt’s (2013) definition:

The concept of worldview may appear to be similar or even interchangeable with concepts such as ideology, paradigm, religion, and discourse, and they indeed possess some degree of referential overlap. However, worldviews can nonetheless be clearly distinguished from these concepts.

(p. 19)

Robert Redfield, the first social anthropologist and a specialist in worldview studies at the University of Chicago in the 1950s, also believed that worldview describes the totality of ideas that people within a culture share about self, human society, natural and spiritual worlds (Redfield, 1953). He considered that since the Asian worldview had been mostly taken over by the Western one, that there remain only two worldviews for us to study—the primal or Indigenous one and the dominant one that continues to overshadow and destroy the original one.

With these ideas about worldview in mind, I believe going deeper with holistic education starts with seeking to find complementarity and understanding contradictions between the two worldviews. Then, with new awareness, educators must begin worlding the Indigenous perspective. We do this by actually participating in the world emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually, as if we are mysteriously inseparable from it and obligated to take action according to our highest potential for complementarity. It is a way of being in the world where distinctions between self and other disappear. I think of this as living fearlessly and, in so doing, embracing the full force of all things. By living the Indigenous worldview again, we cannot help but teach holistically.

So, our next step is to begin holistic education with worldview reflection, starting with ourselves. Before introducing how to begin Indigenous worlding, I offer two examples of what it is like to experience “the full force of all things,” a simple one anyone can do, followed by a more difficult one I was forced into experiencing. The first requires only access to a plant; the second a near death experience.

Over the years I have started many conference workshops by asking the participants to step outside and touch a tree or plant and then to return to the conference room. I ask them to think about
what they did, then ask them to go back outside and do it again, but this time I instruct them to ask permission of the plant or tree and wait for a reply before touching it. They often depart echoing skeptical, laughing attitudes but always return, no matter their age or culture, in silent awe. The stories they share about the experience seldom fail to bring tears to the story-teller or to others. One 14-year old Mexican child who was very skeptical about the exercise came back with a very different attitude for example. He told the class that a small palm tree wept about having lost relatives in a recent hurricane! He said it reluctantly and even embarrassingly at first, but then he became quite emotional in his efforts to describe something he could not quite fathom. There were few dry eyes around me and I was also moved by both his realization of another being in the tree and his understanding that he had missed such relationships until now. I conclude by asking them to imagine living under a worldview where this kind of relationship was continual.

The above experiment we can easily do but sometimes we can be forced into Indigenous worlding. This happened to me while kayaking the uncharted Rio Urique River in Mexico’s Copper Canyon, I was sucked into a rock tunnel into which the entire river disappeared. As I submerged I felt an indescribable sense of peaceful oneness with the world. I felt a knowing that defies knowledge and a mysteriousing that was anything but mysterious. From that point on every rock, every water source and tree, every creature seemed to be an intimate relation or a teacher emerging at just the right time. Synchronicities and non-human teachings began popping up everywhere.

One of the more remarkable outcomes was my work with wild horses. Before the kayaking accident I was involved with 100-mile endurance racing and a sport called “Ride and Tie” that was a race whereby teams consisted of two people and a horse. Most of the mounts are Arabians who are known for their endurance prowess, but I wanted a mustang in honor of my Indigenous traditions. I had adopted one and brought it home just prior to my trip. I could not even approach it and when I used ropes for training, I lost every time. Frustrated with my failures, I left on the kayak trip to take on what I thought would be a more familiar adventure. However, when I came back a miraculous new rapport seemed to exist between the horse and me. The rest is history and I became well known as a horse-trainer, working for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to help people who had adopted mustangs but could not handle them or had young animals whose heads had grown into halters that no one could loosen until I arrived. Working with wild horses has given me many opportunities for Indigenous worlding as well. They are sophisticated biofeedback entities that let you know when you are manifesting the kinds of virtues required for survival in the world, such as generosity, courage, patience, trustfulness, etc. The reader can get a good sense of this by watching a seven-minute TV segment about my working with a wild BLM mustang on Youtube.

Stop for a moment and consider times in your own life, dramatic or otherwise, where you have had moments where ego was so melded into the “other thing” that you felt inseparably a part of it. If you did not remember such a time, start paying attention to your inherent relatedness to the life intelligence in all things and you will soon start to realize many such experiences. It will help to first let go of some dominant worldview assumptions and replace them with our original instructions, using what I refer to as the CAT-FAWN metacognitive worldview reflection tool.

The CAT-FAWN Connection

After the accident on the Rio Urique, I had a dream of two animals I came upon on my way out of the canyon, a mountain lion and a young deer. They turned into the letters, C-A-T and F-A-W-N. The words turned into a mnemonic for a metacognitive worldview reflection strategy for moving people toward a re-embracing of our Indigenous assumptions about how to best live.
with a truly holistic mindset. Rather than describe it myself, I defer to the excellent condensed description recently published by R. Michael Fisher (2017).

According to Four Arrows, CAT-FAWN is a metaphor, “a new theory of mind” and meta-cognitive mnemonic that tells of a predator (CAT) and its potential prey (FAWN) operating with the joint (dialectic) bonding of a hyphenated form; this indicates a basic integration of opposites in a complementarity—the latter, being a foundational principle of the Indigenous worldview (and harmony) as he has written about. The CAT portion stands literally for Concentration Activated Transformation. This refers to a heightened state of consciousness/awareness, which can be induced by many stimuli (situations), for e.g., meditation, dreaming, and/or a shock, etc.).

The problem, Four Arrows notes, is when we enter a CAT state without noticing or knowing we are so, and what is causing it. Thus, if largely unconscious to CAT we are highly susceptible to “inputs” from the environment that may condition us, that is hypnotize us and implant “messages” that are harmful to us. These trance-based learned messages, even if unconscious and subliminal, are deeply memorized and held in the nervous system, so goes the theory of hypnosis.

Let’s move on to the other half of the “formula”—FAWN. Literally, F = Fear, A = Authority, W = Word(s) (and music) and N = Nature. This stands for what Indigenous Peoples of the ‘old ways’ always knew were “four major forces” that shape our lives, for good or ill (depending on our awareness and management of them). Fear is taken as very primal in both inducing CAT and joining with CAT (e.g., CAT-Fear) as a powerful two-some able to bring about “courage” as a virtue (for e.g.) or to bring about “panic” and “irrationality” as a vice (for e.g.). Great character/values are built on the former, and shabby destructive values built on the latter. To reach our highest human potential(s) one has to learn to manage CAT-Fear well—without doing so, this can undermine all the good ways of the other three major forces. Authority is very powerful because it can use Words (for e.g.) to hypnotize. Humans, as a social species, are particularly hard-wired through evolution to “follow” authority (dominant) individuals, groups, organizations, nations, ideologies. So, one has to be very aware when in CAT of their relationships going on via CAT-Authority and CAT-Word.

The last of the major forces of the de-hypnotizing technology is most foundational to the entire CAT-FAWN complex, and I prefer to write this formula (theory) as CAT-FAW/N. Which is saying that the common denominator and most influential factor is N = Nature [11]. It is the most benign of the forces. I won’t go into all those reasons but many of us know how powerful it can be to connect with Nature when we are “off-center” or “hurting” and or “terrified” by the human world. The Natural world, in general, is our "Mother" (Source) for earthlings. Today some groups of modern people know this, as well as the Indigenous Peoples of this planet that have lived in relative harmony with Nature for 99% of human evolution, which is the basic premise of Four Arrows’ theory and work overall.

**How to Use CAT-FAWN to Access Indigenous Worlding**

Because CAT-FAWN uses five concepts for which Indigenous and dominant worldviews have significant contrast, it is the perfect tool for bringing Indigenous worlding into holistic education. These four concepts include:

*Trance-based learning.* Our original cultures and those still holding on to the old ways know that deep knowing and optimal action in the world requires alternative consciousness work. Most Olympic athletes today use TBL and use sports hypnosis to maximize their potential;
however, the rest of the population seldom uses self-hypnosis as do traditional Indigenous cultures. I realize the word “hypnosis” comes with lots of baggage and misunderstanding results. I use the concept here to describe what happens when we move from a normal beta brain-wave frequency into a lower one, like alpha or theta, and while in this altered state one focuses one’s imaginative powers on a particular image of how one is being in the world, the image creates automatic transformations that allow or even cause a potentiation not otherwise likely to happen. I use “trance-based learning” or “concentration-activated transformation” and “hypnosis” as similar terms that describe this process.

**Fear.** In most dominant worldview cultures, fear itself is feared. We don’t like it. We avoid it. Under the Indigenous worldview, fear is an opportunity to practice a virtue like courage, patience, humility, generosity or honesty.

**Authority.** The highest expression of authority under the Indigenous worldview is honest reflection on lived experience with the understanding that everything is related. Hierarchy did not exist as it is understood under the dominant worldview. During times of fear especially, people in the dominant cultures often become hyper-suggestible to the communication of a perceived trusted authority figure. I learned this from wild horses, so this may be true of all creatures as a survival mechanism. However, history shows us that when too much credibility is given to authority figures, especially in stressful situations, we can become hypnotized inappropriately. In the classroom, a child in this spontaneous hypnosis and with the hierarchy position of a teacher who says, “You are never going to amount to anything!”, this child may have a long-term loss of self-esteem for many years.

**Words.** There was a time before deception, before the emergence of the dominant worldview around 9,000 years ago (Four Arrows, 2016). Certainly we can see that words are used far too often for deception today. Under the dominant worldview, deception is understood as a survival strategy whereas under the Indigenous worldview it is just the opposite (Four Arrows, Cajete, & Jommin, 2010).

I conclude this piece with a brief overview of how to use CAT-FAWN to help change how we might hold on to the dominant worldview assumptions about these aforementioned concepts and move into ways that honor our original instructions. By making this transformation, I propose that we will then be able to go deeper into the implementation of holistic teaching and learning for the sake of future generations.

**CAT.** Concentration-activated transformation conveys the idea that most of our unconscious beliefs and actions stem from a previous hypnosis and that to change we must identify underlying assumptions and use trance-based learning to reverse or modify beliefs. Assume when you are out of balance, when anger lasts for more than a few minutes, when you behave or react in a way that seems to bring on stress, when you feel you are avoiding movements in behalf of your highest potential, when a relationship is not working, or when you feel separate from all our relations, etc., that there are unconscious belief systems operating, many, if not most, from early childhood “lessons” resulting from spontaneous hypnosis that is something that causes one to go into a different brain-wave frequency, thus increasing hypersuggestibility to words, whether self-uttered or from a perceived external authority figure. Using the four major forces in FAWN, learn if the dominant worldview perspective (fearing fear; overly depending on external authority; using words dishonestly; seeing nature as something separate) has maintained the hypnosis and if the Indigenous worldview can transform it by asking yourself the following questions relating to FAWN. Do this for yourself and guide students in the same way with the goal of implementing holistic perspectives.
FAWN

Fear. Ask what possible fear relates to the event, action, attitude or behavior. Note that the dominant worldview perspective is to avoid, dismiss or deny it. Move to the Indigenous perspective that sees Fear as a catalyst for practicing a virtue (courage, generosity, honesty, patience, fortitude, humility). Then, use a self-hypnosis technique (Four Arrows, 2016) to imagine yourself doing whatever makes sense to practice a virtue until by taking appropriate action via one or more of them you become fearless in that you are operating by fully trusting the universe and “worlding” a sense of complementarity into the situation.

Authority. Closely related to fear is the authority for it. Get in touch with the position, beliefs, feelings you have about the issue at hand. Ask yourself on whose authority did this position originate? As with the fear question, consider possibilities that some alternative state of consciousness might have been connected with it, though this is not necessary to know and you can assume probability. Now do the self-hypnosis and erase all forms of external authority from the picture, dismissing previous ones entirely and basing your new thoughts on only an honest reflection on your lived experience in light of a complementary attitude.

Words. Get in touch with all the words you use, especially self-talk, to describe the situation and analyze them for how accurate and truthful they really are. Consider what would happen if you understood them literally, as is done when in hypnosis. During hypnotic states of awareness we tend to image words relatively literally. A golfer imaging “I won’t hit the ball in the sand trap” will likely hit it right into the sand trap because “sand trap” is more likely to create the image in this sentence. A proper hypnotic suggestion would be “I am hitting the ball into the fairway.” A person who looks in the mirror and says “I am fat” would have to conclude that even if obese this would be an inaccurate use of words as opposed to “I am a beautiful person with temporarily too much adipose tissue around my belly.” The English language is noun based and susceptible to inaccurate categorizing. Find the best ways to honestly phrase the situation and use the self-hypnosis to process it. Then go the next step and realize that even the new words are insufficient to describe the unknown parts of the situation, including the potential complementarity between opposing energies and meditate on the beauty of the not needing to know.

Nature. Finally, find some other aspect of other-than-human or greater-than-human Nature. It could be a pet, an insect, a plant, a park, a river or a mountain, etc. Present the issue and consider metaphors that relate it to the other. Feel free to use the computer or ask others and come back to the other form of Nature with the new “information” and continue with the intuitive learning. Now allow yourself to continue to watch for other aspects of Nature as keys to a new realization as relates to the issue. Use ceremony with plants like pine, cedar, sage or sweetgrass to evoke images of other than, or greater than, human life forms. Only ceremony can truly continue to help you embrace the unknown. Balance it with discourse, knowing that discourse tends to remove the mysterious. All answers reside somewhere in what remains of the natural landscape in which you dwell. Nature is and always will be the ultimate teacher if we heed it accordingly.

Conclusion

I realize I have offered much new material in more or less abbreviated ways and hope it offers a sufficient introduction for readers. Perhaps this material will at least enhance awareness about how “worldview” has influenced the state of affairs in the world today and why it may be the missing ingredient for fulfilling holistic education. By better employing an “Indigenous worldview”, we bring into play our original instructions that guided us for most of our time on Earth. We have both
historical and present models for achieving relatively peaceful, joyful, and sustainable communities, a model that has for too long been ignored, dismissed, romanticized or ridiculed. This shift from an Indigenous worldview to what has become our dominant worldview may be the foundation for violence against all forms of diversity, that which is at the heart of what we call “holistic education”; it relates to the human mind, body, and spirit and how each of these is interdependent with the complex interactions of the seen and unseen world around us. Until we learn to understand, respect, and reclaim the worldview that operated for most of human history, whether comparing levels of warfare or numbers of fish in the ocean, social/ecological injustices and environmental degradation will continue unabated.

There will be those who resist the notion of replacing or finding complementarity with aspects of our Western or dominant worldview of course and I offer the words of two great non-Indian thinkers to help overcome such resistance to do worldview reflection or practice doing it with the transformational CAT-FAWN tool. Shephard (1992) contends that:

[T]he legacy of History with respect to primitive peoples is threefold: (1) primitive life is devoid of admirable qualities (2) our circumstances render them inappropriate even if admirable, and (3) the matter is moot as “You cannot go back.” This phrase shelters a number of corollaries. Most of these are physical rationalizations—too many people in the world, too much commitment to technology or its social and economic system, ethical and moral ideas that make up civilized sensibilities, and the unwillingness of people to surrender to a less interesting, cruder, or more toilsome life, from which time and progress delivered us.

(p. 44).

David Abram’s words in Becoming Animal offer a similar perspective:

There are many intellectuals today who feel that any respectful reference to indigenous beliefs smacks of romanticism and a kind of backward-looking nostalgia. Oddly, these same persons often have no problem “looking backward” toward ancient Rome or ancient Greece for philosophical insight and guidance in the present day. What upsets these self-styled “defenders of civilization” is the implication that civilization might have something to learn from cultures that operate according to an entirely different set of assumptions, cultures that stand outside of historical time and the thrust of progress.

(2010, p. 267)

In no way do I intend to “romanticize” the Indigenous with these quotes. All humans are subject to similar failures and susceptible to vices and loss of virtue. Moreover, many Indigenous People themselves, owing to years of genocide and culturecide, have lost touch with the traditional wisdom. This said, however, there are still many Indigenous Peoples who have resisted colonization of their hearts, minds, and bodies and, if we can support them, stop participating in their oppression, and attempt to learn from them, we can more readily recover our own ancient DNA in ways that can help us apply such wisdom in our own back yards before it is too late.

Notes

1 See “Four Arrows Wild Horse Hypnotist” at www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxzAm08731c
References

Four Arrows (2016). *Point of departure: Returning to our more authentic worldview for education and survival*. New York: Information Age.