

BOOK REVIEW

Shannon Leddy and Lorrie Miller *Teaching Where You Are: Weaving Indigenous and Slow Principles and Pedagogies* University of Toronto Press, 2024, 152 pages (paperback) ISBN: 978-1-4875-5401-9 (pbk)

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This beautiful book, *Teaching Where You Are: Weaving Indigenous and Slow Principles and Pedagogies* (2024) by Canadian professors Shannon Leddy and Lorrie Miller, conveys Indigenous ways of thinking and an Indigenous approach to education, especially transformative teaching and learning. For them, “the concept of lifelong learning is embedded in Indigenous thought” (p. xviii), which deeply challenges conventional conceptualizations of our field.

After centuries of attempted genocide and the global silencing of Indigenous thinking and ways of being, this book stands as an example of the revitalization of Indigenous onto-epistemologies. In so doing, the authors confront taken-for-granted aspects of schooling, higher, and adult education that remain in the industrial era, including prepackaged and universalized curriculum, education for economic production, individual achievement, fast and efficient pedagogies, siloed specializations, clock time, amoral and ahistorical approaches, and pressure cooker educational institutions. Their turn to Traditional wisdom, Traditional knowledge holders and Indigenous philosophies explains how dominant approaches in education move against natural ways of learning and much older ways of teaching.

Using the principles of slow learning and the Medicine Wheel symbolic system as complementary approaches, they illustrate a gentle approach

to “decolonizing curriculum and indigenizing pedagogy” (p. xxi). In seeking to “serve others, to be of some use” (p. xxii) this approach can address our existential crises of a climate crisis, global pandemic, democratic decline, and racial conflict. They do this by encouraging a spiritual and cultural transformation using processes of relationality, reciprocity, slowness, creativity, noninterference, timelessness, process, and collectivity, explored throughout.

This book is comprised of eight chapters, with the first three chapters laying out the key principles. The first chapter is a making of space, an open invitation that welcomes all. In moving beyond the tyranny of the clock back toward natural rhythms of seasonal and cyclical time and in seamlessly integrating what have been distinct subjects, they illustrate how education can be knit back into a “comprehensive view of life” (p. 8). They use the Lil’wat Principles of Learning, particularly that of “leaning into our discomfort” (p. 6), including the dissonance and uncertainty when considering a new way of approaching education. Unlearning the old ways of education *is* the work of decolonization.

Slow ways that rely on storytelling, mapmaking, poetry, visual art and traditional craft—especially weaving which they use as their dominant craft and metaphor—help “embody different notions of time” (p. 8) and a way of being that loosens frenetic-ness and time famine. They advocate following the felt energy in an educational encounter, especially group attunement, emergence of mutual assistance, and common group purpose (p. 9). Another key principle, which informs their title of “teaching where you are,” is connecting to the local place you live. Consciousness to, and knowledge about, one’s lived place is vital for our human future. These are examples highlighting that it is primarily about the *process* of how learning is engaged. Relations and listening are key...in the relationship with the student, among students, to process, and to content (p. 51). Unhurried time to dive deep into inquiry leads to much richer learning. Always, they say, “less is more” (p. 61).

Decolonizing learning is also about probing a nation’s dominant historical narratives, including the absence of Indigenous voices in their own land, the origins of and causes for becoming settler-people, down to the daily microaggressions, racisms, and misinformation that continually shape relations. They offer powerful themes and processes to aid educators in this decolonial literacy. As weavers, they illustrate how handwork can aid this deep learning.

In Chapters 4 to 7, they use the Medicine Wheel to explicate learning in relation to human development. The East, as a place of beginnings, is the place of spiritual learning, in other words the spirit in all things including individual purpose, as the origins of respect.

The South is the place of emotional and relevant learning, including all the important dispositions of our highest selves—generosity, wisdom, humility, courage, trust, love, and respect. They illustrate a circle pedagogy or healing circle that can address trauma, as part of a process pedagogy. Understanding the typical emotional responses to decolonizing learning is explained, part of early growth and learning discernment.

The West, as the place of maturation, is the place of physical learning and reciprocity. Learning about the relation between the unseen and the physical, manifested world through processes such as meditation, is discussed. Relationality is examined in more depth including our relations in a consumer society, our relation to the Land as the body that sustains us, and our ways of being a social collectivity, including the importance of giving back or reciprocity.

The North is about intellectual learning and responsibility where balance in all things is found, part of the wisdom of the elders. Teaching in a *good way* is about helping each person find their special gift and unique contribution to the community. When you have completed this movement around the wheel, you will have created a warm and tightly woven blanket of meaning from different frames of reference, although the movement is continual.

The final chapter, Chapter Eight, is entitled *Pimoteh* or Walking, indicating that it takes time, effort, mistake-making, courage and persistence, to walk this decolonizing path. Despite the challenges, it is key to our human future.

In sum, this gentle and generous book provides educators, located in diverse locations and places, guidance for exploring long-silenced Indigenous philosophies. They have woven these together with principles for slow teaching and learning, as part of facing fully the colonial history that has distorted so many of our relationships with each other and the Earth.

They assert, “we are *all* colonized peoples” (p. 7). Thus, this book is useful and applicable to all teacher educators working in settler and

settler-origin societies as part of their decolonization journey. It is also useful with preservice and inservice educators searching for alternative ways in which to regard education and our role as educators. As public education systems become stretched and even frayed with ever-increasing diversity and demands, this book offers some important alternatives that can lead to more human, transformative, and respectful engagements of lifelong learning. It returns us to some ancient wisdom about the purpose of the life journey and processes for transforming our societies toward healthy, wise, and regenerative futures.