

# Pausing for Reflection

**Learning without reflection is a waste. Reflection without learning is dangerous.**

CONFUCIUS

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## THE PROJECT

# Pausing for Reflection

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Because of the interdisciplinary nature of our cohort, each participant worked with a unique set of goals, strategies, and content concerns in their classroom projects, making it nearly impossible to roll up those results into a meaningful whole. Fortunately we were able to use this project as a laboratory for applying the classroom-based research techniques known as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL). A different group of faculty members had spent the previous year familiarizing themselves with this rigorous model for conducting classroom-based applied pedagogical research. In a series of workshops, they shared the basic principles and practices with the cohort and helped them design and document projects during the year. They published their efforts under the project title of Making Learning Visible, now UAA's broader SOTL initiative.

Our participants were nearly unanimous in appreciating how much the structured and disciplined SOTL approach improved their ability to learn from each other. Although each did his or her own thing, they all approached their classroom-based research in a similar fashion, posing similar questions, gathering similar “artifacts,” and sharing the results with their colleagues in a structured and professional manner. An instructional designer helped them create posters and web pages describing their projects. At the end of the year, we celebrated those achievements in a poster session following the annual faculty development awards ceremony, also held in our familiar library conference room.

And then it was over, again. Or was it?

We could practically hear the echoes of that long-ago evaluator saying to us, “OK. Off the record. What do you think you really accomplished here?”

We had sixteen faculty members. One intensive. A year's worth of in-class experimentation, a dozen or so online portfolios, and now a book to share with colleagues, allies, and friends. It took a tremendous amount of work to get us to this place. Was it worth it?

We'd say absolutely. We achieved much of what we hoped for and a few things else besides. Among them:

- **A shift in the consciousness** of some of our most dedicated long-term faculty in such a way that future dialogues about Alaska Native issues, students, and perspectives can be conducted with greater respect, understanding, and mutuality.
- **The development of a small but sturdy community of allies** who understand more clearly what is at stake with indigenous issues and higher education; who can support each other as they wrestle with Native issues on their campuses and in their classrooms; and who may invite and inspire other colleagues to join them on this path.

- **A positive influence on the learning climates** for students, especially those from cultures outside the mainstream. Participants changed their perspectives in ways that will impact their teaching on students from Alaska Native and other collectivist cultures, leading to a healthier learning climate and a more balanced exchange of ideas.
- **Fresh inspiration**, fresh approaches to teaching, and a chance for faculty members to connect with each other around best practices.
- **Increased awareness** of issues between indigenous communities and higher educational institutions and of the need for productive dialogues on those issues.
- **Strengthened ties** between our universities and local indigenous communities.
- **The ability to reach** other educators and to add our voices in support of transforming higher education by recognizing the validity, legitimacy, efficacy, and power of indigenous ways of teaching and learning.
- **Greater respect** for our responsibilities and opportunities as educators to have a positive impact on the well-being of the earth.

## Related Efforts

This project was one very important step in a much longer journey. It took place within a much broader context of related efforts. Each step builds on those that came before. Along the way we have been strengthened and supported by others walking similar paths.

In recent years UAA has launched a number of initiatives and programs to support Alaska Native students and call attention to Alaska Native concerns.

**Books of the Year.** Our 2008-2009 Books of the Year program featured three books that would introduce issues critical to Alaska's Native peoples, correct historical inaccuracies, and authentically represent Alaska Native voices so classroom discussions could be conducted in an informed and respectful way.

- *Growing up Native in Alaska* (edited by A.J. McLanahan) interviews twenty-seven young Alaska Native leaders about their lives, their futures, and the challenges of walking in two worlds.
- *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being* (Harold Napoleon) describes the collective trauma and cultural losses suffered by Alaska's Native peoples following the epidemics resulting from contact with non-Native cultures from the 1740's through the early 1900's.
- *Alaska Native Cultures and Issues: Response to Frequently Asked Questions* (edited by Libby Roderick) provides much needed background information about Alaska Native cultures and issues.

**Forums for Alaska Native Youth.** In 2009-2010, we held a series of forums entitled “Warriors for a New Era” that gave Alaska Native students a chance to learn about the politics of subsistence harvesting, the dynamics of internalized oppression, and other critical issues. We also held a mock conference on subsistence issues, in which students researched and represented the views of important Alaska Native organizations and used traditional indigenous discourse and deliberation methods to engage with one another.

**Faculty Development Initiatives.** We added an overview of Alaska’s Native cultures, students, and issues to our New Faculty Orientations so our newest faculty can teach effectively and ethically in Alaska. Jeane Breinig, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, led a faculty learning community on Alaska Native Students and Issues that showcased effective teaching strategies and programs. Internal funding sponsored five faculty members to attend the Evergreen State College Summer Institute on Writing and Teaching Native cases, part of a larger effort to develop culturally relevant curriculum on key issues in Indian Country. The College of Business and Public Policy then sponsored an Institute in Alaska, attended by roughly fifty faculty members.

**Cultural Immersion Partnership.** A partnership with the Alaska Humanities Forum’s Take Wing Alaska project supports Alaska Native high school students from rural communities to make a successful transition to an urban university and eventually return home to work in their communities. The program includes a cultural immersion experience, funding faculty members to attend a week-long summer culture camp in one of the rural Alaska Native villages.

## **Fortunate Factors**

None of these things just happened; they required careful strategizing, material and moral support from key individuals and administrative units, and the persistence to follow through in the face of personal and institutional constraints. We have been extremely fortunate on a number of fronts. We’ve had the support of several key administrators whose own backgrounds included experience with Alaska’s Native cultures, academically and beyond. A few are that rare breed of leaders who support creative endeavors that don’t fit neatly into academic boxes. Our Vice Provost and our former Director of the Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence both championed this work that in other hands might have been seen as too narrowly focused or even irrelevant. Subsequent Directors have continued to support it, recognizing its importance to education in our state.

We couldn’t have done it without the Ford Foundation which, by renewing our Difficult Dialogues grant, gave us a specific mandate to deepen the work on indigenous issues in higher education, lent credibility and material support to the effort, and strengthened our existing team.

Finally, we live in a state in which indigenous cultures have a very strong presence. Our institutional mission statements openly acknowledge our responsibility to serve the many

peoples of Alaska, and we had several talented individuals with pre-existing relationships and understandings of Alaska's complex Native cultures and communities eager to lead the work on the ground.

“These fortunate factors allowed us to experience a degree of success more quickly than might be possible in other settings,” says Libby. “Nevertheless, we hope our ideas and experiences might prove helpful to individuals or groups working at other institutions. The need for indigenous wisdom is greater than ever these days, as higher education struggles to stay relevant in a rapidly changing world, as the marketplace demands graduates who can work productively with people from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, and as the world grapples with daunting environmental, social, and economic challenges. We hope and believe that this project moved us a step closer to fulfilling that need.”

**“Honoring indigenous pedagogies and perspectives in mainstream universities does not necessarily mean that one set of values must replace the other. If we truly wish to serve the highest good of our students, we need educational partnerships that offer them the best of both worlds. Because the imbalance has been so great for so long and because indigenous perspectives have been systematically misunderstood, marginalized, and distorted by colonialism, it will take a considerable conscious effort to move them to the forefront, to a place of equity. Yet this can—and as many of us would argue must—be done.”**

Libby Roderick



**Dr. Diane Hirshberg** is Associate Professor of Education Policy at UAA's Institute of Social and Economic Research and director of the UAA Center for Alaska Education Policy Research. She was born in Massachusetts and raised and educated in Massachusetts, California, and New York. Her degrees include a Master of Public Administration from Columbia University and a Ph.D. in Education from UCLA. She has conducted Alaska-based research on school improvement, education policy, indigenous

education, and how policymakers' views of race are related to the decisions they make concerning Alaska Native education. Diane was one of the Faculty Fellows who participated in this project.

## Good Work

### Diane Hirshberg

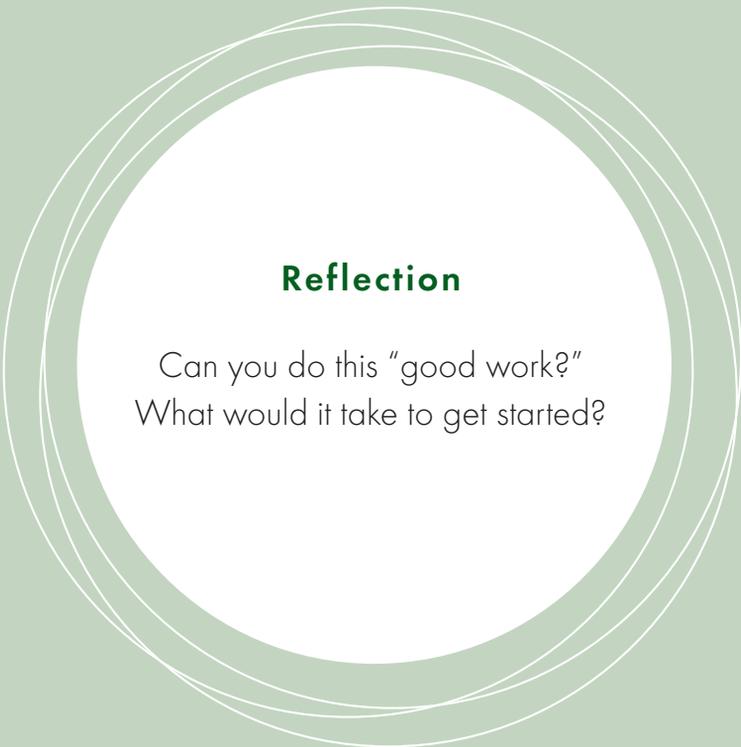
The intensive was really valuable for me. I have studied Alaska Native education issues and spent time in indigenous communities, but I had never really taken the time to reflect on my own classroom and research practices as they relate to these issues. I have taught in the field of education, and I have looked at issues of pedagogy. I've tried to give my students multiple ways of engaging with materials. But this experience called for a completely different depth and a greater sensibility, especially for thinking about things like the environment and personal relationships. It goes a long way beyond engaging in dyads.

It is a luxury to spend time with colleagues working on practice. And yet it should be one of the things that we do regularly. We know that collaborative practice is key to changing and improving education, and we talk regularly about its importance at the K-12 level. But we don't practice it very often in higher education. We don't have other people look at our practice, and we don't spend the time collaboratively developing it. This experience brought all of that together for me: both what I know to be best practices from my work in education and then this very profound sense of connection with the people upon whose lands we do our teaching and learning.

None of us have enough time. And absolutely this is difficult work. But on the other hand, if we don't take the time to do it, our practice will never improve. We know on this campus that we have very low retention rates for our indigenous and non-traditional students. This work really helps you think about how to reach those students, how to differentiate your teaching in a way that allows you to continue with rigor and with getting the content out there but that also makes learning accessible, regardless of where our students come from. And that's just critical. We cannot *not* do this work.

We are in an incredibly diverse community. At UAA we are also intentionally situating ourselves as part of our local, state, and national communities. We recognize our role as an engaged university. And we have an obligation to be able to communicate with people who are coming from different political backgrounds and perspectives, different social systems, different religious beliefs. This helps us do that, and it helps us equip our students with the tools to do the same.

My students are going to graduate into a world where the boundaries are really almost erased—through technology, advances in travel, and the incredible influx of immigrants who have recently moved to this community. This is equipping us to be successful and to help our students be successful as they move forward into this brave new world that is so full of challenges and dangers, but also so rich with possibilities.



## Reflection

Can you do this “good work?”  
What would it take to get started?

## MANIFESTO

# Indigenizing Higher Education

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What do we mean when we speak of “indigenizing” higher education? One vision calls for a balanced partnership between western and indigenous practices, for higher educational institutions that respect the best of western academic traditions while simultaneously honoring indigenous worldviews and ways.

A handful of universities both here and abroad have set these priorities and begun this work. New Zealand is the world leader, with visionaries like Graham and Linda Smith and initiatives that have put indigenous values, practices, languages, and pedagogies closer to the center of many of their institutions. Several Canadian and Australian universities are following suit.

Advocates of sustainable education are calling for something very similar: an education that will ensure a just, healthy, prosperous, and environmentally sustainable society for future generations. Many U.S. universities are adopting best practices identified by groups such as the Carnegie Institute and Campus Compact that take students into more community and place-based experiences. A few, such as Wisconsin’s College of Menominee Nation, are aspiring to full-fledged integrated transformation.

Here are a few examples of changes institutions could make to move in this direction:

- **Place** at the center of university studies and life the preservation of, understanding of, and living in balance with the surrounding lands, waters, creatures, and air. Teach outside more often. Articulate the links between disciplinary material and the biosphere. Help students reconnect with the natural world and understand the human place within it. Design university buildings and campuses to reflect human respect for and connection with the natural world.
- **Emphasize** learning that is place- and problem-based and trans- or inter-disciplinary. Lead students in tackling real-world problems (such as increasing rates of asthma, contaminants in the food supply, or the impact of technology on peoples and places) through the lens of multiple disciplines. Show students how to use disciplinary tools (from psychology, justice, literature, journalism, economics, physics, etc.) to help solve such complex and pressing questions.
- **Teach** students to think not just critically but systemically. Help them identify the linkages between the economic, social, and environmental components of any issue. Routinely explore the upstream and downstream impacts and opportunities of actions and decisions.
- **Build** diversity of all kinds into university practices and courses. Cultural, political, intellectual, geographical, economic and biological diversity would be cultivated, studied, and championed. Staff, faculty, and administrators at these institutions would reflect a much wider range of human backgrounds and experiences. Decision-making roles would be occupied by an ethnically diverse group of leaders.

- **Include** the operations and maintenance of the institution itself as part of the curriculum. Give staff, students, faculty, and administrators roles to play in helping to ensure that the institution's physical plant contributes to, rather than detracts from, the health and integrity of surrounding lands, waters, creatures, and peoples.
- **Recognize** Elders as the equivalent of faculty in relevant fields. Create many more settings where they can function in the role of professor. Compensate them appropriately.
- **Acquire** campus foods from local and/or regional sources as much as possible. Prepare them without the chemicals, pesticides, and other additives shown to be detrimental to human health.
- **Integrate** indigenous pedagogies and others appropriate to your region into the teaching practices of your faculties. Routinely use examples, case studies, and imagery from a wide diversity of cultures.
- **Assess** technologies for their impact on the learning community and the wider society. Use only those shown to have beneficial effects on student learning and on the lands, waters, and peoples of the region.
- **Include** indigenous languages in university business and curricula. Offer them as courses. Give faculty and students who speak these languages credit for mastery of multiple languages in the same way you give credit to those with command of both English and a European- or Asian-based language.
- **Use** research and assessment practices and protocols that reflect the cultural diversity of the world's peoples. Ensure that research is conducted in a way that honors the subjects, their communities, and the natural world.
- **Balance** serious work with play and humor.

These are just initial ideas, and hardly exhaustive. Each institution would necessarily create its own unique forms. What can U.S. institutions learn from those beyond our borders who are taking the lead in this endeavor? Check out the resources listed in the back of the handbook for possibilities worth exploring.

## A Few Ideas for Indigenizing Your University

Here are some very basic steps we took, and are continuing to take, to move our initiative forward and make progress toward the goal of true partnership between Alaska Native and university communities. We hope you can adapt them to your situation.

### **Build relationships.**

- Identify and cultivate administrative champions.
- Identify and train allies wherever you can find them.
- Initiate or develop connections with indigenous students, faculty, organizations on and off campus, community members, and tribes.
- Connect with others working to transform the university culture (especially those working toward inclusive excellence and/or sustainable education).

### **Build awareness and articulate connections.**

- Help people see the relevance of indigenous perspectives and how they can bring fresh ideas to existing challenges in economics, research, technology, and other areas.
- Take advantage of every opportunity (large and small, formal and casual) to link indigenous issues to existing paradigms.

### **Strategize for the long haul, but take it a step at a time.**

- Develop a vision that helps people (yourself included) to imagine what is possible. Aim for true equity and inclusiveness, even if it seems like a distant dream for your institution at this point in time.
- Set manageable goals; break them down into smaller goals that can be accomplished this year, this month, this week, today. Take today's actions today.
- Offer support and appreciation for yourself and others for each step along the way. Celebrate even seemingly small accomplishments. Share stories of other large visions that were realized through patience and persistence over time. Enjoy each other's company and have as much fun as possible as you move toward the vision.
- Keep going!

## If you don't have a specific group to work with...

**Identify** the indigenous student population at your institution. They may be hard to notice; invisibility is a key component in the oppression of indigenous peoples.

**Reach out** to the indigenous nations in your region. Find out where they live and where their young people attend college. What are their educational goals? What are their options? Is there a tribal college nearby? Reach out to the people and programs who serve this population. Ask them to help you find ways to help your faculty learn from those communities and cultures.

**Build relationships**, if you do not already have them, with indigenous leaders, community leaders from other cultural backgrounds, faculty of color, and international faculty. Invite them

to share the teaching and learning practices that come from their cultural backgrounds; create opportunities for them to share with your institution's faculty. Don't expect them to teach you; accept responsibility for your own learning. As you nurture these relationships over time, you will begin to develop resources both on campus and off for cross-cultural faculty learning.

**Emphasize practices** that create inclusive excellence. Inclusive excellence is the result of practices that create learning environments in which students who have been marginalized by the educational system in the dominant culture can thrive. In most cases, these approaches are equally effective with students from the dominant culture<sup>27</sup>.

It is not necessary to have in-depth knowledge of specific cultural backgrounds in order to foster inclusive excellence. Many simple changes can help create educational spaces in which more students can learn and thrive. A few examples:

- Vary your teaching techniques.
- Provide multiple ways for students to show that learning has occurred.
- Use cooperative and collaborative teaching and learning styles.
- Create occasions for authentic human exchanges.
- Relate course material to learners' lives.
- Use inclusive language that reflects the diversity of student backgrounds and identities.
- Use problem-solving goals and case studies as learning tools.
- Ask for feedback from learners about behaviors, practices, and policies that create barriers to their learning.

\* Tisdale, 1995; Wlodkowski and Ginsburg, 1995

# Steps Towards Equity

Modify course offerings and degree programs to become more relevant to village and/or community needs.

Include indigenous examples in course content.

Hire and promote more faculty, staff, and administrators with Native ancestry so students see role models within our institutions.

Engage indigenous students as mentors, guides, and friends early in the college journey.

Provide safe spaces for Native students to connect with one another and rest from the demands of the dominant culture.

Connect students with local indigenous communities and resources near our campuses.

Learn about and try to honor traditional ways of communicating (eye contact, body language, other non-verbal expressions).

Provide assistance with money management and navigation of a foreign campus, community, and system.

Include indigenous artwork, music, activities, foods, and other culturally relevant offerings on our campuses.

Sponsor on and off-campus forums that bring indigenous issues to the forefront.

Pursue programs and projects with Native communities/individuals as partners.

Provide cross-cultural orientations, workshops, and seminars for professors and researchers engaged in or pursuing projects that require cooperation and collaboration with Native peoples and communities.

Allocate funding and support for innovative, creative programs that allow Native young people, the campus, and the general public to become more aware of issues faced by Native peoples.

Show that you care personally about individual indigenous (and non-indigenous!) students by making time to talk, walk, sit, or just hang out with them, in your office or outside. Ask how things are going, where they are from, if they have any relatives in the nearby area or far away. Your warmth and concern can make a difference.

Learn about indigenous ways of conducting research and assessment; validate these other ways of knowing in addition to Western academic protocols.

# Why This Matters

Libby Roderick

The academy is widely assumed to be the best source for the highly specialized knowledge and technological skills people need to be successful in the world. The university helps students develop the critical thinking, theoretical, and technical skills necessary to get good jobs, do good work, and thrive within this society. The goal is to prepare them to engage effectively in a heterogeneous democracy: to navigate, respect, and benefit from diverse perspectives and ideas. At its best, the academy accomplishes these goals very well.

But the academy also comes from a particular place, history, and set of traditions that makes it harder to see certain things differently—such as the human relationship with the natural world. The humanistic tradition postulates a world in which human beings are valued above all other creatures by virtue of such capacities as language and reason. From this position it is difficult to even recognize, much less experience, the indigenous view of human beings embedded within a network of equal relations with all species, each of which has special capacities. From the humanistic point of view, indigenous cultures are seen as mere artifacts of more primitive times in human history. They are worth studying in the anthropology or linguistic classroom perhaps, but not relevant or scholarly, let alone central to the challenges of this modern time. Obviously, this book strives to promote a different viewpoint.

Because who really knows what it may take for coming generations to survive the challenges that lie ahead? Human populations are growing, extreme weather events are increasing, and food and water security is weakening. Many of us are increasingly concerned about a widespread lack of natural knowledge and practical skills and a human consciousness that fails to recognize its interdependence on biological life support systems. Even people wired into global networks need clean air, water, and food; even the most sophisticated abstract thinkers need healthy ecosystems to support their lives. What if the global technology and information culture does not prove sufficient to meet the demands of the future?

We as educators owe it to future generations to take a close look at ourselves. We are still, by and large, educating people as if mental skills were separate from and superior to physical ones, as if long-term intimacy with a particular place on the earth had little to teach us, as if it was somebody else's job to ensure that the next generation learns how to live in right relationship with the rest of the world's life forms, systems, and peoples. We still mostly teach as though economics and psychology have nothing to do with earth sciences, let alone with each other. What if we are wrong about this, perhaps dangerously so?

Throughout history, many of the most creative and transformative ideas in any society (whether business, educational, scientific, or other) have come from the margins of that society. People on the outside can often see what those near the center can't. At first, many of these "outsider" perspectives are ridiculed or simply ignored. They tend to gain respect and recognition only when problems within the prevailing paradigms grow too numerous and the old, familiar solutions no longer work.

Indigenous orientations—including attitudes of humility and reciprocity with respect to other life forms; traditions of gift-giving; and a recognition of our profound interdependence

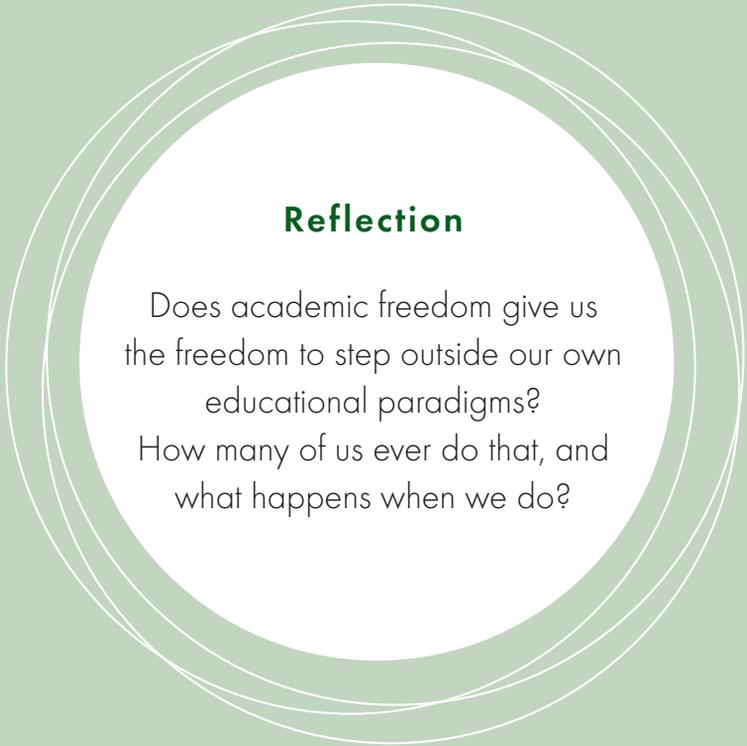
with the complex web of life—stand in almost direct contradiction to those of the modern Western world. As a result, Native cultures are ideally positioned to offer productive critiques of mainstream Western thought and to point towards new solutions for some of humanity’s pressing problems.

Given our commitment to scholarship, academic rigor, and the well being of future generations, we owe it to ourselves to be open to new perspectives about education, our relationship to the planet, what’s real, and what’s really important. In fact, this kind of rigorous, reflective thinking is what Western scholars do best. The finest teachers actively challenge the status quo within which they teach, including their own assumptions, and are willing to draw knowledge and wisdom from all available sources, including those beyond the traditional bounds of higher education. By wrestling with these difficult issues and holding these necessary difficult dialogues within our minds, departments, and universities, we ensure our own integrity.

Our world is interconnected in extraordinarily complex ways, and we are well served when our ways of teaching and learning reflect that fact. Indigenous ways of teaching and learning bring to the academy an integrated, systemic, and longstanding way of perceiving and moving within the world. They heighten our faculty’s capacity for a kind of teaching that prepares students to address the world’s profoundly interdisciplinary challenges. They help us better equip our students to become leaders who can build businesses, communities, nations, and perhaps even a global village, capable of working cooperatively and of protecting the natural world that makes all this possible.

By honoring the best of both ways of teaching and learning, we can help new generations of learners move into adulthood with the best chance of contributing to the creation of a just, healthy, prosperous, and sustainable world.

And really, is there anything more important than that?



## Reflection

Does academic freedom give us  
the freedom to step outside our own  
educational paradigms?

How many of us ever do that, and  
what happens when we do?

# Afterword

Ilarion Mercurieff

Working side by side with Oscar and Libby to engage sixteen professors from two Alaskan universities in Alaska Native ways of teaching and learning was an amazing process. It took months of planning to create one week-long semi-immersion experience, but the time was as rewarding to me as it was to the faculty who participated. Each time I hear a story, personal or otherwise, I learn something new. Each time someone steps forward to share, I recognize the courage involved and appreciate the opportunity their sharing offers for growth. I came away feeling like “we” have new allies in our struggles for equal time and treatment vis a vis people of the mainstream society.

There is no question that this program produced a palpable change in the attitudes of the participants towards Alaska’s Native peoples, for what we have to deal with in today’s world and for what we have to offer as well. Each participant had an individual experience, but all were made keenly aware of institutional racism and the ways in which we are complicit in it whether we are aware of it or not. At least now, the participants will have a heightened awareness about that dynamic and be on the lookout for it.

They will also have a greatly increased awareness of the possibilities that Native approaches offer for student engagement. As Don Rearden’s experience illustrates, Native ways of teaching and learning can have significant impacts on the behavior and thinking of all kinds of students, not only about Native issues but about all kinds of issues. The experience changed their consciousness. This was our desired result. As Albert Einstein is often quoted as saying: “You cannot solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it.”

Most gratifying is the fact that people were changed at an individual, personal level. They learned something they can carry with them for the rest of their lives: how to be quiet and how important being quiet is every day of our lives; how to watch, listen, and learn without taking notes or recording the lessons; how to more truly be with nature; or any of the myriad of other lessons that were available to them. Whatever they learned about Native ways brings nothing but positives into their lives. The Elders say that nothing is created on the outside until it is created on the inside (of us) first. It is our hope that the participants learned things that will help them better understand themselves. The more one understands oneself, the more one will understand other people and, indeed, all of creation.

This is our dream in putting together this book: that members of the academy would come to understand how the Way of the Real Human Being can foster thinking critical to dealing with the daunting problems of violence and ecocide; and that they would use this knowledge to stimulate real actions to decolonize their universities. Indigenous ways have a lot to offer the world. We hope this book will have a positive impact on partnerships and alliances between indigenous peoples and those of the mainstream.

It took ten thousand years of time-tested and successful survival strategies to bring us Native peoples to this point. Surely there must be value in this that cannot be ignored.

*Qaxaalaakux Unguneesh.* Thank you very much