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Review of *Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education*

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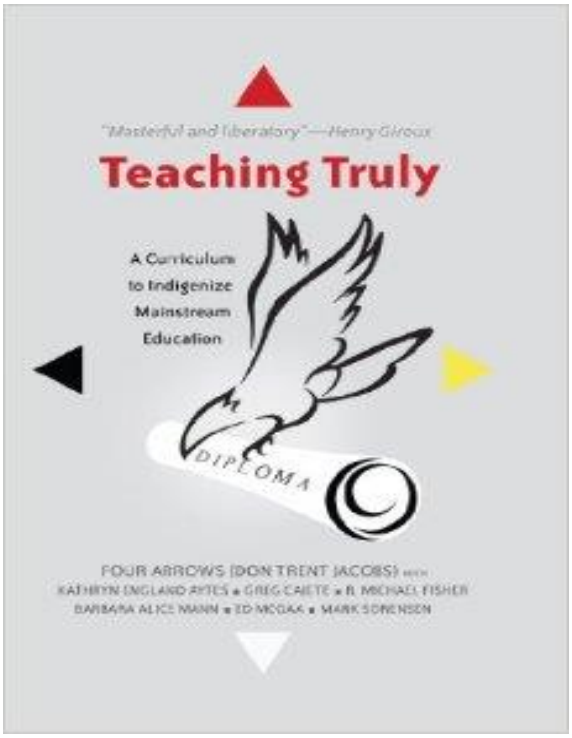

Four Arrows (Jacobs, D. T.), England-Aytes, K., Cajete, G., Fisher, M., R., Mann, B. A., Mcgaa, E., & Sorensen, M. (2013). *Teaching truly: A curriculum to indigenize mainstream education*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

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A teacher's primary task is to help students overcome their fears and discover they can do more than they think they can.

—Kurt Hahn

If you believe people have no history worth mentioning, it's easy to believe they have no humanity worth defending.

—William Loren Katz

Whoever controls the education of our children controls our future.

—Wilma Mankiller, Principal Chief, Cherokee Nation, 1985-1995

I think we're on the brink of disaster on many fronts. I believe that Native people can help us out of that, help us push back away from that brink.

—N. Scott Momaday, in Nabakov, 1992, p. 436.

Words only point to truth, genuine knowledge must be experienced directly.

—Francesca Fremantle

Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education by Four Arrows (Don Trent Jacobs) is fueled by the urgency to respond to "our era of crisis[:]...Every major life system on our planet is at a tipping point" (p. 2). Envisioning a solution to this crisis, Four Arrows along with six contributing authors offer an American Indian interdisciplinary approach to teach/practice harmony and balance in schools. This approach is mostly written with "non-Indian" teachers and administrators as their primary audience. His call is not simply to use Indigenous content and curriculum as an additive approach to build upon current mainstream educational practices, but for generalized Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies to permeate and become re-centered in schooling spaces. As such, he envisions a "partnership between mainstream and generalizable Indigenous approaches to education" (p. 2). The authors collectively embark on what indigenizing mainstream education looks like, who it benefits, how it can be done, and the importance of "teaching truly." Because Four Arrows places a large responsibility of our current worldly problems upon mainstream education, which operates on paradigms (to sustain dominant hegemony) that assume the "[human] superiority over other creatures, races, cultures, spiritual beliefs and Nature, along with the continued dismissal of Indigenous, nature-based values" (p. 2), he sees this work as a key component to our liberation and salvation from ourselves.

The power of this book lies in its questioning of the purpose of education in a pluralistic world: If that purpose is to create plug-and-work citizens into a global economy, the continued dominant paradigms will persist and the destruction of our world eminent, according to Four Arrows. If, however, the purpose is to raise human critical consciousness and to understand a better balance between humanity and our intricate relationship with the natural world (using generalizable tenets of Indigenous knowledges), then we may begin the process of healing by moving closer to the spiritual aspect of nature rather than our dependency upon the material.

There are many ways to read this book: In its entirety, absorbing the small details and the storied flow of the "Four Directions," or the skimming of sections that might personally help with subject-specific lessons/units or administrative plans. I fear that educators who are continually asked to do more and more while not being afforded more time may read parts and pieces without fully investing in the whole. As this book seeks for balance using the "Four Directions," I find it important to consider each of the sections, understand how each part interconnects with the whole, so that readers may better absorb what the authors collectively are attempting to tell. This holistic reading starts by spending some time reading quotes that introduce each section, much like I have done with this review in which I took parts of chapter introductory quotes in order for these powerful voices to have an opportunity to speak with each other, resonate with the other, and to preface what is to come. The carefully chosen chapter quotes speak to each other and prepare the reader for what is to come in the chapter that follows.

Structurally, *Teaching Truly* is divided into "Four Directions" in relation to a medicine wheel. It begins in the West, which focuses on *Introspection* by grounding the discussion on the effects of anti-

Indianism (the discrediting and demonizing of Indigenous knowledges) particularly in the consciousness of many educators. Four Arrows begins here, in the consciousness of the reader, because if this book is to be used as a roadmap, we must first "…discover where we are" in order to better understand "…where we must go, and how we can get there!" (p. 29). So, where are we? According to guest author, Kathryn England-Aytes, we are in states of trauma. By foregrounding the ways mainstream colonial education has impacted communities, discussions of trauma (cultural, historical, and intergenerational) are defined because

> "…it is important that educators understand how historical trauma, unresolved grief and cultural decimation over an individual's lifespan and across generations has affected Native students, families, and communities. …For non-Indian students, this awareness is of significance…because non-Indian students themselves may be suffering their own forms of trauma resulting from structural inequalities their families have experienced" (England-Aytes, p. 32).

The West further foregrounds how societal injustices that have historically reached (and continue to reach) branches of government continues to impact the education of children, particularly Native American children. However, this section moves toward resilience and hope by offering multiple suggestions on where we must go with education, which transitions nicely into the next section.

The North: *Wisdom* focuses on larger educational programs that take more holistic approaches to the inclusion of Indigenous paradigms; as such, this section seems to be aimed more for administrators. Mark Sorensen, the director of the STAR (Service to All Relations) discusses the successes and battles of attempting to "indigenize a mainstream state curriculum" while working from the foundational principals of "K'e," a Diné (Navajo) concept referring to seeing "relations as encompassing all life on this planet" (p. 52). While much success has been collected about this program, Sorensen honestly reveals that that "success" may not be fully realized in the standardized tests that the State Charter Board uses to renew or deny funding for this charter school. When the mainstream realities come face to face with the hope and vision of such a program rooted in indigenous principals, Sorensen reveals that definitions of "success" can get muddled. The North section, in building upon the lessons learned in the STAR program, recommends strategies teachers should understand about Indigenous perspectives in order to better include them into their classes.

If one is having to read quickly, Chapter Four titled "Indigenous Teaching and Learning Pathways" is a must read as it relies on a number of Indigenous scholars and elders to ground what Four Arrows means by "indigenizing" mainstream education: "Prior to conquest by Europeans, traditional Indigenous education in the Americas emphasized oral histories, teaching stories, ceremonies, apprenticeships, learning games, formal instruction and informal tutoring. …The goal of these forms of education is to maintain and sustain relationships among the human, natural and spiritual worlds" (p. 72). He emphasizes that "Indigenous teaching and learning paths are ultimately about cultivating cognition and consciousness via spiritual awareness and reflection of lived experiences" (p. 65). What does this look like, particularly in a mainstream educational system that continues to be extremely linear? The East attempts to address this question.

The East: *Energy and Action* is where the bulk of the content of this book lies (8 of the 13 chapters are located in this section). While the previous two sections discuss the limiting parameters of mainstream paradigms (West) and schools (North) that view education as an assembly line of linear and separate parts, Four Arrows understands the reality of our current schooling situations and collects a number of supplementary lesson resources based on content specific subjects including the following: Health, Music, English Language Arts, United States History (written by Barbara Alice Mann), Mathmatics, Economics, Science (written by Greg Cajete), and Geography. He prefaces this section by stating, "…a truly Indigenous approach would not focus as we do here on individual subjects without connecting them to the others" (p. 81). The emphasis, then, in indigenizing mainstream content is to see how the intersections between and amongst subjects "can

serve the teacher's highest goals" (p. 81). While there were brief moments that talked about the importance of intersecting subjects, an extended introduction or concluding chapter to this section where explicit recommendations of the ways teachers could work with one another to create more holistic and overlapping curricula was needed.

The South: *Spirituality and Emotional Awareness* attempts to reconnect with the first section, The West, by emphasizing emotional and spiritual awareness. The two chapters are written by guest authors, Ed McGaa and R. Michael Fisher. McGaa's chapter emphasizes the binary of fear and fearlessness: "Man has established a religious hierarchy that controls by using fear and false promises that are endangering all of life on Mother Earth today. Through religious-based fear rather than spiritual fearlessness, people are programmed and medicated to exist as if we were not part of the Great Mystery" (p. 242). Fearlessness grounded in spirituality, then, lies in our ability to regain balance by trusting in the interconnectedness between each other and with nature. Fisher extends McGaa's thinking as his chapter connects fearlessness to the overall goals of this book (to indigenize mainstream education) by shifting the paradigms of what wisdom and education are: "Indigenous wisdom teaches that the only true source of authority is personal and honest reflection on lived experience in light of the spiritual understanding that everything is connected" (p. 252).

In attempting to translate what this connectedness looks like, Fisher, I think inadvertently illustrates the messiness/confusion that goes with trying to teach what spirituality (which, as stated in the previous quote, is very much based on the individual and ties to community and place) looks like through the written word. While he provides steps to re-connect one's self with nature and, through extension, humanity (pg. 240-250), the discussion reveals a fundamental and structural shortcoming not only in the chapter, but in the purposes of the book itself: To "indigenize" mainstream education.

After reading this book, I wonder: What are the dangers in using Indigenous as a verb, to "indigenize"? What does it mean to "indigenize mainstream education"? In the movement to a verb, it becomes an action upon another, rather than a change through internal reflection of lived experiences with our communities and families. In my humble opinion, the threat of our current educational system is in its attempt to disseminate knowledge and truth as though there was one knowledge and one truth that should be shared by all. It forgets about place, where people are located, and the multiple truths that exist in our pluralistic society (Grande, San Pedro & Windchief, 2015). Likewise, Indigeneity, when generalized, attempts to combine the many nuances that make Indigenous peoples and places unique. In such combinations, it gets messy and the messiness lies in the attempts to learn from Indigenous people as though they all operate upon the same paradigms, ontologies, and epistemologies. They do not, and we should not.

So, I revert back to the goal of the book — to indigenize mainstream education — and I wonder: What does indigenizing education mean when it is delivered in classrooms void of Indigenous peoples? How do those "generalizable" tenets of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and paradigms translate when it is separated from the people and the places from which they originated? How might non-Native peoples with few relations with Native peoples embark upon this work? Let me be clear, these questions are not to diminish the important work of ally-ship in humanity that this book encourages, after all, "A pluralistic society needs both the many and the one to remain vibrant" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Rather, these prompting questions are rooted in an attempt to better understand the purposes and goals of Indigenous education and indigenizing education. Hopi/Tewa and Diné scholars Jeremy Garcia and Valerie Shirley state: "The goal for Indigenous education is to enact a schooling experience that is rooted in self-education, self-determination and sovereignty for Indigenous peoples," (2012, p. 78). Based off this understanding, I worry that the movement from Indigenous (as a noun) to indigenize (as a verb) in relation to education may, inadvertently, story over and story past the very peoples and communities this book roots its (generalized) knowledges in.

I have no doubt that there is much power in this book, and that it will resonate with a broad, compassionate,

and critical audience. There is much to learn within these pages and from these multiple authors. My questions (above) are rooted in hope and purpose: I hope that as steps are taken, however small or large, to enact the main tenet taught within *Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education*, that they are done so with the experiences, stories, perspectives, and voices of local Indigenous peoples and communities.

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