



Teaching where you are: Weaving Indigenous and slow principles and pedagogies

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Leddy, S., & Miller, L. (2024). [Review of the book *Teaching where you are: Weaving Indigenous and slow principles and pedagogies*, by Shannon Leddy & Lorrie Miller]. University of Toronto Press, 192pp. ISBN 978-1487554019.

The book, *Teaching Where You Are: Weaving Indigenous and Slow Principles and Pedagogies* by Shannon Leddy and Lorrie Miller, published by University of Toronto Press in 2024, is a necessary and useful introduction to indigenising education by bringing together principles from Indigenous and Slow pedagogies. Functioning as an informative and resourceful guide to non-Indigenous educators, the authors use their combined interest in weaving as a figurative and literal aid to argue the need to decolonise education, with a focus on the British Columbia school curriculum.

The framework of the Medicine Wheel from *The Sacred Tree* by Lane, Bopp, Bopp, and Brown (1984) serves as the “loom” on which the ideas in this book are woven (Leddy & Miller, 2024, p. 14). The wheel is divided into four sections, each a different colour (yellow, red, black, white), with each section representing an aspect of our nature (Spiritual, Emotional, Physical, and Intellectual, respectively). Leddy and Miller bring together Indigenous and Slow pedagogies through the Medicine Wheel and Elain Lipson’s (2012) *Slow Cloth Manifesto*. Slow pedagogies here advocate a move towards “more purposeful actions,” which signal an exploratory knowledge-based approach to learning, rooted in “deep inquiry” (p. 16). The authors skillfully weave these pedagogies with curriculum to form a more holistic approach to ways of knowing.

Teaching Where You Are is comprised of eight interconnected and clearly laid-out chapters. The first three lay out the introductory frameworks of the Medicine Wheel and Slow pedagogies, emphasising the importance of decolonising education and the need for a place/land-based approach. The following four chapters address each section of the Medicine Wheel in turn, while the final chapter is a summation of the ideas presented throughout the book.

The volume, beginning with Chapter 1 which is titled *Tawâw*, meaning “welcome” in Nehiyaw Cree. This also implies “*there is room for you here, and it is open,*” inviting the reader to join the dialogue with the authors (p. 1). Introduced



in detail here, the Medicine Wheel is used throughout the book as the foundation for the proposed principles and pedagogies. The authors relate the values of “Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility”—the Four R’s (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), ever-present in Indigenous pedagogies, to the four sections of the Medicine Wheel. They convincingly argue the need to view Indigenous pedagogies as part of the curriculum rather than “*additional*,” while also considering Slow pedagogies through an epistemological lens where the classroom becomes a space to contest colonial ideologies of linear time and to access alternate ways of knowing (p. 8). To include more Indigenous pedagogies meaningfully in the education system, Leddy and Miller advocate a move away from educators positioning themselves as “perfect stranger” to the Indigenous communities for fear of offending or creating controversy by challenging dominant discriminatory discourses, thus not acknowledging their complicity in settler colonialism (Dion, 2007). Instead, teachers are encouraged to decentre their beliefs, unlearn old knowledges, and move towards decolonising educational spaces.

Chapters 2 and 3, titled *Building Decolonial Literacy for Indigenous Education* and *Slow Ways and Indigenous Ways* respectively, lay the theoretical foundation for the book. Beginning with the lived experiences of the authors, these sections highlight the need for decolonising educational practices. Through the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, 2008), the authors address the interconnectedness of Indigenous ontologies, the multiplicity of people’s identities, the importance of place, and the relationship of settlers to First Nations peoples, as being central to achieving a decolonial literacy. Leddy and Miller clearly show how Slow pedagogies connect to Indigenous ways of knowing by relating to four principles from the *Slow Cloth Manifesto*—how the work is done, the materials required and their provenance and impact, the deep connection to making, and the community and cultures related to the making practices (p. 48-49). Rooted in both pedagogies, the book discusses the non-linearity of time, which can be circular and fluid when unbound from Western conventions, and learning and making as experiential and land/place-conscious, relational to communities, cultures, and place, and motivated by an internal spiritual connection.

Chapters 4 to 7 bring together the Medicine Wheel and the Four R’s with the principles of Slow pedagogies. Starting the journey in Chapter 4, *East—Spiritual—Respect*, the authors discuss the Spiritual spoke of the Wheel, showing how Indigenous and Slow principles diverge from Western philosophies by favouring being in the moment, being reflective, and using holistic approaches over universalisms. The spiritual brings together histories and lived experiences with the present, allowing learners to reflect more deeply on the interdisciplinary nature of their learning and respect, and to develop their relationship with place and land, i.e., *where they are* (p. 38). In Chapter 5, *South—Emotional—Relevance*, Leddy and Miller introduce the ‘circle pedagogy’ (p. 97) to create healing spaces for students and encourage teaching that challenges assumptions and stereotypes rather than tokenism, the importance of addressing trauma and the complicity of the educators in perpetuating the same. Here, they emphasise the interconnectedness of emotional intelligence with other aspects of our being, and stress that for learning to be relevant, it must be of interest and relate to the learners.



Chapter 6, *West—Physical—Reciprocity*, calls for us to recognise our physical bodies as more than vehicles for the spiritual, emotional and intellectual parts of our being; rather, they should be seen as ‘sensorial’. Drawing on Marie Battiste and George Dei, Leddy and Miller argue for normalising all kinds of bodies, particularly those of marginalised populations (Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour). For them, the physical calls for a pedagogy that is nurturing, place-conscious, and aware of the materials involved and their impact and connection to place. Completing the circle around the wheel with *North—Intellectual—Responsibility*, Chapter 7 argues that good teaching begins with educators decolonising themselves by analysing the biases inherent in their personal, cultural and institutional spheres. The authors show the importance of an Indigenous lens which is more open-minded and accepting of multiple ways of learning, using the term “*etuaptmumk*” meaning “two-eyed seeing” in the Mi’kmaq language (p. 122). In this way of seeing, one eye represents the best of the Western knowledges while the other eye is the best of the Indigenous, needing both to come together to create “a complete picture” (p. 122). The authors also provide interesting examples of projects that successfully bring together both ways of seeing.

At the end of Chapters 2 to 7, the authors meaningfully connect their pedagogies and principles to weaving, showing how, from the process of collecting wool to the finished woven product, students can engage in interdisciplinary learning that brings together Western curricular knowledge with Indigenous and Slow ways of thinking and knowing. The final chapter, *Pimoteh (Walking)*, helpfully bringing together and summarising the arguments in the volume, emphasises the need for an ‘epistemological change’ in pedagogy by decolonising educational practices and making Indigenous and Slow pedagogies an integral part of the curriculum (p. 132).

The aim of this book, as stated by the authors, is not to provide lesson plans, but to show how the Indigenous ways of knowing differ from Western conventions, the need to make them a part of the education systems, and the steps we can take towards beginning our journey on this path. It is written in easy language, and intended for a wide audience including teachers, administrators, policymakers, and researchers (particularly in the field of education). By incorporating weaving, not only as a metaphor to make learning more inclusive, but also as an activity, the authors make their ideas more accessible and relatable. Additionally, the inclusion of the authors’ personal experiences and reflections helps the reader connect better with the ideas expressed in the book. The content may occasionally appear to be circular and repetitive, but as explained by the authors, this aligns with the non-linear and circular nature of Indigenous principles and Slow pedagogies, giving the reader the freedom to choose any chapter to enter the conversation. As a final point, while the multiplicity of Indigenous languages and their precarity is addressed, it would have been helpful to see more discussion of language. What role do English (and French) play in promoting and reinforcing colonial ideologies, and how can the pedagogies proposed here help us decolonise language teaching, learning, and use?

As a new immigrant to Canada and a multilingual educator, I found that this book helped me better understand my positionality on and responsibility to the land I live on. This is a significant and necessary contribution to conversations and actions towards indigenising education and offers a unique way to build Indigenous ways of knowing into all aspects of learning.



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