

Applying the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model to the Study of Crime: A Teaching Note

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, critics have asked universities to “do more” to support Indigenous learners and learning. Universities usually respond by increasing Indigenous student and faculty representation on campuses and adding on units with Indigenous content in existing courses. However, a lot of curriculum and pedagogy remains vacant of Indigenous understandings of learning and perspectives on higher education content and topics for discussion. This paper applies epistemological lessons in the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (2007) to the study of crime in America. Its inspiration comes from a guest lecture delivered by myself in an introductory sociology class. The students who take this class are registered in professional programs at a large private university in Rhode Island, United States. I describe the class’s context and use of the model with students in an engaged inquiry format to talk about the subject of the day: crime. This discussion can help faculty consider promising practices for grounding course content in Indigenous epistemologies.

Keywords: Indigenous epistemologies; crime; higher education

Author Note

I thank Kevin DeJesus for his invitation to me to speak in his sociology class. My greatest debt is to the students for their warm welcome and reception of my ideas in class. I base the ideas and practices shared in this paper off lessons learned from my research assistant work under M’ikmaw education scholar Dr. Marie Battiste on nourishing the learning spirit. Financial support for the research on nourishing the learning spirit and the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (2007) came from the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre of the Canadian Council on Learning. The two anonymous readers helped improve my paper, and I thank them for their comments.



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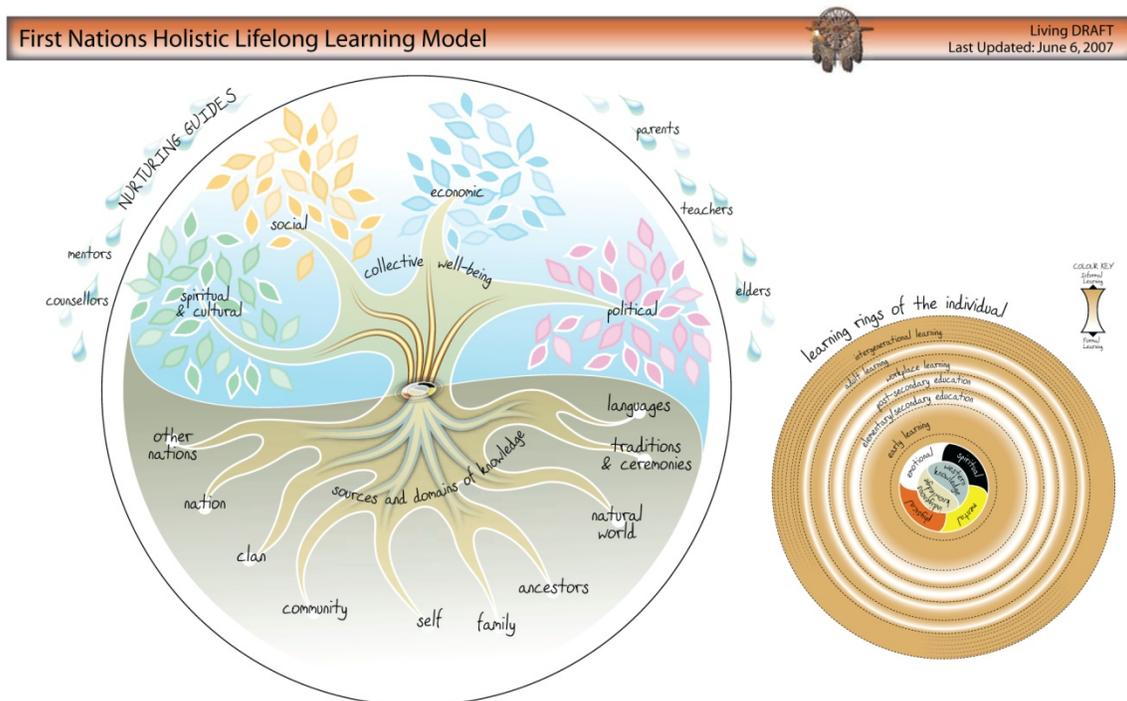
Since the 1960s, administrators in North American universities have heeded calls from Indigenous communities to improve participation of Aboriginals in their programs. Universities have adapted their structures to improve representation of Indigenous students on campus and ameliorate achievement rates. Battiste (2000a) and Anuik (2010) call these initiatives adaptations to support learning. Such initiatives continue to be directed primarily at Aboriginal learners and have had some success in improving achievement of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit at school (Anuik, 2010; Kearns & Anuik, 2015) and in representation of Indigenous people in the professions (Anuik, 2008). The adaptations to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learning quickly revealed a paradox put succinctly by Battiste (2005): Universities want Aboriginal learners but not the knowledge they bring to class.

Indigenous scholars who graduated from universities in the 1970s to the 1990s went on to unpick the systemic problems plaguing North American higher education. Battiste (1986, 2000b) says the main problems are cognitive assimilation and imperialism. Universities—and all schools—still replace Indigenous peoples' epistemologies and worldviews with Western knowledge. Instructors use Western teaching styles and assessments to measure proficiency in subject matter. For example, Métis in Ontario think “the lack of viewing Canadian history from Aboriginal perspectives is an educational...problem” (Kearns & Anuik, 2015, p. 19). Since 2000, Battiste and other Indigenous and allied scholars have urged a new way forward in all educational systems. It has been a time to enrich critique with placement of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit epistemologies of learning at the centre of all university programs, and to advance “a more nuanced exploration of the role of Aboriginal people in ... past events” (Kearns & Anuik, 2015, p. 10).

In elementary and secondary schools across Canada, policy frameworks now require teachers and students to learn “about contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures, histories, and perspectives” (Aboriginal Education Office, Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 7; see Anuik & Kearns, 2012, 2014; Cherubini & Hodson, 2011; Kearns & Anuik, 2015). Too often, though, Indigenous Knowledge is taught from a “colonial perspective” (Leblanc, 2012, p. 57; Kearns & Anuik, 2015). For example, middle school history teachers in Ontario tell the history of Métis through the struggles and achievements of the Dominion of Canada. Two favourite signposts used by history teachers are the Red River Resistance of 1869-70 and the 1885 Northwest Resistance (Barkwell, Dorion, & Préfontaine, 1999; Kearns & Anuik, 2015; Leblanc, 2012; Sealey & Lussier, 1975). Indigenous peoples are expected to fit into these tales of the Canadian new world order, and all Indigenous nations are subsumed “under a broad Aboriginal category...with the implication that their histories, knowledges, languages, and experiences are similar” (Kearns & Anuik, 2015, pp. 12-13; Anuik & Kearns, 2012). Consequently, Indigenous history is framed by these signposts (Miller, 2004; Stanley, 2006) meaning that Canadians see Indigenous peoples only when their interests conflict with Canadian political, economic, and social goals.

Recently, new epistemological frameworks have been developed to reshape learning in Canadian universities. As a university educator, one of the frameworks I use is the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (FNHLLM) (2007). Developed by First Nations from across Canada as a collaborative effort in cooperation with the Canadian Council on Learning to

comprehend learning in formal and informal spaces, the model uses the stylized graphic of a tree to depict learners' journeys. Learners are born into communities whose members learn both as part of a collective and as individuals. Sources and domains of knowledge ground learners as they pass through a series of learning rings. Roots hold languages and spiritual beliefs shared by the community with learners as soon as they are born. The rings of the learner represent the learning journey. Learning begins at birth, and the rings include informal learning experiences—such as encounters with parents, grandparents, faith communities, and languages—and learning in formal domains, such as elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary education, and workplace settings. As the learners age, the number rings grows. Learners take in knowledge that grounds them. The model is generative and iterative in that First Nations and their allies are expected to revise it to shape the learning that goes on in each community.



First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model. Available at http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/RedefiningSuccess/CCL_Learning_Model_FN.pdf

As learners grow, they become part of communities containing economic, spiritual, and political spheres, among many others; community members belong to these spheres, and the tree's branches represent them. Finally, a group of people appear on the model as nurturing guides. The model represents them as raindrops and identifies them as mentors. Teachers are one of many nurturing guides and mentors in learners' lives¹ who work alongside other guides such as "Indigenous educators, including councils, community members, Elders, Old Ones, and knowledge holders," and "offer more than just facts; they ground knowledge in place and act as role models" (Kearns & Anuik, 2015, p. 21). As a university teacher and researcher, I see myself as a nurturer who nourishes the learning spirit, a "teaching guide...who help[s]" learners "in diverse ways to travel ... [the] path" (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, p. 68) and find their heart, face, and foundation (Cajete, 2000).

The FNHLLM (2007) addresses two objectives that, when seen through Indigenous knowledge of learning, require attention. Firstly, the model explains how and why knowledge students bring to class is valued. Secondly, it contributes to a conversation about how to help students see their learning in university as part of a lifelong learning journey and how “dedicated practitioners” from adult education and teaching and learning backgrounds can “erect...scaffolds necessary to support learners on their journey to the discovery...of their learning spirits” (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, p. 65). This paper aligns well with objectives of modern universities in order to try to honour “the cultural pasts of learners...in formal learning environments” (p. 72). The concept *nourishing the learning spirit* buttresses these ambitions and gives life to the model.

Anuik, Battiste, and George (2010) distil the foundations of nourishing the learning spirit. Educators argue that everyone has an inherent capacity to learn; individuals hold learning spirits, which can be thought of as “internalized vehicle[s] which we use to acquire knowledge around us through our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits, in a balanced way” (Elder Danny Musqua, as cited in Knight, 2007, p. 41). Learners are “part of social and physical ecologies that condition their learning” and “sustain and support” them (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, pp. 67-68). On the FNHLLM (2007), one sees the roots that include self, community, family, and ancestors. In class, learners are part of an ever-expanding “network of social relations” (p. 67). The learning “spirit is here to” learn (p. 66), but requires nurturing guides who support their learners’ journeys.

Anuik, Battiste, and George (2010) cite literature from adult education and scholarly work in teaching and learning fields that support the concept in practice in multiple educational spaces and places. We argued that “little is known” among non-Indigenous people “of the contexts that create...successes” among Indigenous learners and “communities’ collective learning foundations” (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, p. 64). The result is that non-Indigenous people see only statistical composites that portray underachievement in formal learning systems, and “Indigenous people are not generally portrayed as resilient, contemporary, or knowledgeable members of society” (Kearns & Anuik, 2015, pp. 6-7). Consequently, “relatively little is known of the principles of Aboriginal learning and the kind of...pedagogy, environment...and practices that contribute to that learning” (p. 64). For Indigenous peoples, “all learners are...a part of creation, and have a purpose that is...driven by their spirit” (p. 65).

Although more First Nations, Métis, and Inuit curriculum is being written (Anuik & Kearns, 2012; Kearns & Anuik, 2015), less is known of the application of nourishing the learning spirit in practice, which is why I want to share this teaching note. As a university educator, I am a caretaker of learners provided by the creator (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010). The classroom is part of students’ learning journeys, and I want them to find themselves part of “learning experiences that will build” their “gifts” and nurture their inherent capacity to learn. For me, the classroom is a space where students will be “attracted to” this “learning experience” and see it as part of their “learning journey” (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, pp. 67-68; Canadian Council on Learning, 2006). That is the educational space university teachers build when guided by the concept of nourishing the learning spirit.

Anuik, Battiste, and George (2010) call for Indigenous learning epistemologies in all educational spaces. They want all teachers to build environments for all learners’ spirits to be nourished in a learning experience (see also Battiste, 2013). This paper joins a discussion of “promising practices that enable students to fuse two worldviews”—Indigenous and Western—

“into one practice.” Through this lens, my work is viewed as a teacher and researcher advancing “Aboriginal epistemologies of learning,” applying the nourishing-the-learning-spirit context from the premise that “the learning spirit is alive in all of us” (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, p. 78). In response to Battiste’s (2013) call that teachers engage directly with Indigenous epistemologies, it is a story of how I “enable learners to engage with the traditional teachings at an advanced level in order to deepen their understanding and appreciation of epistemologies” that are part of their “community and nation” (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, p. 79).

The goal of the next part of this paper is to share a teaching note using the FNHLLM (2007) Indigenous epistemological framework to illuminate my teaching process. I now apply the model to a topic in 1st-year sociology, crime, and deviance. I reflect on my visit to a private university in Rhode Island, United States, last summer to deliver a guest lecture on the sociology of crime from Indigenous epistemologies. For me, that is what “doing more for Aboriginal education”—a phrase used by deans, vice-deans, and other administrators—looks like. That is doing more to support Indigenous learners and learning uses a First Nations community based model. I build on earlier work concerning nourishing the learning spirit (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010) and its illumination in the FNHLLM (2007; see also Cappon, 2008) to discuss the principle’s application in practice with a class of non-Aboriginal learners studying crime, a topic with relevance to Indigenous peoples in Canada. My visit offered students the opportunity to address the study of crime and deviance through the model while having their learning spirits nourished.² I understand doing more for Aboriginal education as a desire to animate what doing more looks like in practice. The following is a chance for readers to see the FNHLLM (2007) as pedagogy and a motivator for this exercise and this teaching note.

I introduced students to the study of crime and deviance, a topic that is often not conceptualized from Indigenous learning models. The FNHLLM (2007) offers a lens to help learners see people as part of communities where knowledge circulates. This exercise can help students comprehend the origins of modern social problems, which, in the case of the class I visited, are crime and social deviance.

I begin my guest lectures, such as the one in my colleague’s 1st-year sociology class, from a question guiding my research: What makes humans learn? Grounded by a position that all humans have an inherent capacity to learn, and guided by the foundational teaching that education is about nourishing the learning spirit (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010; Battiste, 2013), I watched my colleague pose a series of questions for discussion and lecture in the first part of class. He asked his students, the majority of whom take this class as an elective in partial fulfillment of professional business degrees’ requirements, how popular media represents crime, and how crime changes society. When crime happens, how do people make society secure? As he asked questions, I thought of new questions emerging from my engagement with the FNHLLM (2007) and his talk.

How does a community determine a moral standard? How do communities enforce moral standards? How does crime grow in communities? How does it become part of learners’ sources and domains of knowledge? If crime exists in communities, how does it affect learners’ interactions with society’s institutions? Are nurturing guides, the teachers, elders, and other mentors, able to arrest crime and its impact on learners’ journeys?

The branches of the tree shed a bright light on this final question. When I started my part of the class, I followed closely a format suggested by a long-service adult educator, who guided me to give “learners...a teaching on the item”—the FNHLLM (2007)—and then proceed with an activity that “involves speaking and listening skills, as well as reading and...writing” (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010, p. 76). I suggested the leaves of the stylized graphic of the tree represented on the FNHLLM (2007) are members of communities. If they carry knowledge of crime and are perpetrators themselves, when they pass away, the memories fall to the ground and disintegrate into the ground. If learners are born in communities where crime, and violence associated with it, drop into the roots of learners, is it more likely they will carry such memories with them as they begin their own learning journeys?³

All of the above questions asked these neophyte sociologists to go to their sources and domains of knowledge. I expected their responses to become part of their roots. I wanted these students to comprehend crime at the micro level of their communities. The objective for them was to understand the diverse experiences of crime and its myriad effects on communities. The FNHLLM (2007) is a means for them to see crime’s effects on individuals’ learning journeys.

To illuminate the effects of crime on individuals’ learning journeys and communities’ learning spirit, I asked learners to reflect on these questions in engaged inquiry format (Lipman & Sharp, 1982). Discussions arranged in this format are dialogues. The style resembles First Nations teachings about how to respond to questions. Talk goes round and round in response to a question. However, the person with the question listens and takes away what is salient (Anuik & Gillies, 2012).

After sharing the above synopsis with students, I asked them to respond to the question: What does a human’s inherent capacity to learn mean to you? There were four parts to answering this question. Students had to refer to class content to answer the question. Discussion occurred in the following format.

1. A silent discussion: this application of engaged inquiry asks learners to respond silently to the question on a piece of paper.
2. After five minutes, students move around the room adding to their classmates’ responses.
3. After 10 minutes, students return to their desks, rereading their responses and their colleagues’ contributions.

With these responses in hand, I posed a new question with more parts: When I think of humanity, learning, and the effects of crime on learning, I think ____ (I instructed the students to complete this thought). Students rise again standing in a circle to answer this question. I initiated the conversation by shaking hands with the student beside me. After introductions, I stated the question and gave my response. The student took my response, introduced herself to her classmate, summarized my response, and added to it. The talk went round and round the circle.

Students drew several interesting connections. They suggested failure in school resulted in crime. Several suggested that students’ inability to connect their lives on the streets with the stories and facts in books resulted in students’ withdrawal from learning. Hence, their learning spirits became disconnected. Students dropped out emotionally and then physically from mainstream schools and society (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010; Anuik & Gillies, 2012; George, 2010). Notably, all students observed linkages of crime to systemic problems in society.

For students, there was often no connection between the community, and the individuals engaged in criminal behaviour. Therefore, as a class, we agreed teachers face the following challenges: How do you connect the street with the book? Is connecting the street with the book the way to nourish a community's learning spirit? Does learning arrest crime?

Administrators want to do more for Aboriginal education. However, "doing more" still remains a nebulous idea. In the 21st century, products like the FNHLLM (2007), a deliverable of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, provide content and methodologies for faculty and students to use to understand contemporary issues.⁴ In my visit to the sociology class, I used the model to help learners comprehend the effects of crime on individuals' learning journeys. This paper shows how to apply First Nations knowledge to a topic conceptualized by modern sociologists.

There was more to teaching on this day than just introducing the model. I also wanted students to appreciate my research as not just an Aboriginal education topic for one class period. Therefore, I asked students to take a moment to reflect on the model. Using an engaged inquiry format, I posed a question related to the inherent capacity of humans to learn. I expanded the question to help students connect the foundations of First Nations learning with a contemporary problem: crime in America. The model helps students to apply theories to practice by considering how criminal acts affect communities. The topic for dialogue in class—"when I think of humanity, learning, and effects of crime on learning, I think of ___"—obligates learners to do more than just repeat knowledge of an Indigenous format influenced by engaged inquiry style. Students must apply the principles embedded in the FNHLLM (2007) to the study of crime in America.

This teaching method does more than just add on course content (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). The format of engaged inquiry and silent discussion requires students to apply knowledge as a way of viewing the world. Students can become creators of knowledge and use it to address social problems from their own perspectives, those of preservice professionals on learning journeys grounded by community and institutional sources and domains of knowledge (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Wiebe & Guiney Yallop, 2010). Students can draw their own conclusions considering their places in communities. They can get in touch with their own sources and domains of knowledge, understanding more clearly how their roots ground them and guide them. They can see how beliefs and experiences become parts of learners' sources and domains of knowledge. Further, they can see First Nations holistic lifelong learning as dynamic knowledge relevant to the 21st century. It stands with the functionalist paradigms of crime and can even coexist. Drawing together knowledge systems using an engaged inquiry format and First Nations knowledge speaks to the mandate that we, as university professors, represent authentically First Nations knowledge in modern universities.

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Endnotes

¹I discuss the concept of teachers as nurturers and nurturing guides as represented on the First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (2007) in Anuik (2013).

²Kearns and Anuik (2015, pp. 19-20) use the *Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model* (2007), developed as a collaborative effort by Métis from across Canada in cooperation with the Canadian Council on Learning, to comprehend the Northwest Resistance and its impact on Canadian politics and nationhood, the Métis nation, and Métis education.

³In an earlier essay, I suggested learners carry knowledge and memories of homophobia if members of communities pass on such attitudes to learners. See Anuik (2013).

⁴To read more about the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (n.d.), see <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/AboutCCL/KnowledgeCentres/AboriginalLearning/index.html>