THE MÉTIS OF CANADA: WAYS THEIR EXPERIENCES MIGHT SUPPORT THE UN AGENDA

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ABSTRACT: To initiate this discourse, I first address key issues highlighted in the "International Council for Adult Education [ICAE] *Spotlight Report for CONFINTEA VII*" (Ireland & ICAE Executive Committee, 2022) which identifies critical areas for achieving the objectives outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Following this, I examine the adult education literature, with a particular focus on experiential, w/holistic (as defined in this paper), and lifelong learning. I next present an overview of significant events in Métis history in Canada, starting with an introduction to their origins, transitioning to the conflicts they faced with colonial powers, and concluding with their contemporary situation. Finally, I explore the interconnections between the experiences of the Métis and the issues outlined in ICAE report, raising questions about the development of strategies and tools that could facilitate progress toward the goals of 2030.

Keywords: experiential, w/holistic, lifelong learning, informal learning, Indigenous worldview

The International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) Spotlight Report for CONFINTEA VII provides a comprehensive overview of adult education's role in advancing the United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015): 1) no poverty; 2) zero hunger; 3) good health and well-being; 4) quality education; 5) gender equality; 6) clean water and sanitation; 7) affordable and clean energy; 8) decent work and economic growth; 9) industry, innovation and infrastructure; 10) reduced inequalities; 11) sustainable cities and communities; 12) responsible consumption and production; 13) climate action; 14) life below water; 15) life on land; 16) peace, justice and strong institutions; and 17) partnerships for the goals (Ireland & International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) Executive Committee, 2022). These goals encompass a wide range of objectives aimed at eradicating poverty, promoting health and well-being, ensuring quality education, achieving gender equality, and fostering sustainable communities. Lifelong learning is identified as a critical component essential for achieving these goals, particularly SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all (2015).

To address these issues, I delve into experiential learning and how it aligns with progressive educational approaches rooted in post-colonialism and advocate for a broader understanding of knowledge exchange and community building. I will look at how w/holistic learning encompasses diverse perspectives, including Indigenous and Eastern worldviews that emphasize community, spirituality, and environmental stewardship. This contrasts with traditional Western educational paradigms, highlighting the importance of integrating such perspectives into global educational frameworks like the SDGs. Additionally, the concept of collectivism in learning stresses interconnectedness among individuals and their environments. Lastly, lifelong learning, essential to achieving the SDGs, differs from traditional education in its focus on continuous personal, social, and professional development throughout one's life. This approach, supported by educational theorists from Dewey (1916, 1938) to contemporary scholars, underscores the need for inclusive and lifelong educational opportunities that support sustainable development globally.

Examining the historical experiences of the Métis reveals a narrative of adaptive learning and cultural resilience. From early interactions with European traders to their cultural hybridity and

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ongoing informal learning, Métis history exemplifies lifelong, w/holistic learning principles that contribute to sustainable development goals.

In conclusion, integrating experiential, w/holistic, and collective learning approaches from Métis and other Indigenous perspectives enriches global educational discourse. By embracing diverse worldviews and learning methodologies, educators can foster inclusive and sustainable development as envisioned by the UN's 2030 Agenda.

Experiential, W/holistic, and Lifelong Learning in Adult Education and Learning

Experiential Learning

Historically, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) can be associated with "William James, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers and others" (Kolb & Kolb, 2012, p. 192). However, Dewey (1938) coined "a theory of experience," and he drew on a distinction between experiential learning and the" miseducative"(p. 25)—that stems from trauma and hinders experiential learning. Still, - Kolb and Kolb credit Lewin's 1940 to 1960s work as foundational to experiential learning (2012). Drawing from the previously enumerated theorists' aggregate concepts that learning is evolutional, iterative, dialectical, holistic, synergistic, and constructive and while focusing on Lewin's work, Kolb (1984) formed ELT. Four cyclical aspects of ELT begin with an experience followed by reflection, cognition, and action.

Later, Fenwick (2003) highlighted that Kolb's (1984) Cartesian-like theory incorporates a binary taxonomical split between experience and reflection, followed by the dynamic and static split within reflection in experiential learning theory and practice. Fenwick, also adds that there is a problem of hegemonic control of what knowledge has value in experiential learning. Fenwick offers suggestions to make experiential learning more w/holistic by including "interobjectivity". I see an echo here with the Métis worldview *wâhkôhtowin* (all-related) (Jarvis, 2023; MacDougall, 2006) and *buen vivir* (Brown & McCowan, 2018). These concepts offer a human characteristic to the inanimate. For the *wâhkôhtowin* and *buen vivir* perspectives, nurturing these relationships is paramount. Lastly, Fenwick criticized that experiential learning is now becoming synonymous with informal learning. Kawalilak and Groen (2020) echoed Fenwick when they pointed out [s]cholars have increasingly acknowledged that learning is experienced in multiple ways—"formally, nonformally, informally" (p. 73).

Schugurensky (2000) identifies three forms (or types) of informal learning

> [1] self-directed learning…is intentional …and…conscious… [2] incidental learning…is unintentional but conscious.. and [3] socialization…(also referred to as tacit learning)…the internalization of values, attitudes, behaviour, skills, etc. that occur…not a priori intention…not aware that we learned something" (pp. 2–4).

Subsequently, Bennet (2012) extended Schugurensky's model by adding "integrative learning" that is "intentional nonconscious processing of tacit knowledge with conscious access to learning products and mental images" (p. 28). This kind of informal learning involves the intention of self-directed learning, the consciousness of incidental learning, and the unawareness of socialization.

Lastly, Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) pointed out that the informal setting provided "life skills that have kept…families fed and clothed" and that if "educators helped learners recognize the many places and ways they have gone about learning in adulthood, more adults might see themselves as active learners." (p. 53)

In summation, experiential learning can be complex. Reflection has been an important element of the process of conscious learning, but it seems reflection needs a more w/holistic approach. Coupling reflection with Dewey's (1938) "miseducative" experience is important when applying the SDGs because most of the goals are for those who have experienced some kind of trauma.

W/Holistic[1] Perspectives

Stemming from Fenwick's (2003) call for change in the definition of experimental learning, is the perspective that learning is [w/]holistic (Merriam & Kim, 2008). This shifts away from the Western emphasis on cognitive knowing to acknowledge other ways of knowing such as somatic, spiritual, emotional, moral, experiential, and social learning discussed by Merriam and Bierema (2013). As highlighted by Fenwick, non-Western views do not separate these ways of knowing.

Latin American Indigenous cultures hold a belief called *buen vivir* (Brown & McCowan, 2018), which aligns with the African concept *Ubuntu* (Nafukho, 2006) and Eastern philosophies such as "Buddhism, Taoism, and Advaita Vedanta" (Brown & McCowan, 2018, p. 318). Essentially, all these philosophies share a common bond, much like Villalba's (2013) definition of *buen vivir*, that life is a "harmonious coexistence and living with nature in accordance with principles of reciprocity, complementarity, solidarity and relationality" (as cited in Brown & McCowan, 2018, p. 318). The Cree/ *nêhiyaw* say "Aboriginal epistemology…is a mysterious force that connects the totality of existence—forms, energies, or concepts that constitute the outer and inner worlds. (Ermine, 1995, p. 103). This mysterious force is the spirit, and spirit is in everything. Merriam and Baumgartner, (2020) discussed spirituality by highlighting Bohm's explanation that]"w]e may thus think of spirit as an invisible force—a life-giving essence that moves us deeply, or as a source that moves everything from within" (p. 248).

Ermine (1995) added an individual connection to this w/holistic view: one must seek their individual gifts from the spirit, and these gifts are one's contribution to the whole. Moreover, Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) said that "andragogy, self-directed learning, and Mezirow's theory of transformational learning all focus on the individual becoming an independent learner who relies mostly on himself or herself in the process" (p. 286), all of which pertain to Kolb's

[1]Please note Miles et al. (2023) said

> the term wholistic should be seen to hold a distinctive meaning and be used in place of the term holistic, especially when relating to Indigenous pedagogies, cultures, practices, traditions, health, and wellness...[we] contend that the term wholistic is more inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing, understanding, being, and doing. This includes being more reflective of the coming together of the four elements in life encompassing the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental elements of wellbeing" (Miles 2023, p. 3)

Although a great deal of adult education literature does use the "h" instead of the "w" when discussing w/holistic ideas even when they reference Indigenous worldviews as seen in Merriam and Baumgartner (2020): "the Western view of science is "objective" and outward looking, the indigenous perspective is more holistic" (p. 271), when I discuss w/holistic, I will use w/holistic as a form of inclusion.

(1984) four aspects of ELT. The Western view disconnection leaves out how such learning should be reciprocated.

Lastly, Merriam and Baumgartner (2020) encouraged "learning to include perspectives outside of our traditional Western views…[so] that we will be personally enriched" (p. 271).

I have not seen discussion in the adult education literature regarding w/holistic approaches in *panpsychism*. This ancient concept is the everything has a mind down to the smallest particle (Skrbina, 2017). This important idea supports the Indigenous perspective of "all my relations" and Fenwick's (2003) "interobjectivity."

Lifelong Learning

Jarvis (2004) identified lifelong education as "the process of education begins in childhood and continues throughout the lifespan." (p. 61). Dewey (1916), an important influencer on adult educators said "education means the enterprise of supplying the conditions which insure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age" (p. 51), but he was not specifically an adult educator like Linderman (1926/1961) and Knowles (1984). Smith (1919) best expressed who and when of adult education

adult education must not be regarded as a luxury for the few exceptional person here and there, nor as a thing which concerns only a short span of early manhood, but that adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong. (p. 5)

Later, the Faure Report (1972) and the Delors Report (1996), echoed Smith: "education should be both universal and lifelong, claiming that education precedes economic development and prepares individuals for a society that does not exist" (Jarvis, p. 63). The value of a happy life for everyone, not necessarily meaning a focus on economic growth, stands out and is most important in the Faure Report, the Delors Report, Smith's and Dewey's work (1916, 1938).

Considering the ICAE Spotlight Report recognizes that adult education and learning is critical, I believe it is appropriate to distinguish between learning and education (Ireland & ICAE executive committee, 2022). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2012 Notice suggests that the term lifelong "learning" instead of lifelong "education" because "learning" is more focused on the learner, the learning process, and the outcomes. Alternatively, "education "is more associated with the act of imparting knowledge." This view on lifelong learning and education was intiated chiefly by UNESCO in the 1960s and 1970s. UNESCO report, *Learning to Be* (Faure et al., 1972) was a comprehensive reform of education promoting an "over-all lifelong education for…a complete man"(p.viii). Delors (1996) expanded on the Faure report by introducing life long 'learning' and means for a free and peaceful society.

Jarvis (2004) identified a problem in that the "concept of lifelong learning is extremely confusing since it combines individual learning and institutionalized learning" (p. 64). Hutchins (1970) introduced the idea that everyone would learn and develop through and within a society that provided learning resources for everyone, a concept reflected in his book's title, *Learning Society*. Hutchins' idea was more fully developed by Delors et al. (1996), Freire (1972a) and Horton et al. (1990), each of whom described the learning society as a utopia. Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973) distinguished three settings for learning: formal, non-formal and informal. Formal is through traditional institutions; non-formal is through non-accredited institutions; and

informal can be in the formal and non-formal settings or in settings that are neither formal or non-formal. As mentioned earlier, informal learning contributes to one of the new definitions of experiential learning: it can occur in any setting (Merriam and Baumgartner, 2020).

Indigenous Methodology

Fairness is a requisite for there to be a utopian society and inclusiveness of Indigenous methodology supports it. Indigenous methodology requires the "recovery of ourselves" (Smith, 1999, p. 8). Authenticity for Indigenous people engaged in academic research requires the process of *decolonization*, such as the application of the "four R's" (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p.1): there must be *respect* of one's cultural way of being including *relevant* diversity and transformation, with *reciprocity* perspectives between power dynamics that foster mutually developed viewpoints. Additionally, there is a *responsibility* to participate in social change (1991). Within this process of decolonizing and honouring the four R's is one's axiology that "speaks to what knowledge is important and worthy of pursuit" (Little Bear, 2009, p. 10). One's epistemology "speaks to theories of knowledge: how we come to know…[and this] is a methodology or a validation process. For Aboriginal peoples, knowledge is validated through actual experience, stories…[and] observation" (2009, p. 10).

Autoethnography of the Métis

After 1670, the French on Turtle Island found surviving the harsh winters in their forts was challenging, and they needed to conserve supplies. So they dismissed from the forts the expendable men who were the least skilled, to undertake the task of building transactional relationships (versus belonging relationships) with the Indigenous peoples. Both relatonships are reciprocal, but opposite: the former expects a quick return, and if there is not one, the relationship is terminated. The Indigenous Peoples embraced these foreigners and nurtured them. The Algonquins taught the French how to survive on what the Catholics called unclaimed land (Jarvis, 2023b); once relationships were built among the males, the Europeans were then introduced to the Indigenous females. Soon these 'country marriages' produced offspring, and this was the origin of the Métis nation (Foster, 1994). In 1885, a war called the Northwest Rebellion broke out between the Métis and the Canadian government. Following the war, the Métis suffered starvation, racism, and sanctions, and were labelled traitors.

Early ethnographies of Indigenous people of the Americas were Eurocentric, recorded from the lenses of explorers, clergy, and other European researchers. Following Said (1978) and Fanon's (1963) critical reflections of Othering, this qualitative research methodology became the foundation for autoethnography, a social justice method employing a self-reflexive narrative based on a phenomena blending one's self and one's culture (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ellis and Bochner, 2000, 2006; Poulos, 2021). I will share some personal stories of experiential learning within my Métis community of *manito sakahikan* in Treaty Six of Alberta, Canada.

My Stories of Informal Teaching and Learning

I recall my community members built objects as large as a home and as small as a three-legged stool; yet, all they had was a Western-built house and a four-legged stool as models to copy. Community members built houses with settlers who came to the *manito sakahikan* area. The Métis adapted designs by inspecting and measuring the model, then adapting those measurements and materials. They created their own drawings to follow and converted the measurements for their purposes.

A second story arose from observing Métis members of my community undertake auto body repair and vehicle mechanic employment.. Again, there was not any formal or non-formal training, but informal apprentice like teaching and learning from within our community. Métis members skills progressed to the point the members became employed within the settler community.

Another story was Métis who saw an outfit someone was wearing and used that outfit as a model. The women would adapt what they saw to their liking and make a similar outfit from repurposed fabric such as an old curtain. No "store-bought" sewing pattern was used.

The fourth observation was us making a traditional food called bannock. We had no written recipe to follow nor measuring cups or spoons to use. We would "eye" it, and use our hand to measure. This process was learned by years of watching skilled members, then practicing making bannock. The "eyeing" it, I think, was intuitive; this intuitiveness developed from practice. Lawrence (2012) said the "most primal way of accessing knowledge is through the body as our earliest forms of knowing are preverbal" (p. 3). Epistemological theorizing or conscious learning did not explain how the intuitiveness of "eyeing" a measurement developed through the trial and error process. The knowing appeared to be spiritual in the sense of trusting and being with *manito* (the spirit) and *wâhkôhtowin* (all our relations), rather than analyzing (Jarvis, 2023a).

Many Métis I previously observed did not learn from someone outside the community who told them what they needed to learn or how to do something. A person, or several persons from within the community usually had individuals participate with them, and the telling to do something was emergent. This format was iterative and highly observant —much like the adult education apprentice model highlighted by Pratt and Smulders (2016), but in an informal setting and way versus formal or non-formal setting. The learner often elected to participate in the learning as a desire and as a form of sharing responsibility.

I think my family member had high observation skills. The Métis were trying to survive in this new rapidly growing settler world that ostracized them following the Northwest Rebellion. They did not know European behaviours, such as their form of etiquette, fashion, time orientation and formal ways of being. In order to fit in in this new world, the Métis had to observe, as they lacked the shared layers of knowledge that the Europeans had, such as the Imperialist worldview.

The above examples above were from Métis from the Baby Boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964) and earlier generations. The examples below are from Métis from Generation X (born between 1965 and 1981).

I witnessed many Métis strengths (gifts, talents) emerging, which I think the informal learning setting nurtured, and the following examples might shed light on how the earlier mentioned examples surfaced. The Métis in our community were often provided with space to engage in the activities they enjoyed—space to find themselves. More than that, I found it phenomenal how they seemed to instinctively know how to do and learn a new activity. Two two post-preschoolers provide examples: riding horses and playing the piano. The horse-lover was not nurtured around a horse environment in any way, but had a desire for a horse; the community, without judgement and with pleasure, supplied the horse and barn. The Métis child got on the horse and began riding bareback almost instantly. A few years later, they entered horse competitions and won. No one taught them; they just knew. The piano player went for non-

formal lessons. A week into their first lesson, after the instructor modelled an advanced version of the song they were learning, the child went in their room at home and practiced unprompted for a few days until they were able to play the advanced song by ear. The settings for these two examples offered support for desired learning to emerge.

Analysis

I found that experiential, w/holistic and lifelong learning were innate as well as possibly a survival form of teaching and learning within the Métis community. This kind of learning was also an informal teaching and learning enculturation within the Métis community. Observation skills with iterations, apprenticing, nurturing and spirituality formed a breeding ground for enjoyable teaching and learning- and an innate capacity to adapt and create. Therefore I raise the following questions:

- Is the relational bond (with Homo sapiens and beyond) important for teaching and learning?
- Is it important to continue the thread of the teaching and learning from generations before us? Does a connection with our primal selves nurture our innate creativity, strength and aptitudes?
- Is unconditional support important for teaching and learning? Is space needed for teaching and learning to develop?
- Is informal learning valuable?
- Is trial and error more an effective way to develop intuition?
- Is intuitive teaching and learning a survival mechanism?
- Are some or all of these ways ones that could facilitate progress towards the SDGs? For example, could intuition help eradicate poverty?
- Is locality important for forming strong community teaching and learning environments that are reciprocal and sustainable?

Conclusions

The experiential learning from these stories was self-directed (from the children too) because the projects taken on were intentional. I submit the cases described take for granted the consciousness of learning in the process. However, their observational learning appeared to be incidental and intentional, but the consciousness of learning was unintentional. The incidental learning appeared to be a product of the socialization and tacit learning that formed through their Métis enculturation. I suggest the kind of informal learning that was most prominent is Bennett's (2012) integrative learning. There was a "*conscious access to the learning products and mental images*" (p.28). The house example recounted the model and practice with the settler houses, and the three-legged stool was founded on a four-legged stool. The cars example had models for apprenticing. The outfits' creation from visualized examples required mental images of outfits that often had to be remembered. "[S]ynthesiz[ing] new and existing knowledge" occurred (p. 28). Existing knowledge came from years of observation and practice, and new knowledge came from creating new models, such as the four-legged stool and outfits. Also, most of the process of these projects required "insight" and "unconscious" knowing (p. 28). Insight was seen especially when children knew what they wanted to learn and when the

community knew to support the children unconditionally. Possibly, the child examples showed how the adult abilities were formed. The Métis practiced this form of teaching and learning for generations and from childhood.

The w/holistic learning that took place in these stories was implicit. The observation skills were a community competence from generations before us that were learned from our elders. The development of one's skill was their contribution to the whole. Building a house, making a chair, repairing vehicles, sewing clothes, and making bannock were all skills learned from the community and given back to the community—a reciprocation. As for the "ecological and interconnected[ness]" of w/holistic perspectives, several factors stood out: the locality of the houses being built; the four-legged stool to copy; the outfit seen to adapt the curtains; the hands and eyes for measuring. The spiritual aspect versus analytical aspect allowed for flow and non-judgment. Lastly, the lifelong informal learning process was a generational perseverance the Métis applied for their keen observational expertise to develop.

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