

REVIEWS, THEORETICAL PAPERS, AND META-ANALYSES

Transforming medical education leadership through a *Pedagogy of Peace*

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Abstract

Background: Leadership in Canadian medical and health professions education is increasingly called upon to advance equity, reconciliation, and social accountability. However, prevailing leadership paradigms remain largely grounded in Eurocentric, competency-based, and managerial traditions that insufficiently address colonial legacies, relational accountability, and Indigenous epistemologies. This misalignment is particularly evident in efforts to respond meaningfully to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, where institutional commitments often outpace shifts in leadership culture and governance.

Purpose: This paper introduces the *Pedagogy of Peace* as an Indigenous-led, theoretical framework for leadership in medical and health professions education (HPE). Grounded in Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe teachings and developed through community-engaged scholarship, the framework addresses a conceptual gap in the HPE leadership literature by reframing leadership as a wholistic, relational, and peace-focused practice rather than a technical or role-based function.

Framework: The *Pedagogy of Peace* is articulated through four interrelated dimensions: knowing (self-in-relation), understanding (nurturing a Good Mind), doing (strengths-based action), and honouring (peace-focused solutions). Together, these dimensions reflect Indigenous relational ontologies that position leadership as an ethical responsibility arising from relationships to community, land, and future generations.

Implications: By situating the *Pedagogy of Peace* alongside existing leadership frameworks commonly used in Canadian medical and health professions education, this paper clarifies how Indigenous epistemologies offer a distinct theoretical contribution that complements—but is not reducible to—distributed, relational, or anti-oppressive leadership theories. The framework provides an invitational orientation for leadership practice with implications for faculty development, curriculum governance, mentorship, and institutional culture, and may be taken up within familiar educational contexts such as leadership programs, workshops, and reflective practice initiatives.

Conclusion: The *Pedagogy of Peace* offers a theoretically grounded, distinctions-based framework that expands how leadership is conceptualized in HPE. By foregrounding relational accountability, balance, and peace-focused approaches, it invites HPE leaders to engage with reconciliation and institutional change in ways that move beyond managerial paradigms toward ethical, community-responsive leadership.

Transformer le leadership en éducation médicale grâce à une pédagogie de la paix

Résumé

Contexte : Le leadership en éducation médicale et dans les professions de la santé au Canada est de plus en plus sollicité pour promouvoir l'équité, la réconciliation et la responsabilité sociale. Toutefois, les paradigmes de leadership actuellement dominants demeurent largement ancrés dans des traditions eurocentriques, axées sur les compétences et de nature managériale, qui abordent insuffisamment les héritages coloniaux, la responsabilité relationnelle et les épistémologies autochtones. Ce décalage est particulièrement évident dans les efforts visant à répondre de manière significative aux appels à l'action de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation, où les engagements institutionnels dépassent souvent les transformations réelles de la culture de leadership et de la gouvernance.

Objectif : Cet article présente la Pédagogie de la paix comme un cadre théorique dirigé par des Autochtones pour le leadership en éducation médicale et dans les professions de la santé (HPE). Ancré dans les enseignements haudenosaunee et anichinabés, et développé dans le cadre d'un travail universitaire en collaboration avec les communautés, ce cadre comble une lacune conceptuelle dans la littérature sur le leadership en HPE en reconfigurant le leadership comme une pratique holistique, relationnelle et axée sur la paix plutôt qu'une fonction technique ou fondée sur un rôle.

Cadre conceptuel : La Pédagogie de la paix s'articule autour de quatre dimensions interreliées : savoir (le soi en relation), comprendre (cultiver un *Esprit Bienveillant*), agir (action fondée sur les forces), honorer (solutions axées sur la paix). Ensemble, ces dimensions reflètent des ontologies relationnelles autochtones qui situent le leadership comme une responsabilité éthique découlant des relations avec la communauté, la terre et les générations futures.

Implications : En situant la Pédagogie de la paix aux côtés des cadres de leadership déjà utilisés en éducation médicale et dans les professions de la santé au Canada, cet article clarifie la manière dont les épistémologies autochtones offrent une contribution théorique distincte — complémentaire, mais irréductible — aux théories du leadership distribué, relationnel ou anti-oppressif. Ce cadre propose une orientation fondée sur l'invitation et la relation pour la pratique du leadership, avec des implications pour le développement du corps professoral, la gouvernance des programmes, le mentorat et la culture institutionnelle. Il peut être intégré dans des contextes pédagogiques familiers tels que les programmes de leadership, les ateliers ou les initiatives de pratique réflexive.

Conclusion : La Pédagogie de la paix propose un cadre théorique fondé sur les distinctions culturelles qui élargit la manière dont le leadership est conceptualisé en HPE. En mettant de l'avant la responsabilité relationnelle, l'équilibre et des approches axées sur la paix, elle invite les leaders en éducation médicale à s'engager dans la réconciliation et le changement institutionnel d'une manière qui dépasse les paradigmes managériaux pour favoriser un leadership éthique et attentif aux besoins des communautés.

Context and rationale

Leadership in Canadian Health Professions Education (HPE) is increasingly expected to advance equity, reconciliation, and social accountability, yet the paradigms that shape how leadership is understood and practiced remain largely unchanged. Since their inception, faculties of medicine have been governed through Eurocentric academic traditions that privilege hierarchy, efficiency, and individual authority—traditions historically sustained by leadership that is overwhelmingly White, male, and socially advantaged.¹ While these approaches have supported institutional continuity and accreditation compliance, they offer limited guidance for addressing colonial legacies, relational accountability, and the moral dimensions of leadership now demanded of health education systems.

The challenge this paper addresses is not the absence of leadership frameworks in HPE, but a conceptual gap in how leadership itself is theorized. Dominant models tend to frame leadership as a set of competencies, roles, or behaviours, often abstracted from questions of power, positionality, and epistemology.² As a result, leadership development initiatives may improve individual performance without disrupting the structural conditions that shape whose knowledge is valued, whose voices are amplified, and how decisions are made. This limitation becomes particularly evident in institutional efforts related to reconciliation, where commitments to change outpace shifts in leadership culture and governance.³ Grounded in Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe teachings, the *Pedagogy of Peace* reframes leadership as a wholistic, relational, and peace-focused practice in contrast to a technical or managerial function.⁴ By articulating leadership through the interrelated dimensions of knowing, understanding, doing, and honouring, the framework offers HPE leaders a theoretically grounded way to engage with reconciliation, equity, and institutional change without reproducing the colonial assumptions embedded in prevailing leadership paradigms.

Leaders in HPE are tasked not only with advancing academic excellence, but also with ensuring that HPE responds to the social contract of health care:

to serve all communities equitably and to prepare future clinicians to meet diverse health needs.⁵

In HPE, leadership is not only an administrative function but a pedagogical force that shapes learning environments, professional identity formation, and the hidden curriculum. Decisions made by educational leaders influence what is valued, how learners are assessed, whose knowledge is legitimized, and how future health professionals understand their responsibilities to patients, communities, and society. As such, leadership frameworks in HPE function as implicit educational theories, with direct consequences for teaching, learning, and scholarship.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada highlighted these gaps in its Calls to Action, particularly #23 and #24, which call upon health care and medical education systems to increase Indigenous representation and embed Indigenous knowledges and practices into medical curricula.⁶ A decade after the release of the TRC Final Report, Canadian faculties of medicine have made incremental progress, but leadership structures remain slow to change. Indigenous participation in senior leadership roles within academic health professions remains minimal, and many institutions continue to struggle with embedding Indigenous epistemologies into decision-making processes.⁷ This persistent gap points to a need for alternative conceptual models of leadership that are grounded in Indigenous worldviews and that address not only representation, but also the epistemic foundations of leadership itself.

Conventional frameworks used in medical education related to leadership—such as the Leader Role within the CanMEDS competency framework and the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada's Entrustable Professional Activities—have been valuable in standardizing leadership expectations clinically.⁸ However, these models are primarily competency-driven and focus on individual skills acquisition, often overlooking the relational and collective responsibilities central to Indigenous worldviews. As a result, they have done little to disrupt entrenched hierarchies or to meaningfully address the ongoing underrepresentation of Indigenous people in academic leadership;⁷ a reality that perpetuates the marginalization of Indigenous perspectives in

decision-making processes. Recognizing this gap, the National Circle for Indigenous Medical Education (NCIME) has identified increasing Indigenous faculty recruitment, retention, and leadership as a national priority, advancing strategies to support Indigenous leadership development across Canadian medical schools.⁹ These efforts underscore the urgent need for conceptual frameworks that extend beyond technical competencies and instead embed Indigenous epistemologies, values, and teachings as foundational to leadership.

Indigenous scholars and educators have advanced pedagogical frameworks that emphasize balance, relational accountability, and peace as guiding principles for the learning process. One such framework, the *Pedagogy of Peace*, rooted in Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe teachings, offers a wholistic and relational approach that can be applied to leadership that contrasts with the dominant hierarchical paradigms in Canadian HPE.⁴ Initially designed as a curricular model, this pedagogy holds significant potential to guide a reconceptualization of leadership in academic medicine.

The aim of this paper is to articulate the *Pedagogy of Peace* as a theoretical framework for HPE leadership. By positioning this Indigenous-led approach alongside existing leadership competencies, we suggest pathways for Canadian medical schools to reframe leadership as a relational, strengths-based, and peace-focused practice. This theoretical contribution seeks to advance reconciliation within HPE by challenging entrenched leadership paradigms and offering a model that is responsive to Indigenous worldviews, and the diverse communities Canadian physicians serve.

The *Pedagogy of Peace* was developed by Dr. Lindsay Brant (Haudenosaunee, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory) as a framework for embedding Indigenous epistemologies into higher education pedagogy. It draws from Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe teachings, including the Medicine Wheel, to promote balance, relational accountability, and peace in educational contexts.⁴ The framework has been used to guide undergraduate curriculum development and faculty workshops, and it is grounded in Indigenous

knowledge systems that view leadership and learning as inherently relational processes.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is central to Indigenous scholarship and is particularly important in this manuscript, as one of the authors (LB) is the developer of the *Pedagogy of Peace*. This positionality provides deep, experiential knowledge of the framework's philosophical grounding and pedagogical intent, while also necessitating explicit reflection on potential bias.

Both authors engaged in ongoing reflexive dialogue throughout the development of this manuscript, critically examining how their respective roles—as an Indigenous scholar-educator who developed the framework (LB) and as a physician-educator applying it within HPE leadership (JC)—shaped the analysis and interpretation presented here. In contrast to positioning the *Pedagogy of Peace* as a neutral or universally applicable model, the authors intentionally situate it as a distinctions-based, Indigenous-led framework whose relevance to leadership emerged through sustained practice, reflection, and relational accountability.

This reflexive approach strengthens the credibility of the manuscript by making visible the authors' positionalities, responsibilities, and relationships to the knowledge shared.

In keeping with Indigenous scholarship that emphasizes relational accountability, the *Pedagogy of Peace* emerged through sustained engagement with the community rather than in isolation within the academy. The framework was developed as part of doctoral work that was shared, discussed, and defended publicly within the author's home First Nation (LB), in a community-based thesis defence attended by Elders, community members, and leaders. This process functioned not as symbolic consultation, but as a form of community witnessing and validation, through which the framework was refined and affirmed in relationship. These origins continue to shape how the *Pedagogy of Peace* is taken up, with ongoing responsibility to the community guiding decisions about where, how, and by whom the framework is applied.

Approach to theoretical development and positioning

Although this manuscript is theoretical in nature, its development was informed by an iterative, practice-based process grounded in curriculum development and leadership experience within HPE. The *Pedagogy of Peace* was not selected a priori as a leadership framework; rather, its relevance to leadership emerged organically as it was applied to curriculum design, faculty development, and governance contexts within HPE.

The authors' engagement with this framework unfolded through sustained application of the *Pedagogy of Peace* in educational settings, followed by reflective analysis of how its principles shaped decision-making, relationship-building, and institutional leadership practices. This process aligns with Indigenous and interpretive scholarly traditions that recognize theory as emerging from lived practice, relational accountability, and contextual knowledge in contrast to detached abstraction.

Through this reflective and iterative process, the authors identified that the *Pedagogy of Peace* offered conceptual clarity and explanatory power for leadership phenomena in HPE that were insufficiently addressed by dominant leadership frameworks. In considering how to conceptualize leadership within HPE, the authors engaged with several commonly cited leadership and educational frameworks, including transformational leadership, servant leadership, distributed leadership, and competency-based leadership models embedded within CanMEDS and LEADS. While these frameworks offer valuable insights into leadership behaviors and system performance, they were not foregrounded in this manuscript because they do not explicitly account for Indigenous epistemologies, relational accountability to land and community, or peace-centered approaches to governance that are central to the authors' culture and values.

The *Pedagogy of Peace* was therefore advanced not as a replacement for these frameworks, but as a theoretically distinct contribution that addresses epistemic and relational dimensions of leadership that remain underdeveloped within mainstream HPE scholarship.

While the authors acknowledge important contributions from distributed, relational, and anti-oppressive leadership theories, these frameworks are not engaged in depth here because the intent of this paper is not to refine Western leadership models, but to introduce an Indigenous-led framework grounded in distinct ontological and epistemological commitments.

Indigenous philosophical underpinnings

As an educational framework, the *Pedagogy of Peace* aligns with sociocultural and relational theories of learning that emphasize context, identity, and relational accountability as foundational to knowledge construction in HPE. Central to the *Pedagogy of Peace* is the Haudenosaunee principle of cultivating a "Good Mind" (*Kanikonri:io*), which emphasizes clarity, compassion, and responsibility in decision-making.⁴ From the Anishinaabe perspective, the Medicine Wheel provides a wholistic model of growth, where spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental domains must remain in balance.⁴ These teachings emphasize that leadership is not an individual trait, but a collective responsibility rooted in relationality, accountability, and respect for land and community.

Indigenous scholarship in Canada has long emphasized these principles. Wilson describes Indigenous research as founded on "relational accountability," in which knowledge is validated through relationships with people, communities, and land.¹⁰ Kovach situates Indigenous methodologies within oral traditions and storytelling, highlighting knowledge as both contextual and collective.¹¹ Hart similarly emphasizes Indigenous epistemologies as [w]holistic, interdependent, and oriented toward community well-being.¹² Together, these scholars articulate a worldview where leadership is inseparable from relationships and reciprocity—foundational tenets also central to the *Pedagogy of Peace*.

Viewed through an HPE lens, these Indigenous epistemologies challenge dominant cognitive and competency-based models by foregrounding relational learning, moral development, and collective responsibility as core educational outcomes.

Leadership as relational and peace-focused

Within HPE, leadership approaches shape professional identity formation, socialization into institutional norms, and the hidden curriculum experienced by learners and faculty. The *Pedagogy of Peace* offers a complementary theoretical lens to established HPE constructs such as communities of practice and social accountability, reframing leadership as a relational educational process that models ethical practice, cultural humility, and accountability to communities.

Differences between Western and Indigenous leadership theories are rooted not only in contrasting practices, but in fundamentally different ontological and epistemological assumptions. Many dominant Western leadership theories are grounded in individualistic ontologies, in which leadership is understood as residing within discrete individuals and explained through psychological traits, behaviours, or competencies.² Knowledge within these frameworks is often epistemologically reductionist, privileging measurable attributes, role performance, and individual agency as the primary units of analysis.

In contrast, Indigenous leadership frameworks arise from relational ontologies in which being, knowing, and leading are inseparable from relationships with community, land, ancestors, and future generations.¹³ Within such relational ontologies, leadership is enacted through ongoing relationships and responsibilities, shifting as community priorities, contexts, and needs evolve. This stands in contrast to role-based conceptions of leadership that presume stability, permanence, or hierarchical authority. Knowledge is understood as contextual, collective, and morally situated, and leadership is conceptualized not as an individual possession but as a set of responsibilities enacted within networks of reciprocal relationships.¹³

Several of the leadership theories influential in HPE—including distributed leadership, relationship-based leadership, and anti-oppressive leadership—have challenged leader-centric and hierarchical models by emphasizing shared responsibility, relational processes, and attention to power. While these frameworks represent important shifts within Western leadership

scholarship, they largely remain grounded in institutional and epistemological assumptions that prioritize organizational effectiveness, role-based authority, and system performance.

Although distributed, relational, and anti-oppressive leadership theories foreground participation and power-sharing, they often retain implicit assumptions about leadership as a function exercised within institutional systems.¹⁴ By contrast, the *Pedagogy of Peace* locates leadership outside institutional role structures, framing it as a relational responsibility that precedes—and may at times resist—organizational imperatives. Rather than treating relationships as mechanisms for leadership distribution or inclusion, the *Pedagogy of Peace* understands leadership itself as arising from pre-existing obligations to community, land, and intergenerational responsibility.

In medical education specifically, transformational, communities-of-practice, and complexity leadership theories have informed faculty development and curricular change efforts, socialization into institutional norms, and the hidden curriculum experienced by learners and faculty.^{15,16} A range of Western leadership theories has influenced leadership development in HPE, many of which emphasize individual leader attributes or behaviours—such as transformational, authentic, and servant leadership—particularly in faculty development and administrative training programs.¹⁷

At the same time, not all Western leadership theories are leader-centric. Relational, distributed, and complexity leadership theories conceptualize leadership as an emergent, process-oriented phenomenon shaped by social interactions, organizational culture, and systems dynamics.^{14,15} These approaches have informed aspects of HPE leadership, including team-based curriculum reform, communities of practice, and adaptive leadership in complex healthcare systems.² While these theories shift attention from individual traits to processes, interactions, and systems, they generally remain embedded within Western epistemological traditions that prioritize organizational effectiveness, adaptability, and institutional outcomes. Questions of moral responsibility to land, intergenerational accountability, and collective survivance—central to

Indigenous leadership frameworks—are rarely foregrounded.

Despite these developments, even process-oriented Western leadership frameworks tend to remain institutionally bounded and epistemically grounded in Eurocentric assumptions about knowledge, authority, and systems change. By contrast, the *Pedagogy of Peace* is grounded in Indigenous relational ontologies that understand leadership as a lived responsibility arising from relationships to people, land, ancestors, and those yet to come. In contrast to locating leadership within individuals or institutions, this framework understands leadership as an ethical practice embedded within webs of reciprocal accountability. In this way, the *Pedagogy of Peace* does not simply align with relational leadership theories but extends them by grounding leadership in Indigenous worldviews that explicitly link governance, education, and ethical responsibility. Indigenous approaches emphasize service to the collective, responsibility to future generations, and the maintenance of balance across all dimensions of life.⁸ Within the *Pedagogy of Peace*, this is operationalized through four interrelated dimensions: *knowing* (self-in-relation), *understanding* (nurturing a Good Mind), *doing* (strengths-based action), and *honouring* (peace-focused solutions).⁴ Each dimension reflects a cyclical process of growth that guides leaders to reflect on their positionality, act with integrity, and prioritize the well-being of the community.

In HPE, transformational leadership has frequently informed faculty development initiatives and curricular change efforts, emphasizing vision, motivation, and role modelling. Communities of practice theory has shaped approaches to clinical teaching and professional identity formation, while complexity leadership has been applied to understand change within healthcare education systems.¹⁶ However, these frameworks rarely engage explicitly with reconciliation, Indigenous sovereignty, or the moral responsibilities of leadership to land and community—gaps that the *Pedagogy of Peace* seeks to address.

This theoretical foundation provides a distinct alternative to competency-based and behaviourally focused leadership models that remain dominant in Canadian HPE, while also extending relational and systems-oriented leadership theories through an

Indigenous epistemological lens. By grounding leadership in Indigenous worldviews, the *Pedagogy of Peace* challenges the colonial assumptions underpinning academic medicine and opens pathways toward leadership that is relational, peace-focused, and aligned with the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁶ These ontological and epistemological differences help explain why Indigenous leadership frameworks generate distinct priorities, practices, and evaluative criteria—differences that are particularly salient in HPE, where leadership shapes not only systems but moral formation and professional identity.

The *Pedagogy of Peace*: conceptual model

Building on these ontological distinctions, the *Pedagogy of Peace* offers a cyclical, relational framework for leadership grounded in four interrelated domains.⁶ Each domain of the *Pedagogy of Peace* can be applied across multiple levels of HPE, including learner development, faculty teaching practice, and institutional curriculum and governance structures.

Knowing: self-in-relation

The first domain, *knowing*, emphasizes self-in-relation: an awareness of one's positionality, privilege, and responsibilities within a larger community. For HPE leaders, this means acknowledging the ways in which personal identity, professional role, and institutional power intersect with histories of colonialism and ongoing inequities in health care and education. Leaders who practice self-in-relation recognize that their actions are embedded within relationships—with colleagues, learners, patients, and the land—and that leadership decisions reverberate across these relationships.¹⁰ They understand deeply the ripple effect of their decisions and are mindful of operating for the good of their community over personal gain. This dimension aligns with Indigenous scholarship on positionality, which frames knowledge as contextual and relational rather than universal.¹⁹ In educational contexts, this domain informs reflective practice, admissions policies, learner assessment, and faculty evaluation by foregrounding positionality and relational accountability.

Understanding: nurturing a good mind

The second domain, *understanding*, calls leaders to nurture a “Good Mind” (*Kanikonri:io*), a Haudenosaunee teaching emphasizing clarity, humility, compassion, and commitment to ethical growth.⁴ In HPE, this translates into leadership practices that value reflective capacity, emotional intelligence, and openness to diverse perspectives. Developing a Good Mind requires continual self-reflection and learning, ensuring that leaders act with integrity and prioritize the collective good over individual advancement.¹¹ The cultivation of reflective leadership resonates with broader literature on mindfulness in HPE leadership, but the *Pedagogy of Peace* situates this reflection within Indigenous epistemologies, where the moral and spiritual dimensions of leadership are central.¹⁰ Grounding oneself with a Good Mind involves approaching one’s work with positive intentions and demonstrating the humility of working collectively toward a common goal. As an educational construct, nurturing a Good Mind aligns with reflective practice, narrative pedagogy, and trauma-informed teaching approaches increasingly emphasized in HPE.

Doing: strengths-based action

The third domain, *doing*, emphasizes action grounded in strengths and sustainability. Rather than focusing on deficits or problems, strengths-based leadership emphasizes the capabilities and resilience of individuals and communities. In HPE, this means fostering policies and practices that build on the talents of faculty, learners, and staff, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups. For Indigenous leadership, action must be relational and community-driven, ensuring that initiatives are responsive to collective needs and grounded in reciprocity, in other words, that institutions commit to developing Indigenous leaders and not merely placing them in under resourced, tokenistic roles.⁹ This domain offers a framework for curriculum design, faculty development initiatives, and learner support models that move beyond deficit-based approaches.

Honouring: peace-focused solutions

The fourth domain, *honouring*, emphasizes peace-focused solutions, grounded in integrity, reciprocity, and balance across the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental dimensions of life. This reflects both the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace and Anishinaabe teachings of balance.⁴ For HPE leaders, this requires cultivating decision-making processes that promote equity, foster trust, and repair fractured relationships within institutions. Peace-focused leadership prioritizes social responsibility, reconciliation, and collective healing. It also calls leaders to honour connections to land and territory, recognizing how colonial histories continue to shape HPE.²⁰ Honouring, as a leadership practice, moves beyond conflict resolution toward cultivating environments of balance and mutual respect. In HPE, honouring translates into governance practices, dispute resolution, curriculum decision-making, and institutional responses to harm that prioritize restoration and relational repair.

Interconnection and cyclicity

These four domains are not linear stages but interconnected elements of a cyclical process, mirroring the Medicine Wheel.⁴ Leaders are encouraged to move continuously through knowing, understanding, doing, and honouring, recognizing that leadership is a living practice rather than a fixed role. This cyclical nature underscores that leadership development is ongoing, requiring reflection, action, and renewal.

This is particularly salient within Indigenous relational leadership, where leadership emerges dynamically in response to relationships, community needs, and specific moments in time. Authority is not conferred permanently through title or position, but is taken up, shared, or relinquished based on responsibility, trust, and relational accountability. In this way, leadership is understood as situational, collective, and responsive, rather than static or individually possessed.

Implications for health professions education leadership, teaching, and scholarship

The *Pedagogy of Peace* provides an Indigenous-informed conceptual model that can complement and extend existing leadership frameworks in Canadian HPE. By embedding its four domains—*knowing, understanding, doing, and honouring*—into leadership competency structures such as CanMEDS, the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC) Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs), and the LEADS in a Caring Environment framework, faculties of medicine can foster leadership practices that are relational, strengths-based, and peace-focused. Importantly, the insights presented here are informed by real-world application of the *Pedagogy of Peace* within curriculum and leadership contexts, lending practical coherence to its theoretical positioning while remaining attentive to the limits of generalizability.

Reframing the CanMEDS Leader Role

The CanMEDS 2015 Physician Competency Framework identifies the *Leader* role as one of seven essential physician competencies, emphasizing areas such as resource stewardship, health system improvement, and team leadership.² While widely adopted, the framework often frames leadership in managerial terms and does not explicitly address positionality, relational accountability, or reconciliation. The *Pedagogy of Peace* enhances this role by:

- **Knowing (self-in-relation):** Encouraging leaders to situate themselves in relation to community, land, and institution, broadening the scope of leadership beyond efficiency and management.
- **Understanding (nurturing a Good Mind):** Extending professionalism to include moral, emotional, and spiritual growth.
- **Doing (strengths-based action):** Grounding system improvement in equity and community resilience.

- **Honouring (peace-focused solutions):** Shifting stewardship toward practices of reconciliation, trust-building, and balance.

By reframing the *Leader* role, the pedagogy emphasizes Indigenous epistemologies as integral to leadership development.

Alignment with AFMC Entrustable Professional Activities

The AFMC EPAs for the transition from medical school to residency articulate the fundamental activities expected of medical graduates, including collaboration, quality improvement, and advocacy.⁸ While designed for learners, these competencies shape the leadership culture of Canadian medical education. The *Pedagogy of Peace* reinforces these expectations by:

- Modeling humility and reflection (*knowing*).
- Embedding ongoing ethical and professional growth (*understanding*).
- Promoting relational, community-driven approaches to system improvement (*doing*).
- Advocating for reconciliation and culturally safe environments (*honouring*).

Through this alignment, the pedagogy provides leaders with a conceptual model to guide both personal growth and institutional responsibility.

Integration with the LEADS framework refresh

The LEADS in a Caring Environment framework, first published in 2009, has been adopted across Canadian healthcare systems as a national leadership model.^{20,21} It is structured around five domains: *Lead Self, Engage Others, Achieve Results, Develop Coalitions, and Systems Transformation*. In 2024, a national refresh process was launched to update LEADS for contemporary challenges, including equity, reconciliation, and sustainability, with anticipated completion in 2026.²¹

The *Pedagogy of Peace* offers a timely contribution to this refresh. For example:

- Lead Self resonates with *knowing* and *understanding* by emphasizing reflection, self-awareness, and nurturing a Good Mind.
- Engage Others aligns with *doing*, highlighting co-creation, reciprocity, and strengths-based collaboration.
- Systems Transformation reflects *honouring*, as peace-focused leadership emphasizes reconciliation, collective healing, and sustainability.
- Integrating Indigenous conceptual frameworks into LEADS would ensure that the refreshed model reflects Canada's reconciliation commitments and the need for relational, culturally grounded leadership in both health care and HPE.

Implications for faculty development and institutional culture

Leadership development programs in Canadian faculties of medicine often emphasize technical skills such as strategic planning, negotiation, and conflict resolution.^{22,24} While necessary, these approaches are insufficient to advance reconciliation or dismantle entrenched inequities. When taken up within faculty development contexts, the *Pedagogy of Peace* may offer opportunities to:

- support reflection on positionality and privilege;
- create space for co-creation and shared governance; and
- orient decision-making toward land-based and community-responsive approaches.

At an institutional level, this orientation shifts leadership culture from hierarchical and efficiency-driven to relational and peace-centered. In doing so, it advances both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and broader commitments to equity in Canadian HPE.⁶

Implications for health education scholarship

The *Pedagogy of Peace* also contributes to HPE scholarship by offering an Indigenous-led theoretical framework that expands dominant paradigms of leadership and learning. It invites scholarly inquiry into how relational, peace-centered leadership shapes learning environments, faculty development outcomes, and institutional culture. Future scholarship may explore its application through qualitative studies, curriculum evaluation, and programmatic assessment of leadership development initiatives within HPE.

Opportunities and challenges

The integration of the *Pedagogy of Peace* into Canadian HPE leadership offers significant opportunities while also surfacing tensions that require careful, reflective navigation. Rather than viewing these challenges as barriers, they can be understood as productive sites for leadership learning, relational accountability, and institutional growth.

Opportunities Advancing reconciliation

Embedding Indigenous conceptual frameworks into leadership structures directly supports the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action* (#23, #24), which emphasize increasing Indigenous representation in healthcare and integrating Indigenous knowledge[s] into HPE.⁶ This pedagogy provides a structured, culturally grounded way to operationalize reconciliation commitments within faculties of medicine.

Transforming leadership culture

The *Pedagogy of Peace* reorients leadership from hierarchical and managerial models toward relational, strengths-based practices. Such a shift complements ongoing reforms in Canadian HPE that emphasize equity, diversity, inclusion, and cultural safety.¹⁹

Strengthening Indigenous leadership pathways

National initiatives, such as the work of the National Circle for Indigenous Medical Education (NCIME), highlight the importance of recruiting and supporting Indigenous faculty and leaders.⁷ Integrating Indigenous epistemologies into leadership frameworks ensures that Indigenous leaders are not only included but that their worldviews shape institutional practices.

Wholistic faculty development

Leadership development programs traditionally focus on strategic planning and administrative skills.²² The *Pedagogy of Peace* broadens this focus to include self-reflection, relational accountability, and wholistic well-being, aligning with Indigenous approaches to health and education.^{10–12}

In faculty development settings, this orientation could be operationalized through a range of existing educational formats. For example, the *Pedagogy of Peace* may inform leadership retreats or longitudinal faculty leadership programs by structuring reflective exercises around self-in-relation and nurturing a Good Mind. It may also be integrated into Indigenous health, equity, or cultural safety workshops by reframing leadership discussions toward relational accountability and strengths-based action. In mentorship or coaching contexts, the framework offers a shared language for exploring positionality, ethical decision-making, and peace-focused approaches to institutional challenges. These examples illustrate how the *Pedagogy of Peace* can be taken up within familiar faculty development structures while remaining responsive to local context and institutional readiness.

Challenges

Risk of Tokenism

One of the risks in adopting Indigenous frameworks within HPE is the possibility of superficial or symbolic engagement that does not meaningfully shift power or practice. Rather than abandoning such frameworks out of concern for tokenism, the *Pedagogy of Peace* invites leaders to attend to how and where Indigenous knowledge is taken up.

Practical strategies for navigating this tension include embedding Indigenous frameworks within governance structures rather than standalone initiatives, ensuring Indigenous leadership is resourced and decision-making authority is shared, and establishing accountability mechanisms that allow Indigenous partners to assess whether institutional actions align with stated commitments. When approached as an ongoing relational practice rather than a checklist, the risk of tokenism becomes an opportunity for deeper institutional learning.

As Smith notes, decolonizing work requires a transformation of power relations, not simply the addition of Indigenous content.²³

Pan-Indigenization

A further tension arises when Indigenous frameworks are applied without sufficient attention to distinctions among Nations, communities, and territories. Rather than positioning this risk as a reason for inaction, the *Pedagogy of Peace* emphasizes process over prescription.

Leaders can navigate this tension by grounding educational and leadership initiatives in relationships with the Nations on whose lands institutions are located, supporting distinctions-based engagement, and remaining transparent about the specific origins and limits of any framework being used. In this way, the *Pedagogy of Peace* functions not as a universal model to be replicated, but as an invitation to engage ethically with local Indigenous knowledge systems.

As Absolon emphasizes, Indigenous knowledge is local, contextual, and relational.¹⁸

Institutional inertia

HPE systems are historically slow to adapt and often prioritize efficiency and accreditation requirements over structural transformation.²⁴ Within such contexts, incremental and relational strategies may be more effective than wholesale reform. These include identifying early adopters, aligning Indigenous frameworks with existing institutional priorities (such as accreditation, social accountability, or faculty development), and using

pilot initiatives as sites of shared learning. The *Pedagogy of Peace* supports leaders in working within complexity by emphasizing patience, relational trust, and long-term vision rather than immediate transformation.

Capacity and burden

Limited Indigenous faculty capacity is a structural reality within many faculties of medicine.⁹ At the same time, this work is not carried by Indigenous educators alone. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, leaders, and allies are deeply engaged in advancing reconciliation and decolonizing HPE, often through sustained relational work, advocacy, and shared leadership. The *Pedagogy of Peace* affirms the importance of such collective responsibility, while also underscoring the need for institutions to ensure this labour is supported, resourced, and not disproportionately borne by Indigenous faculty.

Practical responses include redistributing reconciliation-related work across leadership teams, recognizing relational and community-engaged labour in promotion and workload models, and investing in mentorship pathways that prepare future Indigenous leaders. In doing so, institutions move from reliance on individual champions toward shared stewardship.

Leadership practices for navigating tensions

The *Pedagogy of Peace* offers an orientation for leadership practice that *emphasizes* slowing decision-making, prioritizing relationships over outcomes, and remaining transparent about limits and uncertainty. Leaders may find this orientation useful when navigating complex institutional environments and approach missteps as opportunities for learning rather than failure. For HPE leaders, this orientation supports ethical action in complex institutional environments where reconciliation work is necessarily imperfect and ongoing.

Balancing the path forward

Realizing these opportunities while navigating associated challenges involves engagement with Indigenous partners through authentic, sustained, and distinctions-based relationships. For many faculties of medicine, this may include committing resources to Indigenous faculty leadership, embedding accountability structures, and attending to how Indigenous epistemologies are lived in daily practice.”

Conclusion

The *Pedagogy of Peace* provides a theoretically grounded and Indigenous-informed framework for reimagining leadership in Canadian HPE. Rooted in Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe teachings, this pedagogy emphasizes relational accountability, balance, and peace-focused solutions as guiding principles for leadership practice.^{10,12,18,23} By situating leadership within the interrelated domains of *knowing*, *understanding*, *doing*, and *honouring*, it expands current models beyond managerial and competency-based approaches toward frameworks that are holistic, strengths-based, and relational. As a conceptual paper grounded in specific Indigenous teachings and institutional contexts, this framework is not intended to be universally transferable but rather to invite thoughtful, context-specific engagement within HPE.

Integrating this pedagogy into established leadership structures—such as CanMEDS,² the AFMC Entrustable Professional Activities,⁸ and the LEADS in a Caring Environment framework^{22,23}—offers a pathway for medical education to advance reconciliation in meaningful ways. Doing so directly addresses the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action* (#23 and #24), which call for increased Indigenous representation in healthcare and the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into health professional education.⁶ Ultimately, the *Pedagogy of Peace* challenges HPE to reconceptualize leadership not as a position of authority, but as a practice of service, reflection, and relational accountability. In contrast to prescribing a single pathway forward, this framework invites HPE leaders to reflect on how peace-focused, relational approaches might inform their own contexts, relationships, and responsibilities. By

articulating leadership as an educational and relational practice, this paper contributes to the HPE literature by offering an Indigenous-informed theoretical framework that informs teaching, learning, faculty development, and institutional governance. By embedding Indigenous epistemologies into leadership development and institutional culture, faculties of medicine can cultivate leaders who are better equipped to guide Canadian HPE toward equity, sustainability, and reconciliation. This is not only an opportunity but also a responsibility for academic medicine in Canada.

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Conflict of Interest:

Dr. Jamaica Cass is the Director of the Queen's-Weeneebayko Health Education Program at Queen's University and serves on the Board of Directors of the Indigenous Physicians' Association of Canada and the Medical Council of Canada. She also chairs the Academic Advisory Council of the National Circle on Indigenous Medical Education and co-chairs Ontario Health's Quality Standards Advisory Committee on Indigenous Health and Cultural Safety. Dr. Lindsay Brant has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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