

*Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage*

## **Teaching Each Other: Nehinuw Concepts & Indigenous Pedagogies**

by Linda M. Goulet and Keith N. Goulet  
Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2014, 248 pages  
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### **Reviewed by/ Revu par**

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Attention to Indigenous education has become more prevalent in Canada, especially since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created in 2008. As a Canadian with European heritage, I was ignorant of the hardship and disturbing abuse experienced by Indigenous populations because of the Residential School system, until the Commission released its findings. I had studied the history of Canada in school, including a summary of the Riel Rebellion, but the repercussions of the negative influence of colonization were never completely clear to me. After all, throughout all of history, it is rare for the group in power to openly discuss the negative actions that they have used to build that power.

So, when I picked up *Teaching Each Other* by Linda and Keith Goulet, I came to the reading with a lot of questions. Why is there such a large population of young Indigenous people who do not finish high school? What are the challenges that this group faces, and why have we not been able to address them? We are now at the precipice of significant social change in our society, and the Goulets provide insight on these and many other questions from both an Indigenous and European perspective. Their method of blending storytelling with theory and practice creates a voice in this book that turns educational theory into a page-turner. I found myself spending hours with this book, re-reading the theories and the teaching framework as presented – something which does not often happen for a book meant to inform teacher training.

Keith and Linda Goulet are a Nehinuw (Cree) policy maker and a Euro-Canadian teacher husband-and-wife team based in Saskatchewan. The duality of their perspectives lends itself well to the writing style of the book, which discusses teaching methods from both world views and how they can contribute to the other's knowledge. Instead of emphasizing the "otherness" of Indigenous learners, the authors discuss the values of the Nehinuw and how their methods of imparting knowledge within their culture can be used to make learning accessible for all learners. The book explores the factors contributing to the challenges that Indigenous students may experience within the Euro-centric education system, and by identifying these colonial

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prejudices within that system, the authors begin to break down the cultural hurdles standing in the way of Indigenous students' success.

The book's introduction gives an overview of the history of Indigenous education in Canada, addressing the deficiencies evident in Indigenous education articulated in the research since 1970. At the heart of these deficiencies is a lack of understanding of Indigenous culture, epistemology, and teaching practices on the part of the Euro-Canadian education leaders. To provide culturally-relevant teaching, one must be aware of the culture itself. Indigenous culture has been repressed throughout the Canadian curriculum, where it is usually presented as ancient history and no longer relevant in today's world. In fact, Indigenous culture is alive and well, and the teaching methods that respect these ways of teaching will make the learning more relevant to Indigenous learners.

Indigenous ways of knowing are threaded throughout the book, which is written in a narrative voice centred on relationships—among children, their families, friends, and Elders. As the authors describe, Elders are key members of Indigenous society who hold the cultural knowledge and values of that society (p. 18). This historical knowledge builds the base for the authors' "Model of Effective Teaching," which highlights the cyclical nature and interconnectedness of the learner, their teacher, and their environment for developing successful Indigenous learners. Contrary to the European model, where the teacher is the holder of knowledge and doles out this knowledge in parcels for the students to understand, Indigenous ways of knowing are learner-centred and encourage exploration, self-awareness, and interconnectedness with the community (p. 20). Elder Ken Goodwill of the Nakoda, as quoted by the authors, saw human development "as learning about your place in this world—finding out who you are in relation to the world, discovering the gifts that you have, developing those gifts to make your contribution to the world, and assuming the responsibility for the use of those gifts" (pp. 77-78). It is this repeated method of discovering that forms the foundation of the authors' teaching framework.

After addressing the overarching social and cultural basis for current stresses on Indigenous learners, the authors delve into their framework through an exploration of Nehinuw cultural values. These values are introduced by their Nehinuw names and the authors make a different foreign language accessible by incorporating a bit of linguistic background for the Cree words. This method of introduction not only makes the words more relevant to the reader, but also points out how important it is to use the words in their original form to fully understand their meaning and connection to the culture—another key theme in this book.

The model is based on four major values: helping and supporting relationships, working together, connecting to the learning process, and connecting to the content. Once the framework is presented in chapter four, the authors use the next four chapters to explore each value in depth. The presentation of the information draws the reader in by connecting them to the content, through stories from teachers currently working with Indigenous learners. Finally, the last two chapters pave the way into the future, discussing how this method of teaching spreads outside of the classroom, and how it is driving further innovation in Indigenous education.

With the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission now formally presented and being incorporated into future educational strategy, *Teaching Each Other* should be made required reading for teacher education programs across the country. The insights of this book give a valuable window into Cree culture and the traditional ways of understanding the world. These values are not only valuable for Indigenous classrooms, but will be useful in any classroom where multiple cultures exist. After all, the ability to identify individual gifts and hone the skills to use those gifts in the world is something that *every* student should learn to do.

### References

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