

Book Review

Learning and Teaching Together: Weaving Indigenous Ways of Knowing into Education

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Tanaka, M. (2017). *Learning and teaching together: Weaving Indigenous ways of knowing into education*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press. 236 pages (paperback), \$34.95CAD

Learning and Teaching Together is an inspiring contribution to Indigenous education scholarship. Through a multi-layered interweaving of perspectives, this text depicts a rich example of what it might look (and feel, and smell, and be) like to immerse pre-service teachers in experiences of Indigenous ways of knowing. Michele Tanaka invites us to join her in a world of culture-based teaching and learning:

Colourful beads, threads, paints, and shell buttons pass through deft fingers. Sounds of laughter, tears, and wondering intermingle with the telling of stories, both joyful and sad. The taste of fresh salmon and berries is infused with the smoke of a fire and the rich, clean scent of cedar as the course participants enter into an indigenous world. (p. 5)

With its emphasis on listening deeply “across cultures” (p. 14), Tanaka’s book vaccinates readers against the temptation to “include” Indigenous perspectives within predetermined Eurocentric structures of teaching and learning in tokenistic, reductive, or instrumentalist ways. Rather, this text reveals ethical and relational possibilities for non-Indigenous educators who seek to walk alongside Indigenous peoples in education. Tanaka calls for teacher education that refuses to simply discuss transformative learning experiences, but instead allows educators to embody and enact a different kind of learning community.

Learning and Teaching Together opens intentionally, leading readers with care into its pages. Tewa scholar Greg Cajete provides a foreword that highlights the significance of Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. Then, preparing readers to travel and to engage with place-based knowledges, the book offers a

SENĆOTEN glossary and guide to pronunciation. This immediate emphasis on Indigenous language, at the forefront of the English text, orients the book toward cross-cultural understanding and invites readers to open up to local ways of knowing.

The book's introduction further develops this grounding in the particular, drawing readers into a place, a time, a circumstance, and a web of relationships. The first few pages introduce readers to "this place, SI,ĆENEN" (p. 3), to the teacher education course that is the focus of the book—"Earth Fibres, Weaving Stories: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World" (p. 3)—and to the interconnected relationships through which the learning and teaching experiences took place. These are intricate, as the course and the author's study both opened up a shared, relational experience between multiple wisdom keepers, faculty members, pre-service teachers, and the earth fibres themselves. Among these participants are Lorna Williams, Wanosts'a7—"Lil'wat scholar and professor emerita, University of Victoria" (p. 3)—and Charlene George, kQwa'ste'not—"T'SOU-KE artist and lead instructor" (4)—who designed the course. Grounding in language, place, relationship, and cultural teachings, this book walks its talk from the very beginning onwards.

In contributing this book on Indigenous ways of teaching and learning, Tanaka positions herself meticulously and reflexively "as a non-Aboriginal woman of mixed European descent" (p. 12) working to remain "rooted in . . . an 'indigenist' worldview" (p. 11). The author stories herself diligently in relation to the work, introducing herself as a researcher who was "able to walk alongside the participants in this course" (p. 7). Rooted also in a sense of responsibility to share what she has learned (p. 13), Tanaka's own self-positioning models the work that non-Indigenous pre-service teachers carried out throughout the course as they engaged with Indigenous ways of knowing in order to expand their understandings as teachers.

Building upon her reflexive self-positioning as the text's author, Tanaka makes space for multiple voices to emerge throughout *Learning and Teaching Together*. "Charlene's melodic voice" (p. 27) welcomes readers to the book through stories and cultural teachings. The voices of wisdom keepers and pre-service teachers are present throughout the book, in dialogue with the author and guiding her understandings. Given her role in developing this course and its related iterations in other years, I personally missed the voice of Lorna Williams in this book (my missing it may have been due to my own oversight). Considering the relational nature of the learning community, I wondered how

Williams' thinking influenced Tanaka's research and why her perspectives were not directly represented in the writing. However, that wondering simply sent me to read more of Williams' and Tanaka's collaborative publications—of which, I was happy to learn, there are several (Tanaka, Williams, Benoit, Duggan, Moir, & Scarrow, 2007; Williams & Tanaka, 2007; Williams, Tanaka, Leik, & Riecken, 2014). Appropriately, the earth fibres and textile pieces from the course also manifest their presence through photographs in each chapter.

In addition to incorporating multiple voices, the text embodies its complex task of interweaving understandings in its structure. As Tanaka explains, “the earth fibres course was rooted in a deeply complex pedagogy. Honouring that complexity required careful attention to framing the findings of the study in a way that reflected their web-like nature” (p. 15). In presenting what emerged through her study, then, Tanaka works through an intricate framework, shaped in relation to cultural teachings shared by wisdom keepers from the course. The result is a compelling journey of understanding that is simultaneously sophisticated and intimate, principled and personal. I found myself reading recursively as Tanaka was “walking the wheel” (p. 20)—I returned to earlier explanations to listen again as I increasingly recognized the depth in what Tanaka had previously shared. It is rare, in my experience, to encounter a book that inspires such attentive revisiting.

As someone who also engages in pre-service teacher education around respecting Indigenous people and perspectives, I found this book inspiring, especially at a time when the pace of change surrounding Indigenous / non-Indigenous relationships can feel very rapid. As I read, my mind would circle out from the text, considering past experiences of and future possibilities for teaching and learning, then return back to the book, soaking up Tanaka's syntheses of what had emerged from the earth fibres course. Each chapter takes up a particular dimension of learning/teaching experiences: from why it matters to trust learners, to the necessity for safe enough spaces, to the nature of dispositional change. Readable and textured, cyclical and patient, generous and insistent, honest and evocative, this book shows how transformative learning can take place when people come together with good minds, hearts, spirits, and hands. I can think of no better way to conclude than to quote the words of Charlene George from early in the book: “My hope for this sharing is that both your great, great grandchildren's grandchildren and my great, great grandchildren's grandchildren live with appreciation of all that holds us up, with all

that sustains us" (p. 37). I hope this book likewise leads many readers into rich, relational, sustaining experiences of learning and teaching together.

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