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INSIGHTS *on* FIRST NATIONS HUMANITIES

JAMES (SÁKÉJ) YOUNGBLOOD HENDERSON

Native Law Centre of Canada, University of Saskatchewan, 101 Diefenbaker Place, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5B8, Canada

■ Abstract

The question of what is humanity and how it is expressed has endless and dynamic answers. My paper is an attempt to construct and explain the answer based on the insights Indigenous humanity expressed in the continent called North America. The four fundamental insights are organised around the concept of creation as ecology, the insights of embodied spirits, the implicate order, and transformation. These complementary insights inform the depth of Indigenous worldview. These insights are replicated and revealed in structure and meaning of Indigenous languages, ceremonies and stories. These cognitive insights suggest a starting point for reflecting about whatever is most significant in Indigenous humanities in curriculum.

■ Introduction

First Nations youth awake in a particular world – not just the natural world and families they inhabit, but the artificial, cognitive realms of the institutions, practices and prejudices that hold sway around them. For better or worse, these cognitive paradigms, institutions and educational systems stand between them and comprehending their place in the natural world and society. The education of the young is the primary way any heritage, society or culture transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes. At the heart of this process is a perspective or set of fundamental assumptions about the relationship of humankind to their environment, which is called humanities. When the traditional education of First Nations children was displaced with education based on cognitive assimilation to the European cultures (Battiste, 1986), their particular worldview and humanities were denied. Almost from the beginning, First Nation elders and parents have attempted to communicate their apprehension with cognitive and cultural assimilation in forced schooling. They have been clear and persistent in calling for a respectful recognition of their worldview and humanities and their principles of love and sharing, while acknowledging the value of learning new skills and knowledge required to participate in the new technologies and economies (Henderson, 2004; Western Canadian Protocol, 2000).

First Nations educators in Canada have continually raised concerns about whose knowledge are centred, included and whose are left out in state-created and required curriculums. They highlight that Indigenous knowledges, the knowledge of First Nations, have been systematically excluded from the required curriculum for a privileged emphasis on European heritages and knowledge systems. Remedying this discriminatory bias in the existing curriculum is necessary. Indigenous humanities, with its oral traditions, symbolic visual and oral traditions, continue to be neglected or treated in a superficial manner. The remedies involve much more than the patchwork of “adding and stirring” First Nations voices or perspectives. These solutions require a fundamental shift in existing educational methodology, pedagogy and our conceptual frameworks.

Any appropriate inclusion of Indigenous humanities in educational curriculum involves learning and reconceptualisation of existing human sciences curriculum. It shifts any lingering residue of Eurocentric thought that “wants everything to come from it”

(Fanon, 1965, p. 63) to a focus on Indigenous thought. This cognitive transformation is crucial: "In working together across difference, the Indigenous humanities acknowledge that we all have a stake in dismantling colonial structures and oppressive singularities while re-imagining and rebuilding practices and institutions and telling stories otherwise" (Findlay, 2003, p. 4). The purpose of such curriculum reform is to have students attain a balance in their lives by exploring, in a personal way, the perspectives of Indigenous humanities, the responsibilities to the ecology and capacity-building to create a shared future.

The questions of what is humanity and how it is expressed in a state-created mandatory curriculum have many answers (Findlay, 2000). In the continent called North America, First Nations humanities of the Indigenous peoples are organised around four insights: the covenants with the Creation, embodied spirits, the implicate order, and dynamic transformations. In this short essay, I will focus on the Algonquian language group, especially the Míkmaq language to illustrate these insights. The Algonquian worldview and language span most of North America from the Atlantic coast to the northwestern coast of California. This vast "langscape" includes the Abenaki, Lenape, Maliseet, Míkmaq, Mohegan, Powhatan, Ojibwa, Arapaho, Blackfoot, Cheyenne (Tsistsistas), Cree and Blackfoot. These complementary insights persist through many variations and inform the depth of most Indigenous humanities in the northern sphere of America. They suggest a starting point for reflecting about whatever is most significant in Indigenous humanities in North America.

■ I. Covenants of Creation

First Nations elders teach that the relationship with a dynamic ecology, family, friends and their vision of humanity were covenants or "gifts" from the Creator. These teachings stretch far back into the animated past. Comprehending and teaching these covenants that inform First Nations humanities is a foundational accomplishment (Battiste, 1997; Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000). The teachings of the First Nations elders establish a holistic comprehension of the Creation. The Creator does not stand above the earth; its sacred force is nature, revealing the spirit realm that sustains the earth. In translation, the interrelated ideas of creation give rise to the idea of the ecological forces of creation. First Nations elders view the forces as vibrant and pervasive sacred forces that exist as life-giving, life-sustaining spirits embedded in the land and resources (Battiste, 1997; Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000). These forces are revealed in the changing cycles of nature and from the embedded spirits or natural forces. The First Nations elders acknowledge the various keepers of the spiritual forces are translated in English to "spirit grandfathers" or "Grandfather Spirits". In other words, First Nations elders comprehend the Creator as the environment.

First Nations elders' translations of the Creator have not always conceived of the unity in the way suggested by Judea-Christian religion as a universal being or transcendent person, and in contrast with the earth and life forms on earth. Typically, this God is talked about as a being, supernatural in power, dwelling outside the earth and invading it periodically to accomplish divine will. Many modern translations of the Creator have converged the idea of God with the Great Spirit. In one of those early interventions, God casts some humans from paradise; the terror of this separateness from nature generates artificial societies according to human consciousness and will. The separation of these humans from nature makes their relations to nature as much a riddle as well a fate. Their ability to reflect on the existence of nature and their separation from it has always been a challenge for them to solve. Thus, to be conscious is to have the experience of being cut off from both God and nature. Their relationship with nature is an incomplete consciousness that labours to overcome the separation from nature and its strangeness. The separated peoples place themselves in an exalted place in nature and species, assuring themselves of their distinctiveness. This creates a manipulative posture with nature, though they must reconcile with it. Their reflective reconciliation humanises their concept of nature and naturalises their concept of humanity and artificial society.

First Nations elders do not view their relations with the Creator or nature in the same way. They have never been separated from either nature or the Creator. The Creator's covenants rest on the belief in a convergence between being, goodness and nature. The Creator's covenants make First Nations people responsible for care of a space – for the land, resources and families. These responsibilities establish the gifted land as sacred and holy (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000, p. 10). The elders maintain the Earth Lodge (land) belongs to their people and the people belong to the Earth lodge (Cardinal & Hildebrant, 2000, p. 10). This relationship informs the First Nations vision of humanity.

These covenants are expressed in the various languages revealing the forces and bounty of the natural environment. For example, in Cree humanities, the covenant is said to be between the *Manitou* (Creator) and *Atayohkaw* (Spirit Power) gifted land and responsibilities to them. Cree knowledge captures this gift in the concept of *ka-miyikosiyahk* translated as "what is given to us by the powers". The Cree describe themselves as people made healthy by the land (*Iyiniwak*). Willie Ermine characterised the creative ability to tap into the live forces that unite the covenant as *mahmâtawisowin* (Ermine, 1995). The *Saulteaux* version of *Anisbnâbê* (translated as "the first people that came down for creation") jurisprudence represents the covenant in similar ways. The Lakota, Assiniboine (or *Anina ombi*, translated as "the people who go around silently"), Nakota (said to be an

Assiniboine term designation another First Nations) (*Ibanke-Towan*), Stonies (*Hobe*), and Dakota (*Isanyeti*) humanities represents the covenant with the land and resources as “living, nourishing”, they do not view any part as “inanimate”. The unity of the Creator’s gifts is revealed through cooperative interrelations between the environment and the First Nations. Among the allied Denendeh (*Athapasian*), the covenant is embodied in the term *Denendeh* which means “the Creator’s Spirit flows through this Land”. Dene knowledge represent this teaching with the concepts that “the land is the blood of the people” is the conscious being from which the Dene are called to learn the Creator’s will.

The First Nations elders’ idea of the gifts or covenants creates and shares a belief that people must live in respectful, harmonious relationships with the ecology, with one another, and with themselves. The covenants are expressed in unique ways with its own language, knowledge, ceremonies, practices and products and knowledge. This challenge extends to the education of each generation as well, and it is the task of First Nation humanities. Because the covenants express humanities and ecological relationships, which are embedded in the structure and substance of Aboriginal languages, the key teachings are revealed in kinship (respect in relationships), ecological relationships, protocol (conduct in ceremonies and social interaction), healing (personal habits and practice in relation to health and spiritual gifts), helpfulness (roles and conduct; earning the right to knowledge) and oral tradition (expression of knowledge, its forms and integrity) (Western Canada Protocol, 2000).

The foundational concept of the covenant in Indigenous humanities is shared with Eurocentrism, in different forms. The Bible holds that the covenantal relationship with God and humans is considered the only proper foundation for human organisation. The Sinai covenant establishes finally God’s kingship over Israel and the partnership between God and Israel in *tikkun olam* (the repair of the universe). The New Testament relied on covenant concepts in church discipline and hierarchical organisation. In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation developed a new theology of covenant in a return to the covenantal thinking as the common law or the law written on the hearts of humans in the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689. In the eighteenth century, the European Enlightenment applied the idea of covenant among peoples, establishing the foundation of the political concepts of the rule of law, constitutionalism, federalism, democracy and decolonisation.

■ 2. Embodied spirits

Central to the Indigenous humanities is the insight that all life is embedded and endowed with the interconnected spiritual gifts and blessings from the creative forces of life. These spiritual forces are gifts

intended to enhance livelihoods rather than threaten them. All elements of nature – wind, water, land, plants, animals and humans – contain interdependent embodied spirits, rather than a spirit in a body. They animate the supporting capacity of life. These spirits and embodied forms are not seen as natural resources, they are seen as a sacred life-sustaining force. All the spirits and forms are vulnerable to change, but they are not isolated. Changes in any life form affects all the other life forms.

These spirits can be apprehended in diverse forms. The various forces of creation blessed each people, plant and stone with a language to communicate to them and to each other. They blessed each life form with the ability to find meaning in every embodied spirit of the ecology that was around them. The people were taught how to live, to respect the ecology and its embodied spirits, and to comprehend the Creator’s law and spiritual traditions. The teachings include the ability to develop a keen mind, hearing, alert and discerning faculties, comprehending, the inner capacity of respect and kindness, a sense of personal initiatives, and an inner sense and ability to be helpful. The presence of life-giving and live-sustaining forces are viewed as evidence of the forces of love, caring, respect, gentleness, kindness and fairness embedded in all life-forms.

These teachings are embedded within the diverse Indigenous languages. They reveal a deeply held spirituality based on embodied spirits. The Algonquian worldview and language holds the invisible forces or spirits embedded in life-forms as described by the sounds *mntu*, *manidoo*, *manito*, *manitu* or *manitou*. They view the unseen spirits as part of their consciousness and the environment they live in; they view the realms of spirit as eternal, but in a continuous state of transformation. This insight is consistent with the modern scientific view that all matter can be seen as energy, shaping itself to particular patterns. *Mntu* reveals the processes that mediate between humans and the natural ecological order (not between the natural and the supernatural). *Mntu* links the awareness of embodied spirits to consciousness, transforming sight, sounds and silences into meaning. *Mntu* gives vitality in the ecological order, and in the animate embedded powers, forces or spirits. The embodied spirits create a sense of place that provides the people with the necessities of life. Each of the manifestations of *mntu* are related to each other in a special way: the most common analogy is a quality exhibiting the characteristics of electromagnetic force – that is, a force or energy derived essentially from an invisible source. *Mntu* could better be described as a verb in English; it is an essential force of an ever-transforming cycle of change, rather than a noun.

First Nations humanities view each person as being born sacred and complete. The embodied spirits give each person the gift of body with the choice to care for

it and use it with respect. They give each person the capacity and the choice to learn to live in respectful relationships. The embodied spirits give each person the strengths to be discovered, nurtured and share the embedded talents and gifts for the benefit of all. Most of the First Nations teachings do not believe in a single spirit or soul. They believe in a matrix of spirits. The Mikmaq are aware of three generalised embodied spirits (or in English “souls” or “anima” in Latin) and processes. The language of Lakota, which is distinct from the Algonquian languages, speaks of four aspects of spirit: *sicun, tun, ni, nagi*. They identify them as the embodied *life spirits* (or seat of life), the related guardian spirit (or *external soul*), and the ecological spirits (or *free-soul*).

The embodied life spirits (*wijaqami* – *wji* represents the personal, *jaq* represents mirror image, and *mij* represents an alive, animate force) are the functional and emanating spirits within an object; conceptualised as being located in the human heart, it is the seat of will (to use a Eurocentric concept) and experiences love, pleasure and passions. It is responsible for the vital manifestations of the object, the heart of the object. It is important to comprehend that the life soul is the seat of the Mikmaq language, which is a language of the heart, the space where relationships are sustained. Each part of the body has a unique embedded life soul or *ntinin*. The Tsistsitas represent the guardian spirits of plants and animals as *nisimon*; they kept the spirit lodges (*nisimatozom*), and to the keepers of these people were given the sacred arrows (*nimabenan*). In Cree, this force was present in all living things and was called “*abtca-k*”. These spirits are particular; for example, pulse-spirits, heart-spirits, stomach-spirits, bone-spirits, head-spirits, and breath-spirits or language-spirits.

First Nations elders teach that the life soul passes through different existences. Each life form begins with a potential for being, and this soul is transformed at birth into an interdependent essence encoded in the form; this soul continuously gains allies as it develops, and continues after death as a potentiality again. They interpret their existence within the thought that all people must be balanced: strong and weak, happy and angry, physical and spiritual. Balanced consciousness creates the best possible human beings. These spirits are capable of traveling outside the body for brief periods. During a vision, for example, these spirits could leave the body and travel about with the guardian spirits. If the spirits remain separate too long the person will go insane or the organ will cease to function. Some sicknesses are understood as a condition in which the soul is unable to return to the body. An insane mind has lost its life soul and therefore has no longer the ability to comprehend. After death of a body, these spirits remain for four to eight days, then traversed toward the Milky Way, and ultimately entered the land of the dead. Although these disembodied spirits have

the capacity to return to Earth Lodge on occasion, especially during the ceremony, they did not usually appear in visions nor were they able to bestow power on people.

In Mikmaq language, the related guardian spirits or external soul (*mimajuaqen*) organises the guardian spirits that protect the embodied life soul in the body. These *mntu* are viewed as functioning within a body, working in the mind or brain instead of their heart. The external soul is the “eyes” of the Mikmaq, the forces that allow them to awaken and become perception and knowledge. These forces give intelligence, allow Mikmaq to perceive them and talk to other *mntu*, to contemplate and to remember, and to establish relationships and alliances with other forms. Thus they are called “actually life”. These spirits are personal, not supernatural, but more indefinite than the life spirits. Every once in a while, a human is allowed to view the external spirits, which is seen in the same appearance as the body. The guardian spirits communicate silently with human consciousness. They are said to be informing or making one aware of other forces and things. For example, when you meet another Mikmaq, you must always address his existence before he passes you; this respects his guardian spirits as well as his life spirits. Your spirits must acknowledge another’s spirits. If you want to argue with another Mikmaq, you must not do so until your guardian spirits continue on their way. Your body and life souls can disagree, but such disagreements will pass quickly if your guardian spirits are not affected. In Cree, when a spirit power appeared to an individual in a vision, it became that person’s *pawakan*, a guardian or spirit helper. The power did not guard and protect against all contingencies, but rather aided the person in definite, prescribed situations. When a spirit power revealed itself, it enumerated to the visionary the blessings to be gifted upon him, and the capacity he might accomplish with its cooperation. Occasionally, the guardian spirits may conflict, one spirit wishing to cooperate with the life soul and body, the other with the ecological spirits. Such conflicting desires or doubts are viewed as creating discomfort in the soul and disease in the body. Sometimes such conflicts are seen as *puoin’s* (power spirit) work, but most often as caused by bad conduct – the life soul and guardian spirits have left the body and moved a distance away from him, so that he consists only of body. Correct behaviour or ceremonies can loosen the ecological spirits and return the life soul, but not always the guardian spirits.

The ecological spirits (*ski-te’kwj*) are composed of spirits active outside of, in an indifferent but reciprocal relationship to, the person, animal or life form. These spirits give people the ability to work mutually with and construct respectful relations with the embodied spirits of an ecological space. First Nations do not know all the embodied spirits of the wind, water, rocks, plants

and animals. Yet they are understood as belonging to the same animate spirits. The ecological spirits are infinitely greater than those embodied spirits of the Earth Lodge, and are a source of awe and entreaty for assistance. This worldview is similar to, if not the same as, the phenomenon designated *nagualism* of Central and South America First Nations. Since all objects have embodied spirits, and spirit is synonymous with dignity, every life form has to be given respect for its dignity. Therefore, First Nation people believe all life forms and embodied spirits must be respected, and this respect requires a special consciousness which discourages carelessness about things. All form decays according to a pattern, but the *mntu* are renewable.

These embodied spirits generate the structure of the many languages of the First Nations. Its unifying purpose and structure are different from modern English. Algonquian and English have developed systems of meaning isolated from each other. The conceptual structure underlying each language is distinct. These two language systems construct meaning and package information in distinct ways. The speaking or writing of the language families does not parallel each other. Each language differs in the way "reality" (whatever that means) is segmented into sounds or words. Algonquian languages are cultures of sound, rather than words as is English. English tends to have one or two ideas per word. Algonquian languages tend to wrap up their insights into sound, with each sound conveying meaning that gives many layers of comprehending. These aspects animate multilayers of meaning, called in English linguistic disciplines and characterised as "verb stems" or "root" and "inflectional prefixes and suffixes". The verb stem sound creates the motion, appearances or configuration; the prefix relates the context of the appearance between the verb stem and the suffix, while the suffix relates the process involved. These patterns translating insights about embodied spirits into ideas into words. It represents the structure of the embodied spirits as well as modern understanding of quantum mechanics. The use of verbs rather than noun subjects and objects is important: it means that there are very few fixed and rigid separate objects in the First Nation worldviews.

First Nations language and thought attempts to learn from being part of a complementary relationship with realms of spirit, to experience the beauty and creativity, and to release such inspirations back to where they came from without fear of loss. What the sounds of the language contain is the great flux, eternal transformation, and an interconnected order of time, space and events. With this fluidity of verb phrases, every speaker can create new vocabulary "on the fly", custom-tailored to meet the experience of the moment, to express the very finest nuances of meanings. These languages have not developed a method to explain the forces or change them, merely to contain or express them. This is the vital context of their humanity. These

languages represent a realm formed out of spiritual dignity, which they comprehend and act out. Through unique word-endings, the language divides the world into the animate (breathing) and the inanimate (non-breathing), or what is intrinsically respected and not. In English this process or experience can be described as the implicate order.

Similarly the idea of embodied spirits generates the structure of the symbolic literacy and visual arts. The symbolic literacy is animated by rock drawing (petroglyphs), totemic symbols, medicine wheels, birchbark scrolls, medicine or legends painting, grave posts, prairie glyphstones and totem poles. Each form promotes a specific set of memories about embodied spirits to consciousness of subtle, multilayered meanings. Among the Algonquian people, its visual art is a rich and imaginative link between embodied spirits to the tangible. Contemporary First Nations visual art is a vital continuation of their oldest cultural tradition. The embodied spirits as represented in double-curved designs of the Míkmaq reflect the Eurocentric view of the world as a whole completely mirrored in each of its parts (*jaq*); the "x-ray" vision of Ojibwa art of Noral Morrisseau, and Daphne Odjig, the art of Tom Chee Chee, the Huichol yarn painting, and the art of the Northwest Coast. The embodied spirits animate in basketry, beadwork, textiles, clothing and pottery. The embodied spirits generate the performing arts of the ceremonies as well as dress and dances of the modern fora of the "powwow", where any part enfolds or encapsulates the force of the spirits.

The modern Eurocentric concept of the relation to thought to nature denies the idea of embodied spirits. It asserts that the human consciousness or ideology determines what is to count as reality or fact and how they can be distinguished from one another. Thinking and language, rather than *mntu*, create categories, which offer no assurances that the classification corresponds to anything in the world. This creates not only an incoherence, but also a bias in the teaching of human science in the required educational systems.

■ 3. The implicate order

The holistic comprehending of the Creation's covenants and the embodied spirits reveals the concept of the implicate order in Indigenous humanities. This order is constructed on learning the spiraling comprehension of kinship and relationships and the implicit interpretation of the Earth Lodge. First Nations humanities have various expressions for implicate order. Algonquian language speakers express the vastness of the realm of spirit; they use the sound of *Ji* or *Gichi*. Algonquian sounds express the implicate order in terms of being and becoming, such as *Niskam* (Míkmaq) or *Gichi-manidoo* (Ojibwewin-Ikidowinan) or *Ma'ura* (Winnebago) or *mábeá* (Tsistsistas) or *ktece manito* (Cree). The Lakota use the sound of *wakan*

tanka. In Lakota thought, *wakan* represents sacred and *tanka* translates as vast or great; thus *wakan tanka* symbolises the implicate processes of all that is sacred in the universe. The sounds can be used to describe at least 16 different animate realms or forces, but they are all linked together as one. Christian missionaries and European ethnologists had incorrectly interpreted *wakan tanka* as a Noun God – “the Great Spirit”, which is an imposition of Eurocentric thought on Indigenous thoughts. The Hopis refer to the realm as “Mighty Something” (*a’ne bimú*), said to be the realm of soft, unmanifested essence as opposed to hard manifest forms.

These realms can be glimpsed or entered in many ways – sometimes it just happens, other times it must be sought out. Most prayers and ceremonies address the creative ecological spirits of the implicate order, however, these spirits are never personalised. While the ecological spirits regulate all the phenomena, these powers seldom directly appear in visions. First Nations conceive of them as being too great, too awesome, to be asked directly for blessing. The keepers of the implicate order or intermediary spirits (in Cree, *watayobkanak*) which were embodied in every life form, reconcile the ecological realm of spirits and the embodied life and guardian spirits. Usually a keeper of the realm gives seekers a lifelong spiritual guardian, or totem. Often the vision of this realm is best expressed by rhythm – a song or chant – which ambiguously shares meanings equally and enigmatically; such a song can open a protected space between thoughts, often referred to as memory. In visual art, these relations generate the totemic identity represented by totem poles – or in Ojibwa *dodaim* (residence of family) – with the vast First Nations confederacies and nations. Totemic identity is usually an inheritance from their mother or occasionally the father as well as matter of vision or choice. The totemic identities created the kinship and relational bonds of First Nations society and the forces of the environment.

The covenants and learning spirals that exist in the implicate order are reflected in the ecologies of the Earth Lodge (*maqmike’wi’kam*). This is often simply called “nature” in English, or ecology in biological thought, but it is a very difficult concept in Míkmaq thought, perhaps best expressed as *niskam melkiko’tim* (the Creator’s land). Generally, these covenants of the Earth Lodge speak of four realms: the realm made of light, the realm of water, the realm of dry land, and the realm made of darkness. They reveal that creation of the Earth Lodge was an elaborate and dynamic tapestry based on cooperation of the life forms to generate the earth. The teachings stress the necessity of collaboration and relationship in creative forces. They link the cooperation of these forces of the sky people, father sky, sky woman, mother earth, earth diver, earthmaker, water, sun and the twins in the stories of creation. They stress the cooperation of

animals such as the water beetles, geese, buzzers, water beetle, muskrat, turtle, coyote, bear, raven, spider and turtle in stories recounting the origin of a tribe. The teachings of creation stories signify the meaning and value of cooperation and alliance in enfolding the animating forces of the implicate order in contingent and transformational harmonies.

Most First Nations comprehend how limited their knowledge is about this intimate realm of the implicate order. The First Nation idea of the implicate order capable of being perceived by the human mind is assumed to be inconsistent with the modern idea of science and its study of “nature”. The modern Eurocentric concept of nature and science denies the implicate order. The modern idea of science and nature is united on the foundation that there are no unchanging intelligible essences. The scientific approach is based on fragmentation of nature, based on categories developed and constructed from the language and human imagination, rather than direct appeal to nature. It is construction of the assumption that ideologies created by reason is universal and fact (or desires) creates the particular – this created the distinction between the universal and the particular. It is built on the belief that ultimately the scientific mind can make rational choice among conflicting paradigms and theories about the universe.

■ 4. The flux: Dynamic transformations

Indigenous consciousness and humanities is preoccupied with the forces of the land of the living, the Earth Lodge, which is monitored by the implicate order. The Earth Lodge manifests the various transformations or flux of the realms of spirit – it has always been a place where forms dissolve and flow into everything else, a realm characterised by its transformations – the changing of forms and shapes – known through observations. All aspects of existence in the Earth Lodge merge in an ongoing, indivisible process – a realm fragile yet resilient, delicate yet tough, sacred yet changeable. The air, sea, and land are alive – their rhythms contain the knowledge of the implicate order.

Because of embodied spirits, the flux of the life forms is always capable of overcoming all the conditions or determination of its existence. The spirits are never restricted to any particular embodiment. This generates the fourth insight of Indigenous humanities: dynamic transformations, the continual rearrangement of the mysteries, the restructuring of the realms of embodied spirits. In First Nations humanities, this flux is often translated as the law of circular inaction and represented through teachings, ceremonies, rituals, prayers, stories, songs, dances, arts, symbols and everyday activities. The flux created the quest for harmony and adequacy in an ecological space. These transformations represent dynamic inclusion; they have no temporal dimension.

In its continual flow, the Earth Lodge has always had many ways for First Nations to comprehend the converging flux. First Nations peoples study the transformation and interactions; they learned by being taught by the embodied spirits and life forms. They study the behaviour of all animal life, the seasonal changes in plant life, and irregularities of the ecosystem to give them insights into the transformation and cycles. They learn how to respect, merge with, and adapt to the transformations with as little disturbance as possible. This learning is guided by an inherent desire for wholeness. Wholeness of the implicate order is expressed by a desire for completeness and perfection that can never be wholly satisfied. Yet, wholeness is prohibited from the conditional character of the flux, the nature of false awareness, and the contingent comprehending of life.

Their knowledge is not a description of reality, but of some perceptions about the nature of change, the ever-changing insights about patterns or styles of the flux. Concepts about "what is" define a human awareness of the changes, but add little to the actual processes. To see a configuration as permanent is to be confused about everything – the First Nations alternative is to comprehend the need for creating temporary harmonies through alliances and relationships among all forms and forces. Comprehending these processes is a never-ending source of wonder to the Indigenous mind and to other forces that contribute to the harmony. The energy or forces of an ecology are transformative. The transformative is not outside of each other, but is intimate, interactional and total. This fourth insight generates the structures of the animate-centered First Nations languages, the oral traditions, and stories. Like the structure of First Nations languages, the oral tradition responds to the dynamic transformation of the Earth Lodge. This energetic method is used to transmit Indigenous humanities and its knowledge of the flux to the new generations. This tradition is not about a fixed or recorded body of stories retained from the First Nations "past". It is a relationship, with each performance contains many levels of communications. The listener is part of the event too, and is expected to think about and interpret messages in the story. Oral tradition does not spell out everything a listener needs to know, but rather makes the listener think about ordinary experiences in new, implied ways. These shared responsibilities inform and nourish an interrelated "community of being", which the Cree language characterises as "connecting through speaking" (*anisko-atobtamoik*).

Elders and knowledge keepers state and restate four themes of importance to oral traditions within the Indigenous humanities. First, they stress the continuing importance of Indigenous languages and the structure of sounds, both words and songs. The oral tradition continues to provide guidelines for the present and it lays a foundation for thinking about the present

and future, as constructed by the European language. Second, they stress the continuing importance of the visible material heritage, performance and visual arts. Ceremonial dress and arts and performance have an ongoing role in reproducing comprehending Indigenous humanities. Each part of ceremonial dress enfolds the ecology. Third, the elders caution that oral traditions of Indigenous humanities cannot be "made up", it must be attached to a comprehending of embodied spirits and the implicate order. They must represent a deep comprehending of the teaching of those who explore this source of knowledge and heritage. Fourth, the elders declare the oral traditions include everyone. No performance or retelling is perfect. Neither knowledgeable elders nor written texts close off the circulation of Indigenous humanities in First Nations. The key to comprehending the oral tradition is to study the performance and the stories, without looking through it or around or behind it. What people say is intimately involved with how they say it. Embedded meanings are dynamic and contradictory as embedded spirits and the learning spirals are not fixed.

These themes are concerned with comprehending how Indigenous humanities are constructed and with a comprehending of how "truthing" gets constructed. Within First Nations humanities the oral traditions reflect a way to learn and cope with a world riddled with change and contradiction. These insights of the arbitrary nature of everyday life create the omnipresent symbolism of the trickster in First Nations humanities. These stories have been widely reduplicated about by Eurocentric authors, but not from a deep understanding as from a First Nations perspective. The Eurocentric understanding of the trickster stories is an extension of the Enlightenment, Romantic and Gestalt idea of imagination as a faculty that allows humans to be attentive to the organic wholeness of complex beings.

The First Nations understand the trickster stories as unraveling teaching about the mysterious forces of dynamic transformation and transposition in terrestrial consciousness. All sensory perception progresses from imitation to betrayal, but reveals the fluidity of embodied spirits. They regenerate the competing and conflicting forces in the Earth Lodge, the reality of the holistic contingent as an implicate order, which is revealed in the structure of languages that can be reconstituted based on feelings. The trickster stories represent a spirit helper who can readjust the mysterious transformation. These stories attempt to make sense of the implicate order through the use of the trickster, as embodied spiritual forces that reveal how in consciousness everything seems to be other than what it is and everything might be other than what it is. The stories about trickster reveal the error of mistaking the contingent for the necessary and the transitory for the eternal. The contingent is revealed in our conception of a reality that is vulnerable to transformations. Critical humor

is the intimate key to these stories, including frequent teasing, outrageous punning, surprising association, extreme subtlety, layered and serious reference, and considerable compassion.

These stories reveal contradictory or irregular behaviour: as charm and cunning, honesty and deception, kindness and mean tricks. Certainty in thought is revealed as forms of deceit, lawlessness, sexuality and death. Most of all, they remind us that, when we are most focused on some well-reasoned plan, we are most blind to the complexity of our own desires. They teach that human spirit and its desires are extremely complex and mutually conflicting. They teach that whenever we try to construct life in a way that ignores this diversity of embodied spirits or prohibits any outward or conscious expression, we set ourselves up for major accidents in which the repressed material returns unrecognised to hinder or even destroy us. It teaches that all consciousness is healthiest when we can balance these many sides and keep them in view, not when we try to be perfect.

Also, these stories teach a deeper linguistic riddle: if the spirits are actually changing in the course of the flux of an ecological order, what is the use of attempting to identify them as nouns or as the same entities at different moments? The stories recognise that if the spirits change in the course of their relationship to the implicate order, a noun-based language would have no way of recognising or identifying them at different transformations as the same and therefore would have no way of knowing that a spirit has changed. The failure to detect these occasions is a failure of insight and recognition. This generates the impossibility to speak about general categories; hence given the nature of noun-based thought and language, impossible to think or speak about the transformations. These insights affirm the verb-based nature of First Nation languages.

■ Conclusion

Indigenous worldviews and humanities stand beyond the boundaries of the education curriculum framework, English language, modern methods of knowing, and theories of learning. Eurocentric thought represents Indigenous humanities as an enigma, within and against existing curriculum. First Nations youth deserve the inclusion of these insights of Indigenous humanities into education curriculum as defining moments in education: it affirms that revitalising Indigenous humanity and languages, which will brighten the hearts of the elders and parents, can ignite the imaginations of our children, and help a new generation of Indigenous youth find their way to a full, responsible and healthful life once more, and guide them to a life of promise, a life of hope.

To establish a fair and inclusive curriculum, this essay then attempts to provisionally translate First

Nations insights of Indigenous humanity into English. By appreciating the four distinct insights of First Nations humanities may permit educators to achieve a facile understanding of the four vectors of Indigenous humanities. The first vector is the distinct dynamic mode of consciousness generated by observation, listening, teachings and experiences rather than a written system of concepts and memorisation. Second, Indigenous humanities are based on states of being and processes (verb-based in English grammar) rather than things (noun-based). Third, Indigenous humanities is generated within dynamic ecological space rather than artificial or of imaginative concepts of the human mind.

Comprehending these three vectors and their implications allows readers to move beyond the solitudes of comparative knowledge and the interpretative manipulations of the existing dark colonial legacy to the fourth vector. This approach foreshadows, but does not establish, the fourth vector of a possible reconciliation between the distinct humanities in educational systems. It rejects the contrived approaches in Eurocentric thought to comprehend Indigenous humanities and its consequential despair this approach generates in First Nations students, by either estrangement or resignation. No-one who has heard the whispered insights of Indigenous humanities will ever surrender to despair, nor will she or he doubt the power and greatness of embodied spirits of the terrestrial consciousness that will one day awaken allies.

My strategy of translations of the insights for educators, however, pays for its solidarity by its narrowness. These prudent, sober, and serious English translations are a simplified, analytical crutch: the crutch is provisional; it should to be cast off as soon as they are comprehended in Indigenous languages, since they are translated imitations of First Nations thought. They should eventually be replaced with deep knowledge of First Nations humanities in their languages, which are always the best medium for comprehending the First Nations concepts. This educational strategy anticipates a comprehension of First Nations humanities that cannot yet make fully comprehensible in the structure of English language and thought. It invokes the elements of a system of thought that can only be formulated by mature and reflective speakers of both languages, who comprehend the comparable cultural, linguistic, and legal concepts of humanity and society embedded in both languages.

Awareness of the nature of the fragile crutch provided is another step in comprehending Indigenous knowledge. Otherwise, readers can easily delude themselves into thinking that they are masters of a translated mystery rather than comprehending Indigenous humanities itself. This delusion prevents deeper comprehending of First Nations thought and explanation to which they should aspire, and which

must constitute the cornerstone of comprehending First Nations humanities. Deep comprehending of First Nation humanities are found in the structure and spirit of First Nations languages. The second International Decade of World's Indigenous People presents educators with a unique opportunity to establish respect of the Indigenous humanities and develop the four vectors toward a respected reconciliation of Indigenous with state-enforced curriculum.

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■ About the author

James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson IPC is Professor and Research Director of the Native Law Centre of Canada at the University of Saskatchewan. Born to the Bear Clan of the Chickasaw Nation and Cheyenne (Tsistsistas) Tribe in Oklahoma, he is co-author of *Aboriginal tenure in the constitution of Canada* (2000), co-author of *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage* (2000), and author of *Mikmaq society v. Canada in UN Human Rights Committee* (2005). He is working on two books: *Indigenous jurisprudence* and *Aboriginal rights and Treaty rights in the constitution of Canada*. He is considered a leading legal elder; he was awarded the Indigenous Peoples Counsel (2005) and the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Law and Justice (2006). A noted international human rights lawyer and an authority on protecting Indigenous heritage, knowledge and culture, he is a member of the Sectoral Commission on Culture, Communication and Information of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and Experts Advisory Group on International Cultural Diversity.

