

Two-Eyed Seeing as a Potential Way Forward in Art Education: Bringing Indigenous Knowledges Alongside Western Knowledges in the Classroom

Razieh Alba, University of Calgary

The future of education is not without its challenges, as on the one hand there is a significant call for decolonization of curricula—and on the other, a high level of fear and discomfort among educators who are asked to teach outside of their own comfort zones (Barkaskas & Gladwin, 2021; Carroll et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2018; Scott & Gani, 2018). One area in particular in the Canadian education system that has gained significant traction in recent years is the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges alongside Western knowledges in the classroom (Mawere, 2015; Wilson et al., 2019). This Two-Eyed Seeing (TES) approach is the concept of seeing the world through Indigenous ways of knowing with one eye, and Western ways of knowing with the other, so that the individual can bring those two ways of knowing together to see the world through both philosophies (Hatcher et al., 2009; Jeffrey et al., 2021). By bringing Indigenous and Western knowledges alongside one another, and engaging in both knowledge systems as equally valid and important sources of knowledge generation, educators can provide students with tools to see the world in multiple perspectives, challenge dominant Eurocentric narratives, and have access to a richer and more diverse art discourse with the aim of validating the lived experiences and knowledges of Indigenous peoples, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and socially conscious art education.

Two-Eyed Seeing

As a non-Indigenous educator who was raised between two distinctly different Persian and Western worldviews, I have a firsthand understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and potential benefits of bringing multiple ways of knowing into the classroom. As we move further towards globalization, it is not uncommon to find a wide variety of students who already have first-hand experiences with learning to see the world through multiple lenses. Two-Eyed Seeing specifically focused on the inclusion of Indigenous and Western ways of knowing could be brought into the classroom as a way to balance how educators approach engagement with each knowledge system. The concept of TES began as a grassroots effort to encourage Mi'kmaq university students of Eskasoni First Nation, to pursue education in the sciences at Cape Breton University (Bartlett et al., 2012; Jeffrey et al., 2021). As Elder Marshall explained, “the concentration on the common ground between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing does not mean that one does not have to relinquish either position but can come to understand the elements of both” (Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 146). Through this, TES sets out to, respectfully and intentionally, bridge together the unique ways of knowing (Hatcher et al., 2009).

The foundation of TES is focused on not only mutual respect between both Indigenous and Western communities, but demands that positive relationships be built between individuals from both communities (Jeffery et al., 2021). In a study by Johnson et al. (2023), the authors found that “research that weaves ways of knowing must not be approached with a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, but instead should emphasize relationship building, continuous engagement, and ethical practices” (p. 452). To successfully take part in Indigenous-based research using TES, there must be collaboration among communities, the dissemination of knowledge to benefit both

Indigenous and Western groups, and the continuation of the relationships that have been built once the research has concluded (Jeffery et al., 2021).

Opportunities and Challenges of Two-Eyed Seeing

There are direct benefits from balancing different worldviews together. Through TES, individuals can learn to see the world through multiple perspectives and knowledge systems and build deeper connections to other worldviews (Aoki, 1983; Hatcher et al., 2009). Seeing the world through more than one worldview is of particular benefit for individuals who find themselves between two or more cultures, as learning to see the world through more than one way of knowing can allow the individual to better understand their own lived experiences (Aoki, 1983). By viewing the world through only a single Western ontology, the power structures introduced through colonization remain in place (Schelly et al., 2021).

While TES is “sometimes presented in a straightforward way of considering two knowledge systems in tandem—with the positive result of a more wholistic understanding of the world in which we all live—the project is, very often and quite understandably, very far from straightforward” (Broadhead & Howard, 2021 p. 112). Elder Marshall believed that TES was a natural and inherent concept among most Indigenous people, developed through Indigenous histories of hunting and gathering where survival depended on seeing the world from other perspectives (Broadhead & Howard, 2021). When engaging with TES among non-Indigenous people from a Western perspective, TES can provide an opportunity for the Western eye to “look at itself—and the world around it—afresh” (Broadhead & Howard, 2021 p. 112) and offer an opportunity to learn from the First Peoples of this land. This approach of providing a space for the Western eye to reflect on itself is not commonly sought out, and the typical approach for TES often focuses on avoiding confrontation between the two ways of knowing (Broadhead & Howard, 2021).

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Given the tensions that arise with cultural clashes and the subsequent anxieties faced by educators, art education may be an ideal space to explore different worldviews in a way that is respectful and centred around learning to see the world through different ways of knowing (Carrol et al., 2020; Conrad, 2022; Hatcher et al., 2009). One way to engage in transformative learning through TES is through the arts, which can be used as a way for learners to reflect and “develop various connection that make the education personally meaningful to the student” (Hatcher et al., 2009, p. 149). Art education can provide students with a safe space to explore not only their own lived experiences, but a way to include “hidden lessons about culture, identity, history, politics, and social dynamics that impact how students interpret the world around them” (Oberhofer, 2020, p. 48). A byproduct of the engagement in the arts is to create safe spaces where people from different communities and backgrounds can come together to create strong interpersonal bonds (Rugg et al., 2021). As Hand (2019) wrote, “concepts like trust, wellbeing, belonging, and collective efficacy are increasingly valued by those working in communities and are understood intuitively to be the domain of artists and culture bearers” (p. 153). When seeking to build trust with Indigenous communities and strengthen interpersonal relationships between educators and non-Indigenous researchers, art-based research provides the foundational needs of

relationship building through those underlying qualities of trust, belonging, wellbeing, and collective efficacy (Hand, 2019).

An added benefit is that seeking to engage with Indigenous artistic practices and ways of knowing in the classroom provides a method of sharing generations of artistic and cultural practice with a wider community as a way to revitalize Indigenous knowledges (DuPre, 2019). Art education as a vehicle for TES in the classroom may allow for the approach to be taught in a space where art practitioners are already comfortable viewing the world through different philosophies throughout the artistic creation process. In terms of using Art Education as a space for broaching decolonization and the bringing together of Indigenous and Western ways of knowing in the classroom, the artistic creation process itself has the ability to allow artists to work through their own experiences, or the shared collective experiences of their communities, and to use those perspectives as a way to better understand the world around them and their own place in it through creative outlets (Mutch & Latai, 2019; Stevens et al., 2018).

Through the artistic creation process, individuals can explore their own experiences through both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing to explore their connection to stories, people, and places (Smith et al., 2023). The artistic creation process can be defined as the series of thought processes and actions an artist engages in, which lead to an original production of artistic work (Botella et al., 2018). This process takes place on both macro and micro levels, where the macro level is the overarching stages of an artistic project, and the micro level is the thought processes that underpin the creation of the work and its mechanisms (Botella et al., 2018). The use of storytelling in the classroom, in particular, functions as a way to explore larger narratives shared among Indigenous and Western ways of knowing, while allowing students to examine their own personal lived experiences and their experiences in bringing together Indigenous and Western ways of knowing through TES (Kovach, 2021).

Practical Implications for Educators: Relationship Building

There are a series of considerations that must be made before an educator can, or should, begin the journey of bringing Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing into the classroom alongside Western ways of knowing. TES becomes complex in practice, as educators must navigate between the existing hierarchies between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and histories, as well as navigate historical and generational trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples (Smith et al., 2023). As Smith et al. (2023) explained, the aim of TES is to bring people together, developing reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities and community members, as well as with Indigenous academic researchers. This can be daunting for non-Indigenous educators just starting out, and a smaller first step may be to begin exposing oneself to Indigenous literatures and Indigenous voices in and out of the classroom.

In my own classrooms, and having learned from mentors and instructors who have carefully set about creating inclusive spaces, incorporating Indigenous literatures is a strong first step. Indigenous literatures can consist of a wide variety of media—from books and articles written by Indigenous authors, oral stories and Indigenous music online, graphic novels, and adding Indigenous content creators to your social media accounts. Learning about the land from local and historical Indigenous perspectives, becoming acquainted with the traditional territories, and making a conscious effort to create your own personalized territorial/land acknowledgements and integrate these into your classroom based on what you have learned. Bringing Indigenous literatures and Indigenous voices alongside western knowledges in the

classroom, and being mindful of how these voices are presented and discussed in the classroom can also be a step towards creating an environment that could foster TES approaches. As you become more knowledgeable about Indigenous perspectives and experiences, turning to the next step of developing community may seem a more natural extension of the work you have been doing. Developing relationships should focus on creating authentic, long-term partnerships focused not only on bringing Indigenous voices into the classroom but on developing a framework for knowledge sharing to ensure that knowledge is being shared in both directions (Kovach, 2021; Smith et al., 2023). Without creating and maintaining relationships, there is a high risk of creating an environment where knowledge is being extracted from Indigenous communities or community members without reciprocity (Smith et al., 2023).

Two-Eyed Seeing's demand of building strong relationships between Indigenous and Western individuals and communities is grounded in continuous engagement and ongoing dialogue (Jeffrey et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2023). The more investments placed onto relationship building and reciprocity with Indigenous knowledge holders and communities and non-Indigenous educators, the more successful the TES approach becomes (Bardwell & Woller-Skar, 2022). There is heavy responsibility placed on non-Indigenous educators with this approach, and it is one that requires personal growth and a dedication to un-learning Eurocentric, Western views towards Indigenous knowledges and stepping back to take on the role of learner alongside students in the classroom. The partnerships between non-Indigenous educators and Indigenous knowledge holders can assist in creating substantial change within how settler colonial societies decolonize the curriculum to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing, but also show students how to view the world through more than one worldview (Carroll et al., 2020; McKinley, 2020).

Non-Indigenous educators must recognize that a critical element in successfully engaging with Indigenous knowledges in the classroom involves significant work on their part. According to Webb and Mashford-Pringle (2022), successful programs that engage with Indigenous knowledges require relationship building with Indigenous community members, challenging, and confronting personal beliefs, developing classrooms that offer safe spaces for learners, and continuously addressing obstacles that emerge while educators begin to navigate the issues that take place with the process of decolonization. Creating space within the classroom for learners to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing first requires that educators and educational institutions recognize the validity of Indigenous knowledge systems. When educators and institutions seek to bring Indigenous knowledges alongside Western ways of knowing in the classroom, Indigenous ways of knowing must be granted the same depth, respect, and importance that Western knowledges receive (St. Denis, 2011).

Conclusion

The integration of Indigenous knowledges into the post-secondary art education classroom through the framework of TES offers a transformative approach to decolonizing education. This method encourages mutual respect and understanding between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, while fostering an inclusive and diverse learning environment that is built on relationships and reciprocity between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous educators. While there are challenges to bringing Indigenous and Western ways of knowing alongside one another, there are also significant opportunities to be explored in the future. By providing students with the tools to view the world through multiple perspectives, educators can

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challenge the entrenched Eurocentric narratives while also validating Indigenous lived experiences and perspectives. This inclusive model not only enriches artistic discourse and makes room for alternative knowledge systems, but it also has the potential to build stronger, more meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Ultimately, with the goal of contributing to a more socially conscious and equitable society as TES is moved past art education and into other areas of study. As educators embrace the challenges and opportunities of TES, the future of education may embrace diverse ways of knowing, coexisting alongside one another leading to a richer educational landscape.

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