

Exploring Instructor and Student Values Through The Seven Teachings

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Abstract: Exploring instructor values can be done through critical reflection by utilizing the Seven Teachings, a collection of North American indigenous principles, as a tool for exploring philosophies and practice in EFL/ESL settings. Indigenous groups in North America ground many of their beliefs and community practices on the values of humility, truth, wisdom, love, respect, courage and honesty. Using the Seven Teachings can also aid learners in having more awareness into their values. The Teachings present these values with simplicity along with a symbolic animal which can make it a very accessible tool for those who are learning English. Activities using the Seven Teaching with questions for instructors and students will be presented. In addition, the history of Canada's indigenous people's with an outsider educational system will be discussed as an example of the power such systems can potentially have on the learners. Having a deeper understanding of how an instructor's values are embodied within their philosophy and practice could potentially provide the instructor with more sensitivity to their learners.

Keywords: *critical reflection, teacher education and development, indigenous people, First Nations, The Seven Teachings*

1. Introduction

This paper will present a method for reflection on instructor and student values in the ESL and EFL environment through the Seven Teachings, a tool used by North American indigenous groups. The Seven Teachings' principles of love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility and truth can enable those in English-language learning to engage in critical reflection and have meaningful dialogue about the ways their values guide their actions. This can enable the instructors, and in turn their students to deepen their understanding of how their values are expressed through the multiple roles that they inhabit. By giving voice to one's values, a greater awareness of philosophies and practices both inside and outside of the English language-learning classroom can be gained. First, the importance of examining instructor values in an ESL/EFL context will be presented and the history of Canada's indigenous people and an outside European educational system will be explained. Then the relevance of being sensitive to the English-language learners' needs will also be considered in relation to Canada's indigenous people. Next the Seven Teachings' values, symbolic animals and practice will be explored. To conclude, activities for instructors and students' reflection of values

using the Seven Teachings will be discussed.

2. Reflection and English Language Teaching

English language teaching and instructor reflection can be a starting point of the examination of values. As English language instructors gain more awareness to the values that they hold, they can better understand how those values shape their philosophies and guide their practice. According to Tom Farrell (2015): “When we contemplate on our inner self we try to attend and do at the same time in order to gain greater self-awareness of our philosophy and also a better understanding of who we are as human beings and teachers” (p.47). Utilizing critical reflection requires the instructor to examine all components of his or her being not only professionally but also personally encompassing not only the reflective, cognitive and emotional but also one’s social, moral, ethical, and political aspects (Farrell, 2015, p.95). Furthermore, Farrell also cautions that “no practice is without theory or ideology; every practice promotes some sort of ideology and it is always best to be aware of this” (2015, p.31). As instructors more deeply contemplate their values, they can better understand how their actions both inside and outside the language-learning classroom are reflective of these values. An instructor’s values can have an influence, consciously or unconsciously, on their students. The more awareness the instructor has of his or her values, the more understanding the instructor can have into how his or her values shape their philosophies and practice. This in turn may influence their students’ behavior and potentially their students’ values. Having more awareness of this, can assist instructors in being more sensitive to their learners. For instance, if a scenario occurs where an instructor puts a preference on being proactive in the language-learning classroom with students freely calling out the answers to questions in front of the class without instructor prompting, over time some students in the class may take on this behavior when questions are posed even if it is not a style they are familiar with. The instructor may value this style of student behavior because it is the behavior he or she was familiar with or practiced when he or she was a student. Consequently, in future learning settings, this instructor’s students may feel that being more proactive in answering questions is a behavior which is desirable thus potentially changing the students’ values from being passive in their learning to instead being active.

Conversely, other students may be unaccustomed to or uncomfortable with this style of student behavior, as having to immediately answer the questions cause anxiety to provide a response and embarrassment if an incorrect response is given. If in future situations with an instructor who shares a similar practice or teaches the same subject, this may cause the student to recall those negative feelings potentially interfering in his or her ability to learn in the class. It could further indicate that either positive or negative effects can occur with the imposition of the instructor’s values in the language-learning classroom. It often seems that instructors may view a student’s behavior as isolated,

simply connected to the class that the student is currently in, failing to consider previous learning experiences that the student may have had. Having greater sensitivity to this could enable the instructor to better support the learner. As in the above case, instead of having individual students to answer questions aloud, pairs or groups could be used. The analysis of this scenario also provides a more comprehensive examination into the various components interconnected in the classroom which will later reflect the holistic perspective of many indigenous groups' beliefs.

3. Canada's Indigenous People and an Outsider Educational System

The impact of the European educational system on Canada's indigenous people is a cautionary tale of the harm that imposing outside learning systems on students can potentially have. When Europeans came to Canada starting in the 1600s, they were dependent on the wisdom, kindness and generosity of the country's indigenous people, sometimes referred to as First Nations. But as more Europeans came, especially those who were involved in business, the abundance of natural resources quickly destroyed the partnership. The Europeans sought to usurp the lands and if they could not destroy the First Nations, then to dominate them. Treaties were signed to protect future generations. Through the treaties, from the Canadian government, the First Nations leaders sought to receive free health care, education, tax exemption and reserved land to continue their livelihoods on and raise their children. The education that the leaders were promised that their children and grandchildren would receive could never be imagined with its destructive nature.

Shifting from traditional community-based learning and teachings received from elders, indigenous children from 7 to 15 were required to attend the government- or church-run schools away from their communities starting in the 1920s (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015, p.2). In extreme cases the children were apprehended from their families by the police, church officials and government employees (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015, p.2). Government documents report that 150,000 children were forced to attend residential schools away from their families and communities (INAC, 2019, para 1). This was not only the placement of an outside educational model on the children's learning but physically placed the children in isolation from their families and communities for the purpose of learning. There were 139 residential schools for indigenous children in operation in Canada with the last school finally closing in the late 1990s (INAC, 2019, para 1).

Sadly this outsider educational system was used as a tool for cultural genocide which continues to have deep scars on today's First Nations' people. This was done as children were removed from their families and communities, forced to cut their hair and wear school uniforms set by European churches and later provincial education departments

(Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015, p.1). Most significantly, the students were banned from speaking their L1 and were instead forced to speak the L2 which was English or in some cases French (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015, p.1). Moreover, residential school students experienced various forms of abuse, such as physical, mental, emotional and sexual, from their teachers and other individuals in authoritative positions (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015, p.2). As a result many indigenous individuals and communities suffer from various issues ranging from addictions to domestic violence to disunity (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015). The effects of residential schools still have a devastating impact on Canada's indigenous people exemplifying the danger of the outsider educational system upon the learners.

4. The Relevance of Canada's Indigenous People and English-Language Teaching

Canada's indigenous people's educational history and their spirituality can aid in English-language teaching. First, the power of education can never be underestimated. Also the power that an instructor has is greater than that of their students need to be remembered. Though the European educational system that was imposed upon indigenous children in Canada is not what occurs in modern-day EFL/ESL in countries where English is not the native language potential parallels could exist. Those may be that students are taking a mandatory English-language course and prohibited from using their L1 in the classroom. Furthermore, the instructor's belief that their home country's educational system is superior to that of their learners. This could cause the instructor to impose their home country's practice onto their learners which is another parallel to the past experience of Canada's indigenous people. Other parallels of imposing an outsider educational system onto learners could be a negative experience for the learners resulting in confusion, apprehensiveness and embarrassment. Consequently, this could lead to the learner developing self-esteem issues. Instructors must be sensitive to their learners' needs and consider the ways their actions may influence their learners' present and future learning experiences. Instructors also need to be conscious of ways their judgement of their learners' education system may manifest itself in classroom interactions.

Second, the rich spirituality of Canada's indigenous people can be beneficial to exploring values and practice in English-language education such as with critical reflection. Instead of focusing on individual issues which is very much a western lens, indigenous teachings incorporate the numerous realms when exploring an issue potentially offering multiple ways to solve the issue. For instance, if a student is having trouble in the classroom, it is important to consider what other issues that the student may be facing outside of the classroom and what his or her previous experience with learning English was. Teaching tools like the Medicine Wheel present the indigenous beliefs such as

holism and the interconnectedness of all things. *The Sacred Tree* by Judie and Michael Bopp published by Lotus Press in 1987 is a book that provides accessible teachings from North American indigenous groups and may be a good starting point to those who are interested in learning more about indigenous spirituality and worldviews.

5. The Seven Teachings

The Seven Teachings is a tool that presents values with simplicity and give concrete examples. Many indigenous groups in North America share the common guiding principles of the Seven Teachings which are fundamentally based on a respect for all living things (Southern First Nations Network Care, 2019). This section will pertain to the seven values, their practice and the symbolic animal based on the material from *Uniting Three Fires Against Violence* (2019). The values are humility, bravery, honesty, wisdom, truth, respect and love. The first teaching is the value of humility which is represented by the wolf. It is essential that the wolf be part of the pack and not alone. Understanding one's part of and balance in creation as well as living a selfless life is important is a practical application of humility. The second teaching is the value of bravery which is represented by the bear. The protective nature of the mother bear for her young exemplifies bravery. Also the bear's life is a balanced one of play, rest and survival. It is important to make the right choices for one's self, family and community. The third teaching is the value of honesty represented by the sabe (sasquatch) or in some cases the raven. Both creatures are unique and do not pretend to be anything that they are not. Honesty asks the individual to embrace self-acceptance and use the gifts that he or she has been given.

To continue the fourth teaching is the value of wisdom which is represented by the beaver, an aquatic rodent. It is able to cut down trees with its long teeth to dam rivers sustainably to help its family by building a home as well as to catch fish. The beaver provides insight into using one's gifts and seeing not only the gifts in others but also respecting their differences. The fifth teaching is the value of truth. The antiquity of the turtle in comparison to the other symbolic animals linking it to the creation of the earth. The slow pace of the turtle indicates the importance of living life considerately and by performing all actions with sincerity. The sixth teaching is respect which is represented by the buffalo. Indigenous groups living on the plains of North America were dependent on the buffalo for survival and used all parts of the animal no not only food but various tools, clothing and housing materials. The animal shows that mindfulness and generosity are integral to all interactions. The seventh and final teaching is the value of love which is represented by the eagle. The heights that the eagle can soar make it the creature closest to the creator of the universe enabling it to see all things from a unique perspective. Love is connected to peace and strength thus interlocking all the teachings. The eagle's feather itself is a sacred object in many indigenous ceremonies. In summary, the Seven Teachings provide insight into values and ways those values may be practiced

not only individually but communally. In addition, the holistic nature of the Seven Teachings is complimentary of the points outlined about critical reflection in the previous section.

6. The Seven Teachings in an English-Language Learning Context

This section will suggest ways that the Seven Teachings can be used for instructors and students to understand their values. Appendices A, B and C can be used in EFL and ESL settings. Appendix A is an overview of the Seven Teachings which was discussed in the previous section. This handout is directly based on materials from Southern First Nations Network Care (2019). Appendix A has been used for an instructor workshop in May, 2019 and for numerous elective English classes for second to fourth-year university students in Summer, 2019. As an indigenous person and a student of indigenous spirituality, it seems that indigenous teachings and belief systems are more holistic unlike many western systems which tend to isolate the individual or phenomena. Such a narrow lens could result in potentially neglecting to view other aspects connected to the individual as well as the influence of the environment on the individual. In addition, segmenting instructor beliefs from the behavior and attitude seems that it could result in less sensitivity towards the learners. For example, if an instructor values critical thinking but is intent on sharing his or her opinion and potentially gives preference to his or her viewpoints over other viewpoints shared. This would seem to be contrary to actually thinking critically. Or if the instructor is not open to have students questions the reasons for certain classroom activities, it is possible that the instructor may feel defensive and even upset with being questioned. In turn, the instructor may react negatively towards the students. However, if an instructor has more awareness of practicing critical thinking in the classroom, the instructor may be more understanding and have more sensitivity towards the students.

Subsequently, to incorporate a more holistic perspective, the instructor handout, Appendix B and the student handout, Appendix C, are composed of questions to aid in the exploration for the individual, his or her values, practice and the multiple roles that the individual inhabits. Appendix B has prompts for self-reflection, pair- and group-discussion which are connected to the values an instructor has an individual, the multiple roles that he or she inhabits and the instructor's relations with others. Considering the roles an individual has outside of being an instructor or student, such as being a friend, son/daughter or committee member, guides the participant in connecting their values into multiple ways of practicing those values in various settings. The majority of the prompts are connected to values. For instance, one's values and practice such as ways that others the instructor may interacts with recognize his or her core values. If an instructor states that he or she values respect but does not appear to show respect to the students in regards to classroom management, this would be a disconnect in values and practice. Instructors need to be more sensitive to this to

provide more supportive and safer learning environments for their students. The final prompt of the instructor handout pertains to spirituality or a belief system and values.

At the instructor workshop in May 2019 which used Appendices A and B, one participant mentioned that he did not previously consider his values and the practical application of those values in the EFL classroom. It could be that others in this field may also be unaware of the significance of the connection between what is held as important and the ways that this is embodied in practice. This prompted me to think about ways to impart the Teachings to others in EFL particularly in regards to philosophy and practice. As I shared the Seven Teachings and instructor handout with other co-workers who could not attend the workshop, some asked if I had used the activity with my students. Though I had not thought about that previously, I was interested in sharing my culture with my students, in addition to providing an opportunity for discussions about values. This led to the creation of a student activity.

The student activity used Appendix C as well as Appendix A. The purpose for the student handout is similar to the instructor handout as both ask participants to consider their values and how they practice those values. However, the student handout starts with a focus on the symbolic animals to aid in the reflective process. It is mainly because to discuss the concepts of values in an L2 may be challenging for many students. The theme of animals may be more accessible for the students and help with the production of English-language output. Additionally, the student activity also differs from the instructor activity as instead of ending with a focus on the individual's personal belief systems, it instead asks if the students have previously been exposed to similar indigenous teachings. When the activities were used in class, the observation of student responses was limited. However, most seemed to be engaged in the activity and interested to learn about the Seven Teachings. In future settings, more feedback from students would be solicited particularly regarding the benefits and challenges of examining personal values through the Seven Teachings.

7. Conclusion

The Seven Teachings of North American indigenous people can be a useful tool aiding in instructors' critical reflection. This can enable the instructor to examine and explore not only values but how those values translate into one's practice inside and outside the English-language learning classroom. The necessity of having sensitivity to learners is amplified through the experience of Canada's indigenous people with an outsider educational system particularly in regards to L1 and L2 language usage. Using the Seven Teachings along with prompts for self-reflection and group discussions in ESL/EFL settings can provide instructors and their students with insight into their values and the ways that they practice those values.

References

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Appendix A - The Seven Teachings Handout

THE SEVEN TEACHINGS

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| <p><i>Love is the gift from the Eagle.</i> Love is a force that is undeniable. With love all things are possible. It is everyone's right to have and experience it.</p> | <p><i>Respect is the gift from the Buffalo.</i> In all life, respect is the first and foremost. Respect oneself and respect will be bestowed.</p> | <p><i>The Bear carries bravery.</i> We seek the strength and courage to face our greatest enemy-oneself. The bear will give us the understanding to seek resolutions.</p> | <p><i>Honesty is carried by the Sabe (Sasquatch).</i> It is from within and not to confused with truth (law). In reality there is no "ifs or buts", there can only be honesty if one is to survive. In the wilderness, one either knows survival, or one does not.</p> |
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| <p><i>The Beaver carries wisdom.</i> Wisdom is not to be confused with knowledge. Wisdom is the gained experience and knowledge is to know the difference and accept responsibility and accountability.</p> | <p><i>The Wolf carries humility.</i> Central to the wolf is the family pack. In one's life, much the same as the wolf, we need to understand humility. In the wolf pack, each member understands his individual role and in our individual lives humility becomes the factor, which allows us to ask for guidance humbly.</p> | <p><i>The Turtle carries truth.</i> Truth is symbolic of law and principle. Since the beginning of time the turtle has not changed. The turtle has been chosen to be the bearer of truth and the basic truth of the laws of nature have not changed. The turtle has been able to adapt to change without changing; thus he represents truth.</p> |
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Southern First Nations Network Care (2019). *The Seven Teachings*. Retrieved from <https://www.southernnetwork.org/site/seven-teachings>

Appendix B - Instructor Handout

Prompts for Reflection and Discussion

What are some of your values as a language teacher?

What are some of your values as a partner? A parent? A friend? A member of the community? Also feel free to explore any other role you view as significant to your identity.

Are you able to demonstrate your core values in all of the various realms you move within?

Which of the seven teachings do you feel most drawn to (multiple choices are permitted)?

Which do you not feel drawn to (multiple choices are permitted)?

How do you or can you practically embody the Seven Teachings in the classroom? In your daily life? Do you think others would recognize your practice of the Teachings? Would your students be able to recognize this?

Appendix C - Student Handout

Prompts for Reflection and Discussion

Do you think the animals and values are a good match? Why or why not? Do you think another animal would have been a better match? Why?

Which value is or values are most important to you? Why?

Which value is or values are not so important to you? Why?

How do you practice these values as a university student? A friend? A family member? A club member and/or part-time employee? A member of the community? Also feel free to talk about any other things that are important to you.

Have you learned about anything similar to the Seven Teachings before?