Relational Learning With Indigenous Communities:
Reconciling Indigenous Service Learning

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with Elders
Grandmother Doreen Spence (Saddle Lake Cree Nation) &
Kupuna Francine Dudoit Tagupa (Hawai'i)

Welcome & Opening Prayer

Welcome to all
in the spirit of love, humility, respect, reciprocity,
and the ethical space of engagement

(Ermine, 2007)

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders and Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work together.

The presenters are humbly and respectfully located in the traditional territories of the

Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Tsuut'ina, Îyãħé Nakoda, Métis Nations in the Treaty 7 region of Alberta, and of the

Kanaka Maoli in the Hawaiian Islands.

The academic community shares responsibility as caretakers of knowledge in relationship with the land.

All My Relations

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Presentation Overview

Reimagine and Reconcile Indigenous Service-Learning

- **Review of study process & findings**
- **Learning with Elders on 3 key lessons**
- **Reflection & discussion**

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Review of Study Process & Findings

Research Problem & Question:

- ‘service-learning’ is a term that originated in American college programs in the late 1960s for students to gain academic credit and/or payment for community project work (Sigmon, 1979).
- institutional aims may be confounded within an unexamined colonial system that marginalizes meaningful contribution of Indigenous Knowledges and rewards ongoing domination of westernized ways (Battiste, 2013; Hernandez, 2016; Santiago-Oritz, 2019; Stoecker, 2016).

Indigenous Service Learning was re-examined (Spence et al., 2018) from a critical decolonial lens by questioning:

- **“What is Indigenous Service Learning from the perspective of Elders and Students?”** *(Kennedy et al., 2021, p 4-6)*

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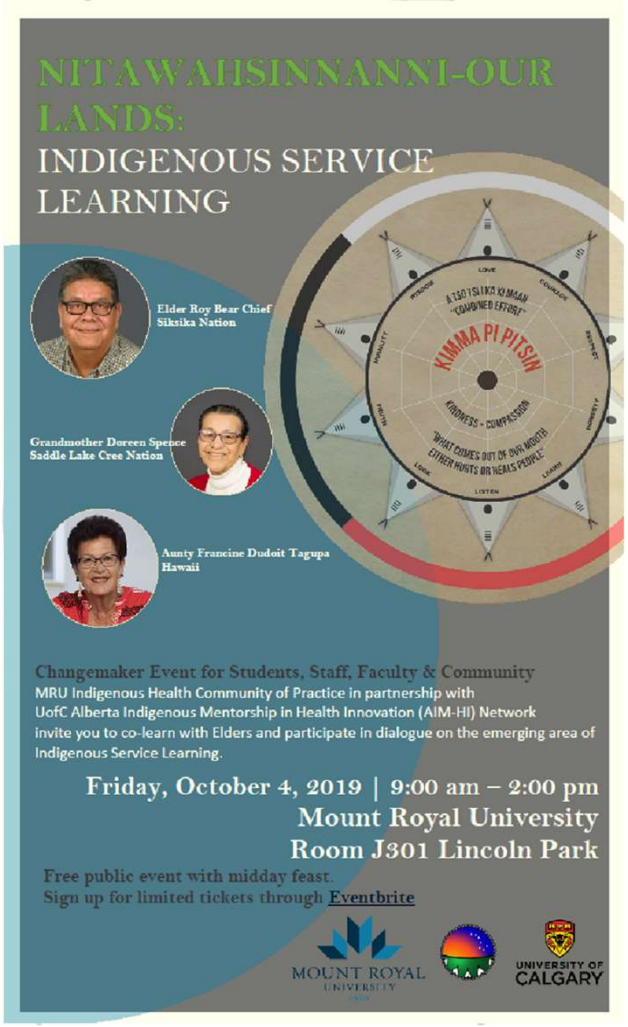
Review of Study Process & Findings



Indigenous Research Methodology:

- relationality (Deloria, 1999) & conversational method (Kovach, 2019)

Participants & Data Collection (post service-learning event)

- 3 Elders: focus group narrative
- 5 Students: paper survey

Data Analysis

- "Elders validated connections between their stories
- Students' narrative evolved in a constructivist manner
- interpreted as a whole rather than segmented responses to individual questions.
- connections mapped within and between groups to describe how Indigenous Elders and Students deconstructed Indigenous service-learning and reoriented understanding from an Indigenous worldview" *(Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 8)*

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Review Findings – Reconciling ISL

Relational Learning with Local Indigenous Communities
as maintaining *good relations*
through *humility, respect, honesty and reciprocity*
in response to the following interconnected priorities:

1. **The Land** - local context where knowledge is held
2. **Traditional Ways** - collectivist, co-learning and helping
3. **Common Language -**clear and shared communication
4. **Elders** - guiding community engagement and relational learning

(Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 9)

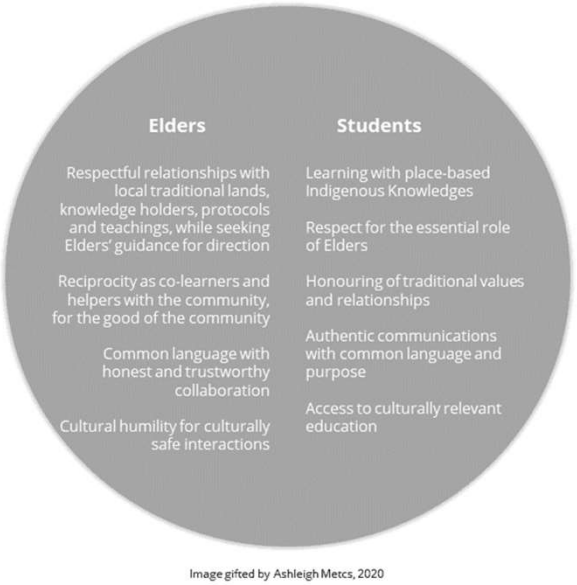

Image gifted by Ashleigh Metcs, 2020

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Review Findings – Reconciling ISL

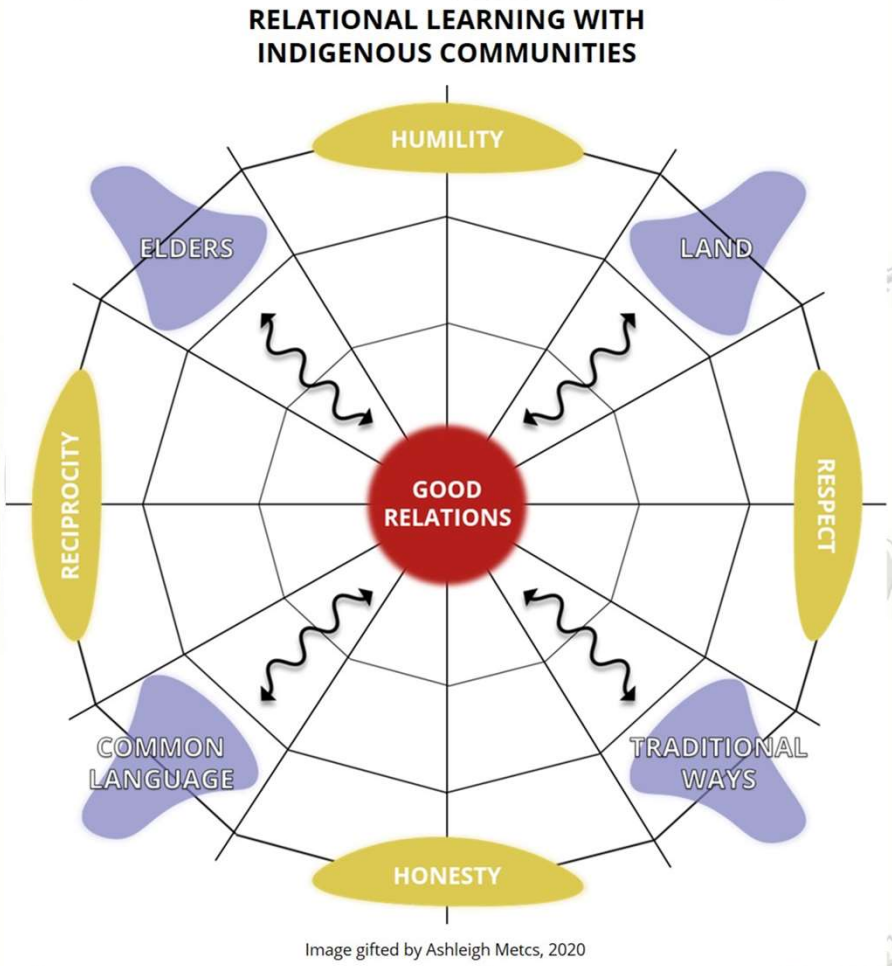

Image gifted by Ashleigh Metcs, 2020

Relationships mapped based on traditional Blackfoot teachings gifted by Elder Roy Bear Chief:

The Creator instructed Anitopisi to wrap the world, with the people in it in his web and let them down to the lower world.

After the people were lowered from the upper world (spoomootsi), Anitopisi explained to them that the web would remain with them so that the Creator would know when to help them.

When there was trouble or an emergency, one string of the web would vibrate and signal the Creator to come to help,

The people were told to pattern their lives after the web so they can stay close together and help each other whenever there is a problem, a vibration on the web.

The whole concept behind the spider web is well adapted to the idea of working together to reach common goals.

(Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 8-10)

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Recommendations- Key Lessons with Elders

Elder Roy Bear Chief

Replace

the term service learning

Aunty Francine Dudoit

Re-root

the term *Indigenous*

Grandmother Doreen Spence

Respect

the Elders' roles and knowledges

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Elder Roy Bear Chief-
Replace the term ‘service-learning’

“There is serious concern about the term ‘Indigenous service-learning’ as a westernized and misunderstood term because it does not respect Indigenous ways.

This is highly problematic because the lack of relevance will prevent honest partnerships between the university and Indigenous communities.

The university needs to use common language and understanding that is humbly, honestly and respectfully shared by local Indigenous community ways of life and Elders’ wisdom.

Service-learning is about the university. Helping and co-learning is about relationships with Indigenous communities.”

(Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 7)

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Aunty Francine Dudoit-
Re-root the term 'Indigenous'

"The term 'Indigenous' is vague when out of context, perpetuating disregard of Indigenous Peoples by western society;

this term must be re-rooted in the land and local community ways of being, knowing and doing.

In this partnership, the university needs to act "for the good of the people" and honour the Indigenous community's gain/benefit as central "with a good heart".

Relationships and trust take time and must be cultivated with humble respect of the local knowledge and protocol of the community."

(Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 7-8)

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Grandmother Doreen Spence- Respect the Elders' Roles and Knowledges

"Elders are essential to setting the direction for community engagement yet are often missing in essential roles within the higher education system.

The university needs to practice cultural humility when working with Elders and Indigenous communities so that interactions are culturally safe.

This requires respect for worldviews that are about relationships with all beings and the environment.

Elders are necessary to support and validate this partnership process because "you can buy education, but you can't buy wisdom".

The university needs an Elders Council that represents the diverse Indigenous community where the university is situated."

(Kennedy et al., 2021, p. 8)

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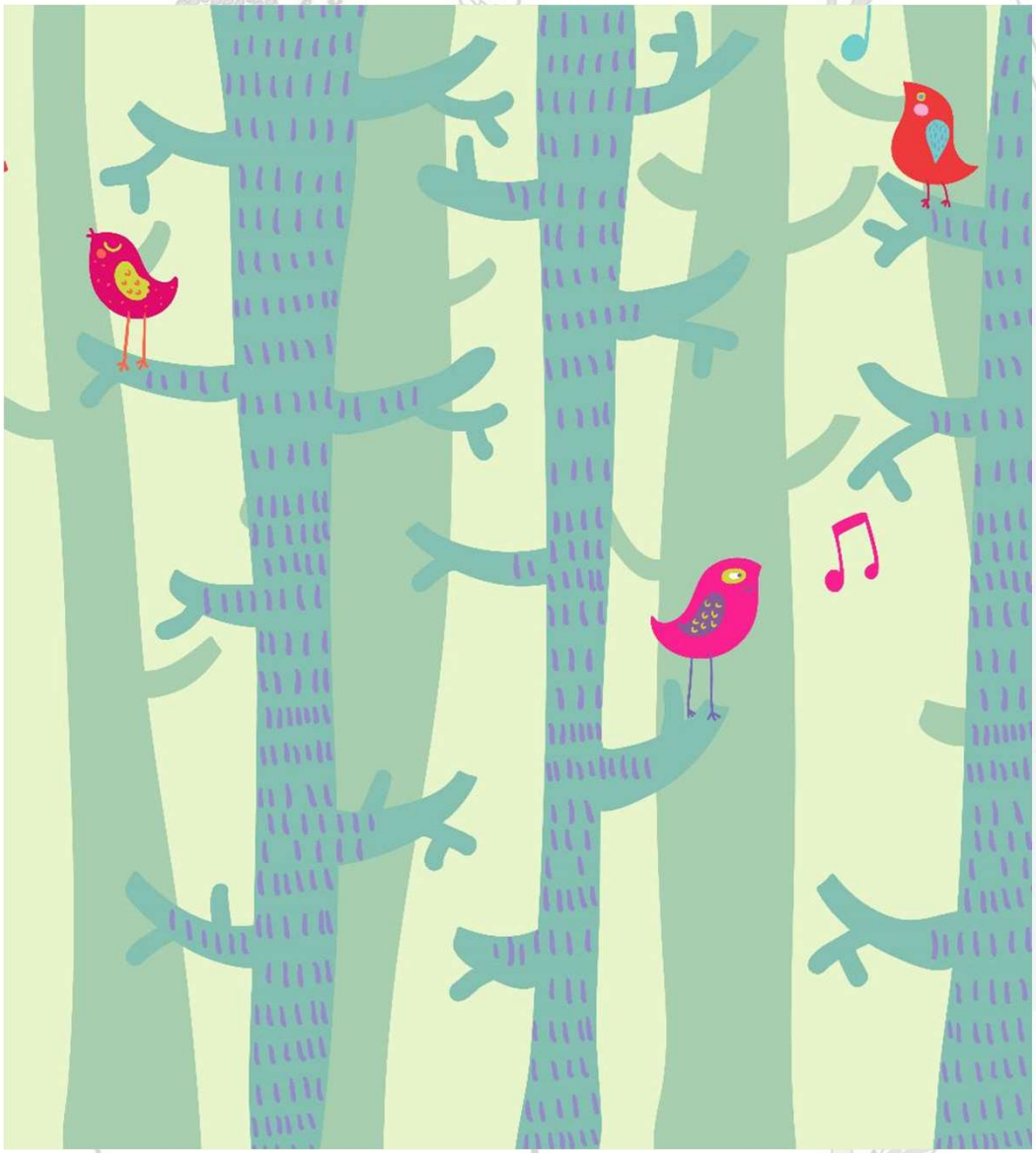

Reflection & Discussion

Welcome ideas & questions

- reflective listeners
- chat box comments
- conversation

Invitation to reflect & complete sentence stems:

A question that is emerging for me is…

Something we must learn to do is…

What I find challenging in our current situation is…

Something I plan to do is...

(adapted from Liberating Structures, 2021)

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Conclusion & Closing Prayer

Hiy! Hiy!
Aloha
Thank you

Let's keep this conversation going:

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