

Review of: "In the Spirit of Dr. Betty Bastien: Conceptualizing Ontological Responsibilities through the lens of Blackfoot Resilience"

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The authors have crafted herewith a lovely tribute to the influential work of Dr. Betty Bastien, a pioneer in the field of relationally-based Indigenous pedagogical work grounded in the cultural frameworks and experiences of the Piikani Nation (Niitsitapi, Blackfoot). As someone who has recently been learning more about the Canadian TRC and the legacy of ongoing violence, alienation, and trauma that necessitated the creation of that commission, I found this article inspirational and useful in understanding more deeply the importance of what Dr. Bastien called "ontological responsibilities" in expanding notions of transformative learning theory beyond adult learning into lifelong realizations of resilience for First Nations Peoples and other Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. The references accessed in this work are extensive and provide a solid grounding for anyone who wishes to know more about Indigenous pedagogical practices, epistemologies, and ontologies. I particularly appreciate the suggestion that all humanity has much to learn from Indigenous--particularly Blackfoot--knowledge and action. Examples provided regarding expanding concepts of leadership to emphasize those who demonstrated respect, compassion, spirituality, and other qualities seem necessary in K-12 classrooms where relationship-building is the central value, bolstered by a rejection of a "deficit model" in responding to the TRC's "call to action." I also appreciate knowing what methods were used to conduct an important 2019 Canadian SSHRC research project that promises to guide related studies in the future. My remaining questions and quibbles are few. First, I find it a bit confusing and contradictory to address a "philosophical divide" between Western and Native frameworks of knowing/being/acting/valuing using conceptual tools such as epistemology and ontology, which are deeply Western. I am confused by discourse that simultaneously makes a strong distinction between Western and Indigenous philosophies while also utilizing Western frameworks and concepts such as DNA. To me, saying that something is embedded in one's DNA troubles the much more elegant and productive idea that it is relational-based learning (rather than genetics) that makes us human beings tied to particular communities, lands, and more-than-human relatives with particular histories. I confess I am also confused regarding the identification of the elegant Blackfoot Resilience model as "teleological," particularly as it demonstrates the ways that ceremonies and values interact with survival in new circumstances and times in ways that are unpredictable. In the end, however, my concerns are unimportant, as I find very illuminating and valuable the notion that we all have "ontological responsibilities" to which we should attend. This paper provides an excellent and instructive example of how these responsibilities might be carried out, fulfilling successfully the authors' two primary purposes for not only writing and publishing their article, but also trusting the readers to read it with gratitude and respect.

