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Against the Tide: Indigenous Knowledge and Education for Humanization

Arturo Rodriguez
arturorodriguez@boisestate.edu

Kevin Russel Magill
Baylor University, kevin_magill@baylor.edu

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Against the Tide: Indigenous Knowledge and Education for Humanization

Cover Page Footnote

We would like to acknowledge our families and friends who struggle for a better tomorrow.

Against the Tide: Indigenous Knowledge and Education for Humanization

*Arturo Rodriguez & Kevin Russel Magill,
Baylor University*

Introduction: The Middle Class Perspective

In what is commonly understood as the western world, we are raised in the urban or suburban jungle, where the conditions are fixed, and food, healthcare, and housing all are guaranteed social conditions. We may enjoy a surplus or scarcity, but the conditions are such all our needs are met. The environs that Indigenous people, people of color, people of lower socioeconomic classes, and minoritized students face are often hostile or substandard at best (Baptiste et. al., 2020; Hall & Patrinos, 2012). Forget upward mobility, to live a life under *their* circumstances, that is to meet the western ideal of the good life, is to starve; food, shelter, and healthcare are never a short walk away (Major & Machin, 2018). Ask anyone who grows up on a reservation, a shanty town, township, or village exploited by a transnational corporation. In the shadow of unchecked corporate personhood and when time is of the essence, human needs are hours away.

But what causes educational success under the above-mentioned living conditions? It is not testable western knowledge or social capital within a broken system (Au, 2020). The people seek continuity, community, and care; these are the foundations of educational experience and success. However, it is the lack of these that allows for maximum economic exploitation and forms the foundations of

student suffering. Poverty is not a random phenomenon, where minoritized students are isolated from their enfranchised peers, a byproduct of cultural differences or language barriers (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Our people, Indigenous people, people of color, people of lower socioeconomic classes, and minoritized students are students asked to perform scholastically, yet providing them with minimal skills while they endure a docile accommodating underclass (Willis, 1977). But what about affirmative action, diversity programs, or similar beacons of entitlement, which transnational corporations and indeed social organizations waive as a testament to their virtue?

Global manipulation or nationalistic ideologies lead citizens to believe that hegemonic efforts to secure international control somehow support the interests of citizens. Discourse supports trade wars ensuring the flow of petroleum; winners in this scenario are corporations while the working classes are forced to pay for the negative externalities (Unerman et al., 2018). Inequitable class relations can result in a pipeline running through your backyard or closed markets abroad. However, we are told that drilling for oil will create new jobs and trade wars will allow us to return to a time when the United States represented the strongest power internationally. These in turn provide social welfare at home through the relations of production and an unhealthy obsession with the economic present (Mika, 2017).

Given these systems that secure the foundation for social structures, citizenship itself does not exist without the nation-state (Ross & Vinson, 2013). People are citizens only as they support the models we have

been given to vote, participate, and be patriotic. What about those unable to speak within existing systems, such as the citizen that is at the food bank and not running the food bank? Consider that human dignity and justice are only provided to those who participate according to sanctioned criteria. In choosing alienation or human dignity, people will choose conformity over invisibility (Debord, 1967/2012; Marx & Engles, 1844/1988).

It is very much in vogue for educationists to argue against or for the neoliberal capitalist structure and interventions, appearing in support of students from diverse populations. These perceptions suggest we need only to attend to our truth manifestations of oppression, those we argue against while perpetuating the existing social relations and attendant power structure: the curriculum, the ways we teach, and existing epistemologies. However, the epistemologies we share are the epistemologies of power and not the structures causing the living challenges for students (Pellicano et al. 2018).

Let us reframe, when we were children, our grandmothers told us stories about their childhoods, for Kevin in California and Arturo in Mexico. Memorable were our connections to the earth, reading the seasons, and our relationships to all living things. Arturo's grandmother's village contained all that was necessary for a good life. She might have been sharing what was to her a utopia, but she also discussed how the world came home when soldiers with guns invaded during the Mexican Revolution. That struggle, like all class struggles, was the antecedent of continuous displacement through to the 21st centuries, and the global

social order is played as a game of Crazy Eights or Monopoly where power families or corporations incite fire that is actual war or the above-mentioned trade war, and then feed it as they manipulate the world's markets (see Lowe, 2018). The stories our grandmothers told, all stories grandmothers tell, are our true beginnings. The Diné, Koori, Maasai, and Nahuatl people had time to speculate for millennia. Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and interacting were necessary for survival; they did not serve as counterpoints to the good life. To be egalitarian or socially just is not then the latest or fashionable way to show how conscious we are, they are necessary to avoid extinction (McCarty & Roessel, 2015; Peacock & Prehn, 2019).

Bizaadish Dinits'a': Do You Speak?

Education then must acknowledge the totality of the human ecology we associate with lived experience rather than adhere to the western approach of feeding the human industrial power complex (Federici, 2004; Stahelin, 2017). To demonstrate that those in power understand education, they continue to promote simplistic ideas about learning, rote memorization, phonication, or the lecture and their attendant exams, which are signs to them of student learning. These systematic approaches to learning and the ways students are positioned in classrooms ensure oppressive social conditions persist. Our grandmothers, like the people, described education as a means by which to discover our better nature, our place in the world, and our relationship with others. The Koori, Dineh, Nahuatl, and Maasai among other first peoples describe education through an interactional approach, one tied to human dignity that does not neglect the

environment because how we interact with the world and each other has consequences (Battiste, 2018).

Perhaps it is time to reconsider how people perceive education. Educational policies and attending historical rhetoric suggest students must theoretically and legally have access to the educational environment. Since powerbrokers and their systems of oppression, guaranteed by policies such as The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or No Child Left Behind (NCLB), cannot legally violate student civic rights, they instead violate human rights (see Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2020; Lundy & Sainz, 2018; Nelson et al., 2019). The faulty implication is that access to systems would allow our students to thrive as others were the game not rigged. However, we know that the legal and substantive rights of students are always in question as they assume their position in the global economic marketplace (Shue, 1996).

Attending to these hypocrisies in the educational system requires a shift in values. Our language must change from thinking only of what value are workers to the state, to instead considering our relationship, and duty to the global community. It is our duty as citizens of the world and the responsibility of institutions to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate discrimination and victimization of anyone in a community. These are relations within institutions free from the negation of human rights since we recognize the negation of the market as the enfranchisement of the human spirit (Hegel, 1807/1977; Marx, 1844/1988) and not an acceptance of our place within its structures. For Indigenous persons, adulthood is not the

end of childhood as they do not see development as limited to stages; adulthood is when we recognize we are ready to take our place in the circle.

The Problems of Propaganda

Why does education run counter to what is considered western? We propose that education operates in a fascist model, rather than a democratic model. For Aboriginal eyes, recognition is a simple matter of knowing who we are and how we must engage one another. In the United States, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) helped reform education but failed to attend to the situational needs of minoritized students (Waitoller & Thorius, 2015). The legislation was amended in 1966 to include education services like extended school days, summer programs, and English as Second Language (ESL) classes, which were designed to support social mobility. Much of this legislation was economically driven, allowing students to move with their families as cheap labor. Since that time various programs have been developed to serve children who work or whose parents work in similar but previously unrecognized industries. Some of this legislation has included The High School Equivalency Program (HEP), The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), and the Minoritized Education Even Start Program, to provide support for children to graduate high school, find success in colleges, and increase literacy (Morrell, 2010). These interventions are developed to better help students exist within systems that move students from exploited laborer to neoliberal laborer, meaning a move from de facto slave labor to wage slavery (Peters, 2012). International policy efforts have been

constructed to support students, ensuring the global neoliberal contexts persist. It is perhaps most tragic that individuals from minoritized groups have been recruited to become functionaries for this oppressive system.

The refrain from Rodney King, “Why can’t we all just get along” is an echo reverberating the propaganda machine, selling the idea of conformity, and thus upward mobility is unlimited. Minoritized children have no such safety network. Children from lower socioeconomic classes continue to participate, unwillingly, in poverty culture (Allcott et al., 2017) which feeds the system of oppression, set by the state: payday loans, student loans, credit card debt, and ultimately the prison industrial complex. Who gets swallowed up by the machine was evident in the people of color who turned to crack cocaine and the white people currently ensnared by pain and depression medication like oxycontin, Prozac, and Adderall, a precursor to Molly, Crystal Methamphetamine or Heroine (Drake et. al., 2020). Drugs and systems serve the same end, to mask human suffering. Are these conditions the realization that bootstrap consciousness is a lie?

Illiberalism

Efforts to support students’ access to systems are part of the bourgeois liberal philosophy proclaiming liberalism but maintaining the oppressive cultures that allow the oppressive structures to exist (Lowe, 2015). As above, system policies continue that do not acknowledge or attend to actual human rights by assuming assimilation of the underclass into neoliberal capitalist education is the fantasy that will

“fix” these problems (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Magill & Rodriguez, 2016).

Frameworks for understanding education must address the manifestations of access, not their neoliberal logic of what constitutes learning. Existing frameworks have not transformed the ecology in which students are asked to live and work. Governmental approaches to systematic understandings of justice create conditions whereby it appears minoritized students have access to formal (or legal) rights, and that they also have the substantive rights, or ability to access these rights (Shue, 1996). However, though many of us have certain legal rights, we are unable to access them in practice. Schooling then is accessible in theory but not necessarily in reality.

The disparities in educational experience are an issue of justice and not simply a bridge to access neoliberal schooling. Of course, supporting students will involve cross-cultural empathy or education stakeholders understanding the nature, context, and needs of students. However, the educational ecology will not improve for students if we do not consider how systems are toxic, particularly for minoritized students. Our thinking then must be about education as an issue of justice and not merely as an issue of access (Ashford, 2018).

We Trade: We War

In this paper, we argue for examining education through an institutional model, as described by Pogge (2002) that envisions an alternative reality for our social systems to secure access to the substance of human rights (Shue, 1996). Pogge (2002) suggests systems must be created to safeguard the human rights of people and not purely the

legal or economic readings of these rights. Thus, human rights necessarily precede educational rights. If we believe in human rights and educational rights, then we need to first secure the rights that allow people to secure their humanity.

Examining Pogge's (2002) work further, we understand issues of poverty are human rights violations that limit access to life and education. If students are affected significantly by poverty, we must first ameliorate the conditions contributing to class stagnation before we can attend to their education rights (Magill & Rodriguez, 2022). Students will not meet the demands of educational systems if they are asked to live and learn in spaces where they lack clean drinking water, experience food insecurity, and have limited access to systems necessary for upward mobility or if they are considered lesser humans (Portelli & Eizadirad 2018).

World power and relational power imbalances continue to strain the world economy, and these manifest as asymmetrical human social relations (Ashford, 2018). Perceptions of poverty then make it difficult to affect global social conditions. Consider how assemblages of relation are experienced by the masses through their symbolic meanings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), that is without a colonial and criminal ethos. We see Presidents making speeches in the 5th Ward of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, providing paper towels to Puerto Ricans and water bottles to those poisoned in Flint (Bonilla, 2020; Klein, 2007). The message conveyed that these citizens are being cared for legally but not democratically or with an eye toward justice.

Those observing these events might suggest victims are attended to or these individuals can move economically if not socially, but they remain trapped within larger structures. Symbolic representations, such as aid during crises, neglect injustice perpetrated against our communities (Gaynor, 2018). Each instance is part of the power system that ensures citizens and therefore students are tied to spaces of oppression and social conditions that allow poverty perspectives or ideologies to persist. The preceding systems and conditions are pieces of the politics that ensure the domestic oppression of citizens; however, this is only one marker of the larger global social order (Bowles & Gintis, 2011).

If then we believe, as Pogge (2002) and Shue (1996) suggest, that freedom from poverty must be and can be a human right, addressing these concerns also requires that we see differently the ways global neoliberal educational systems cause poverty to persist. This would involve understanding how power functions for students within class relations among global economies, leading to displacement and migration. Human rights violations then ensure that the design of social systems is constrained, causing actual poverty or relative poverty for much of the world.

Asymmetries of market power, social power, and political power solidify the global value chains that exploit labor, as a means of maintaining power and inequality in the contemporary global political economy (Philips, 2017). Like the asymmetries and assemblages of market power, those with existing power relations or networks of entitlement capture the attention and forms of market capital; models founded on oppressive labor

strategies that require the exploitation of labor (Marx & Engels, 1844/1988). Our students are caught in these relationships, forced to work within systems that form their identity and become their reality.

The history of this revolution is clear. The global labor pool doubled from 2000 to 2010 through efforts to liberalize and deregulate the labor force (Theodore, 2016). As new countries were brought into the global neoliberal marketplace, asymmetrical social relations and labor power ensured a readjustment in labor and capital causing more complex migratory patterns, which succeeded in the collapse of the former Soviet Union (Freeman, 2006). New social relations allowed globalizing corporations flexibility in handling labor solidarity and the ability to create myths that would perpetuate neoliberal conditions in so-called liberal societies, creating conditions for increases from abject poverty to working poor (Wood, 2000; Wright, 2013).

Minoritized labor became an important aspect of this new labor vision. The vulnerabilities of minoritized laborers allow for impoverished labor with little possibility for political action related to working wages or conditions. Immigration often restricts individual legal protection or welfare protection constraining one's ability to find adequate employment, which supports and increases market manipulation by employers. Consider how individuals are often stripped of their labor power and human rights through fear of deportation as they are forced to work under inhumane conditions. Furthermore, forced and child labor becomes a common manifestation of this reality as vulnerability results from an inevitable part of the system (Philips, 2017).

The dehumanization of such workers becomes a means of controlling value-producing resources to monopolize labor power (Tilly, 1998), which ultimately is applied to student signification and exploitation.

However, some organizations and workers have taken agency under these conditions. Consider further the One Penny More campaign organized with college students to boycott companies paying workers very little for picking baskets of tomatoes. The difference in pay was significant, however, a penny raise brings a worker to a yearly income from \$10,000 to around \$17,000 (The Editorial Board, 2010). Solidarity with and for minoritized populations helped improve their living conditions, albeit slightly. Social Justice can close the distance to global neoliberal labor relations.

Los Que Somos de Abajo-The Underdogs

Student framing as human beings and their position in the global economic power structure ensures their epistemologies are relegated to traditional scholastic performance, which is naturally challenged within these settings, or disregarded. The consequence is students are neglected, impoverished, and/or homogenized into the neoliberal capitalist structure as disposable labor (Giroux & Robbins, 2015). However, despite these macro and microeconomic contexts, minoritized students possess unique funds of knowledge that might help others understand human nature and the realities of the capitalist world (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Student voices can shed light on the unification of labor that might support forms of consciousness and community

needed for an alternate conception of human freedom (King, 2015; White, 2015).

Foregrounding our relationships with humanity including but not limited to personal labor, communal experience, and fierce love, may reveal and work past the slave ecologies that corrupt our ideas and embodiment of what it means to be human (Buber, 2010). But it is through struggle that we can achieve shared courage, strength, and vision to achieve a communal and transformational social identity. We might act to understand how identity relates to the way our material needs are met, the core aspect of our identity becomes the way we understand needs fulfillment. As Schmitt (2005) suggests, individuals make decisions based on one essential aspect of their identity and are willing to protect that most valued part of their being. What then is the neoliberal or western identity? It has become the shared delusion of freedom steeped in neoliberal whiteness and privilege learned through the ways power, or conversely, community or struggle, or how love is given and received (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2016).

Harambee

Many have discussed the idea of globalizing education as a means of developing a more transformational identity. However, globalizing education is often a new form of intellectual and linguistic colonization that reinforces western knowledge production for Indigenous and minoritized students (Bunda, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2014). The history of Indigenous ways of knowing and being might help us better support our students and communities and the ways they and others are understood within the neoliberal global capitalist social

power structure (Laurie et al., 2005). Efforts to support students require both justice and freedom from poverty. For some, this means reconstituting the relationship between people and the societies in which they are embedded (Madden, 2015).

Though it is an elusive and ever-changing term, *Buen Vivir* represents a plurality of discursive platforms and social movements to ponder alternative visions in the construction of a system of knowledge that recognizes the communion between humans and nature (Gudynas, 2011). It presents an approach to dismantling neoliberal policies under a radically different life philosophy to challenge the colonial matrix of power legitimizing the relations inherent within capital and world markets (Quijano, 2000). It emerges from several traditions including *Sumaqkawsay* (Equador), *suma kamana* (Quechua), *suma Qamana* (Ayamara), *nande reko* (Guarani) in ways that align and split from government structures (Albó, 2011; Altman, 2013; Waldmüller, 2014). Adopting such an epistemological practice of consciousness necessitates understanding the interrelation of beings, knowledge, logic, and relationalities of thought, action, existence, and living. It also utilizes the cosmivision, cosmology, or philosophy of the indigenous people of Abya Yala (Walsh, 2018). Overcoming the enduring aftermath of colonialism and capitalism (Mignolo, 2005) can provide a path to move beyond modern neo-liberal western culture (Guynas, 2011).

To leave the macro or economic power structure we need to decolonize our relationship to knowledge, actualize self-determination, promote critical thinking, work toward consciousness-raising, and engage in new forms of solidarity

(Pewewardy et al., 2018). Consciousness-raising is the recognition of conditions of exchange where we substitute cultural norms and values for market-driven education. A predictor of anti-minority sentiment, these become the drivers of domestic policy (Cavaillé & Marshall, 2019). But this requires understanding the complicated power relationships between populations, corporations, and the U.S. federal government (Brayboy, 2005).

Consciousness-raising and incorporating new forms of knowledge in an English-dominant hegemonic culture necessarily requires grounding in Indigenous ways of being (Ahenakew, 2016; Gilbert, 2019). For example, two-eyed knowing encourages learners to see from one eye through Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with mainstream ways of knowing, a parallel analysis of the world, and most importantly, learning to see with both eyes together for the benefit of all persons, synthesizing and reconciling diverse epistemologies (Bartlett et al., 2012). To the Nahuatl *Nepantla* or living in a third space necessitates continuous personal and social transformation (Antuna, 2018; Lizárraga & Gutiérrez, 2018). The above is what Freire (1970/2000) and others refer to as a hermeneutic or praxiological cycle.

Transformative Indigenous education then involves all members of a community (Bullen & Roberts, 2019; Kato, 2018). Students are recognized as part of our identity, rather than future participants of the minimally skilled labor force or the prison industrial complex. Learning is therefore aligned with knowing the world or the ways people live and not abstracted from lived experience (Vaughn, 2016). As previously stated, students must be encouraged to

participate in meaningful ways in the classroom to be productive members of the community. But in participation, do students choose if, how, or when they will participate, or is this consideration moot considering global educational social relationships and power structures? Might we follow the people of the Laguna Pueblo, and consider time not as a linear construct where the almighty dollar regulates our consciousness, but as a space for engaging our critical social nature where in reading ourselves, we read the world and accept what is best in actualizing our identity (Freire, 1970/2000).

Indigenous ways of knowing are holistic approaches to active and participatory forms of learning (Nxumalo & Mncube, 2018). They include more than what is listed here but for the sake of our paper: oral traditions, listening, watching, imitating, group work, apprenticeship, high levels of cultural knowledge, and environmental contextualization (Cajete, 2019; Ezeife, 2002). Indigenous knowledge is both individual and rooted in experience and culture (Munroe et al., 2013). Likewise, “formal education systems have disrupted the practical everyday life aspects of Indigenous knowledge and ways of learning, replacing them with abstract knowledge and academic ways of learning” (Nakashima et al., 2000, p. 12). Living Indigenous ways of knowing more completely requires transforming the social order.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

How then must we transform the ways we understand education and more importantly the global social order? Personal knowledge is our relationship to a shared human contract and world ecology (McCoy

et al., 2017). Understanding this, our essential nature and its relationship to the world is part of our global imaginary, where shared identity, social struggle, and deconstructions of oppressive power structures reveal our human truth. Personal and ecological critical pedagogy, what some call teaching for social justice, is the inner kernel ontology and a concomitant epistemology of and for liberation.

These are revealed by the stories we tell and are told, both formally and informally, by community and family members, and the ways we engage them with others. Epistemology of being is learned identity, and interaction refined as our friends and relatives laugh with us for our expression and when sharing bonds of friendship and reciprocated communal love. Communal states of shared identity then are the building of ecological communities of mutual respect and solidarity (Buber, 1923/2010).

In learning in and for our communities, we reduce distinctions between classroom learning and learning in the world while amplifying experience. As with language, we learn best by experiencing the world, participating in it, and being mentored by others in its structures. The experiences become the before mentioned praxiological lifelong cycle that evolves with the ways we name the world. The essential nature of learning is that we are always learning informally while working to achieve what have for millennia been Indigenous ways of knowing (Wotherspoon, 2015). For the Koori, Maasai, Puebloan, and Nahuatl cultures, understanding the world or the problems or challenges we face are not exceptions to living or being in the world. Being in the

world is the beginning and meeting creativity where we seek out others to better understand our place and our environment as then we try, fail, learn, and ultimately flow with the world.

Learning then, is about connecting to the human spirit—or the respect, morality, intelligence, and values that we share and the world’s ecology—or again accepting our being within it. Flowing in ecology reveals our human nature. Our learning then transforms from learning as an end to learning as understanding socially and ecologically, the issues that march us toward crisis. Indigenous ways of knowing are seeing the social reality and cultivating spaces for generative learning, personal development, and transformation. This is how “schooling” is intentionally distinct from “learning” (Illich, 1971). Schooling acculturates while learning engages the communal human spirit in ameliorating adverse environmental and social conditions. In the global social order, Indigenous knowledge must help us understand justice and basic human rights, as human dignity and love take primacy, discarding reason to develop relations based on use, value, and favorable exchange.

We might also benefit from understanding additional dimensions of existence to access concepts like time as a companion we experience to all things and not as something that we are running from or toward. Time and matter exist together as do we all. Time is telling our unfolding story, much like those lessons told in communities that help us come to know ourselves in the world. Through cultural expressions like science, art, and sport we come to know our history, push the limits of who we are, create communities, and

connect to our essential nature. However, when these become academic scholarships, livelihoods, and means of exploitation or are used to convey propagandistic messages, we must reexamine our community identity. Fortunately, human voices can speak to the essential humanness of our nature. An *Indigenous epistemological and ontological imaginary* is accepting ourselves as we relate to the world and others.

Conclusion

For the Koori and the Diné, the land is not a thing we own or that we work on, it is our living and spiritual mother, that with which we live. All considerations of engaging with her and with each other extend from this sentiment. Spirituality ties us through our essential nature, a condition that we often try to hide.

We must resolve the relationships between the epistemological interiority and its relationship to the epistemological exteriority, reframe our ontology, and align our epistemologies with time and life and not simply with existence. This is why Freire (1970/2000) calls for dialogue to resolve existential tensions in the material and pragmatic; This dialogue helps us realize absurdity in the relationship between interiority and exteriority as we *become* toward insurgency (Fregoso Bailón & De Lissovoy, 2019; Friere, 1970/2000). Consider both students and adults who demonstrate the inability to share resources in a basic supply and demand economic lesson. In the first round of the game, the goal is to secure capital by trading with others. In the second round, it is to ensure everyone has a minimum level of subsistence. The game makes it easy to meet the basic level of support, yet students and

adults alike fail to achieve success in the second round, again and again (see Shanks, 2020). This is because under capitalism winners are rewarded with progress while those who lose are relegated to history. Those who secure capital always celebrates winning. When that occurs, the class struggle becomes irrelevant. What we find is that class struggle, like all machinations of the state, simply secures time. The desire for freedom will always be the best of human nature. This is not a question of personal growth but of greed at the core of western identity, where Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing transform the world ecology, the supra-personal human spirit (Hegel, 1807/1977).

This way of learning and being is precisely the original human condition. In western schooling, the global social order *is* the curriculum, the pedagogy, and the human relationship with the global zeitgeist and its capitalist human superstructure. These cement power relationships in social tensions, and they manifest as the global economic structure. Conversely, Indigenous knowledge relates to what Zizek (2019), Badiou (2019), and Lacan (2006) refer to as *the real*, a course of study dedicated to self-determination, revealing the power relationships that situate life—what we will refer to as the living spirit. Indigenous ways of knowing, observation, storytelling, cooperation, collaboration, exploration, and active learning are what we have shed, what we have lost to civilize the human condition. The spirit, place, culture, and authentic being are our humanness. They are the source value of knowing and of being. They extend beyond all conceptions or manifestations of material reality. Finally, it is not Indigenous interventions within existing systems that will free the tragedy of

western global capitalist and reductionist social experience, but acceptance that we live beyond time and space in rejecting the global capitalist social order.

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