

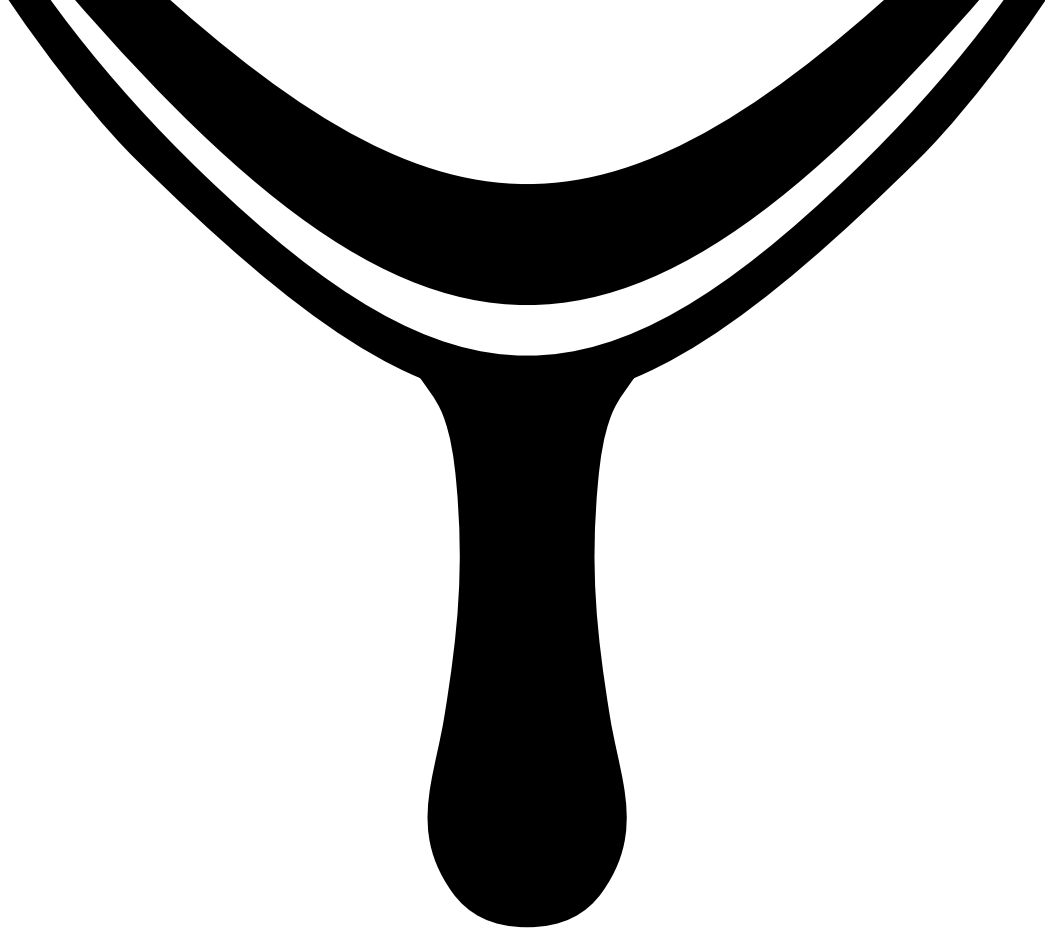


United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Canadian
Commission
for UNESCO

**World Virtual
Indigenous Circle**
on **Open Science and the
Decolonization of Knowledge**



Acknowledgements

Dorothea Harris, BSW, PhD (student), was the webinar rapporteur, analyzed the discussions and provided written contribution to this summary.

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World Virtual Indigenous Circle on Open Science and the Decolonization of Knowledge, Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2021.

“Leroy, I remember a talk you gave where I said something stupid like, ‘Land is a metaphor for our mother.’ And you scolded me and said, ‘Land is not a metaphor for our mother, land is our mother.’ That changed everything for me. Indigenous epistemology is about continuity. “And in that centre of continuity is love. We call it aloha here in Hawaii. And it’s not a commodity. It is an energetic field of purpose, shared meaning, passion and commitment to the love of land and the service of people.”

Dr. Manulani Aluli Meyer
University of Hawaii, West O’ahu, U.S.



“I find it a great mystery that so much of the world’s population has come to believe in a myth that our valued knowledge as humans has only evolved since the emergence of what has been called civilization.

“Contrary to these beliefs, I recognize that the accumulated knowledge we have formed throughout human time is not only significant and of value, but necessary for the continued existence of humans on Earth.”

Dr. Ed Connors
Kahnawake First Nation, Psychologist, Canada.



World Virtual Indigenous Circle on Open Science *and the* Decolonization of Knowledge

Purpose of the webinar

The World Virtual Indigenous Circle on Open Science and the Decolonization of Knowledge took place November 12, 2020. It was organized by the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education and co-hosted by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium.

Its format was designed by Lorna Wanósts'a7 Williams. The Circle featured nearly 20 Indigenous speakers and attracted some 300 registrants from around the world. Its purpose was to inform UNESCO's forthcoming recommendation on open science and, in turn, to ensure Indigenous Knowledge is incorporated respectfully and with integrity to help reshape how institutions recognize and use it.

Ultimately, the aim was to take the next of many steps toward ensuring that Indigenous Knowledge is better recognized worldwide so it can guide individuals and institutions in education, in research and in protecting the Earth.

Coast Salish Frogs by
Tseskinakhen, William Good
Snuneymuxw First Nation

Participants in order *of appearance*

Laurie Robinson

Mahingan Sagaigan Nation, Executive Director,
Indigenous Advanced Education
and Skills Council, Ontario, Canada

John Elliott

Tsartlip First Nation

Katsi Cook

Wolf Clan Mohawk Akwesasne

Lorna Wanósts'a7 Williams

Lil'wat First Nation, Professor Emerita,
University of Victoria, Canada

Sébastien Goupil

Secretary-General, Canadian Commission
for UNESCO

Keiki Kawai'ae'a & Kealani Makaiwi

World Indigenous Nations Higher Education
Consortium

Carrie Bourassa

Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Dominique Bérubé & David Newhouse

Social Sciences and Humanities Research
Council, Canada

Kevin Fitzgibbons

Natural Science and Engineering Research
Council of Canada

Leroy Little Bear

Blackfoot First Nation, Professor Emeritus,
University of Lethbridge, Canada

Gregory Cajete

Tewa, Santa Clara Pueblo, Professor, University
of New Mexico, U.S.

Wangoola Wangoola Nduwala

Nabyama, MPAMBO African Multiversity,
Busoga, Uganda

Zanisah Man

Orang Asli Professor, Universiti Kebangsaan
Malaysia

Sonajharia Minz

Vice-Chancellor Sido Kanhu Murmu University,
Dumka, India

Jazmin Romero Epiayu

Wayuu activist, Colombia

Ed Connors

Psychologist
Kahnawake First Nation, Canada

Manulani Aluli Meyer

University of Hawaii, U.S.

Jose Barreiro

Taino, Cuba; Emeritus Smithsonian Institute, U.S.

Kevin Lowe

Gubbi Gubbi, Scientia Indigenous Fellow,
University of New South Wales, Australia

Indigenous Circle format *and* themes

Despite its virtual format, the webinar adhered to Indigenous protocols, opening and closing with prayers, songs and territorial welcomes from respected Elders and Knowledge Keepers. As one speaker reminded everyone, “Songs and prayers are a very important part of science.”

The format emulated a Talking Circle that encouraged respect, information-sharing, attentiveness and interconnectedness. Speakers and attendees expressed their recognition that the webinar marked a time for Indigenous People to revisit who and where they are, who their ancestors are, and where their teachings come from to move forward in a positive way. They also expressed their appreciation for the use of the traditional Circle format and its ability to “bring out” Indigenous Knowledge.

Many participants used Indigenous languages, which are also integral to Indigenous or traditional knowledge and can indeed serve as a shortcut to knowledge. As one of the opening speakers put it, the “wellness of language is connected to the wellness of the Earth.”

Dr. Lorna Williams aptly summed up the purpose of the Circle and its format in her opening remarks: “We have gathered today in a circle and we are here to shape what’s in the middle: the bundle of knowledge that will guide the way in which Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge is continued and created from all over the world.”

“These criticisms have to be brought forward in ways that allow us to build bridges toward a better future for our students, ourselves and our communities. We do need science to sustain ourselves into the 21st century in all areas. And we do need more Native students in science-related fields. Hopefully, with these kinds of strategies, we will be able to accomplish more rapidly within the next decade.”

Dr. Gregory Cajete
Tewa, Santa Clara Pueblo, Professor,
University of New Mexico, U.S.

“Let me very quickly compare science to a house. A house usually has a foundation and then a floor plan. And once you’ve got the floor plan, then you can think about decorating, furnishing and so on. A lot of times when we’re talking about science, we end up talking at the furnishing level, not so much at the floor plan level, and even less so at the foundational level. I want to talk about the foundational level.”

Dr. Leroy Little Bear
Blackfoot First Nation,
Professor Emeritus, University of Lethbridge,
Canada

Key messages

Many speakers contrasted Indigenous and western views of science, describing Indigenous science as the foundation for understanding the nature of the universe and our relationship with it versus western science as something that is more fleeting and focused on the temporal. Culture, tradition, spirituality, relationships and time are all important components of Indigenous Knowledge (which is science). The lack or loss of these has resulted in devastation, both for Indigenous Peoples and the world in general. There is fear that this may continue, but revitalizing these understandings is a source of hope for the next generation.

Each webinar participant brought a unique perspective—from the importance of storytelling and cross-cultural dialogue to the connection between Indigenous Knowledge and political activism to the global class struggle, the intersection of Indigenous language and mental health care, and more.

Some central themes emerged:

The knowledge that Indigenous Peoples accumulated for thousands of years before the emergence of “civilization” is not only valuable, but necessary for the continued existence of humans on Earth. Indigenous Knowledge systems have been around since time immemorial and can benefit future generations.

The Earth is facing a crisis. The broader scientific community can help to address it and restore equilibrium by supporting Indigenous scientific communities. A central goal of Indigenous Knowledge is sustainability, and it is built on relationships rather than on what can be measured.

Indigenous science is about love of land. Its continuity is therefore linked to the continuity of life on Earth.

Indigenous language and knowledge are intertwined, and both are at the heart of cultural survival and identity. A reinvigoration of Indigenous languages and cultures can help Indigenous populations reclaim space, dignity, equality, justice and liberty.

Despite long traditions of Indigenous science that are now being appreciated and reimplemented, the practice of Western science has systemically excluded Indigenous thought, Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous Peoples. This needs to stop.





Central discussion points

- Indigenous Peoples in many parts of the world have experienced a 500-year attack on their territories, cultures, languages and knowledges. This systematic move to silence and devalue Indigenous perspectives can be seen as a form of intellectual colonization.
- We are engaged in the work of educating people about the fact that Indigenous Knowledge has value and that considering other knowledges does not jeopardize their own. This is an effort to appreciate that the Indigenous Knowledge people continue to hold is precious, and to recognize that it continues despite a centuries-long effort to silence it.
- Indigenous scholars and activists around the world have diverse languages, cultures and histories, but take strength from important commonalities in their epistemologies, and agree on the importance of decolonizing knowledge and establishing a shared infrastructure to support the re-emergence of and renewed respect for their languages and knowledges.
- The importance of this work is gaining recognition among pillars and funders of research. In Canada, these include the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council.

Language is an essential starting point for reasserting the value and application of Indigenous Knowledge, as they are indivisible. The richness of Indigenous Knowledge systems arises from an intimate tradition of knowing and relationship, with a focus on continuity. It is time for these traditions to enter the mainstream and receive the same serious consideration as “western” knowledge.

- Value can be derived from bringing traditional knowledge into universities and having Indigenous institutions work alongside western institutions. These ideas are connected to the need to ensure access to quality education for Indigenous Peoples everywhere and to ensure Indigenous ways of knowing are incorporated into educational institutions so they can be considered universal rather than western. Mainstream agencies should reflect on the need to develop an ethical space from which to frame a relationship between themselves (and the state) and Indigenous Peoples.

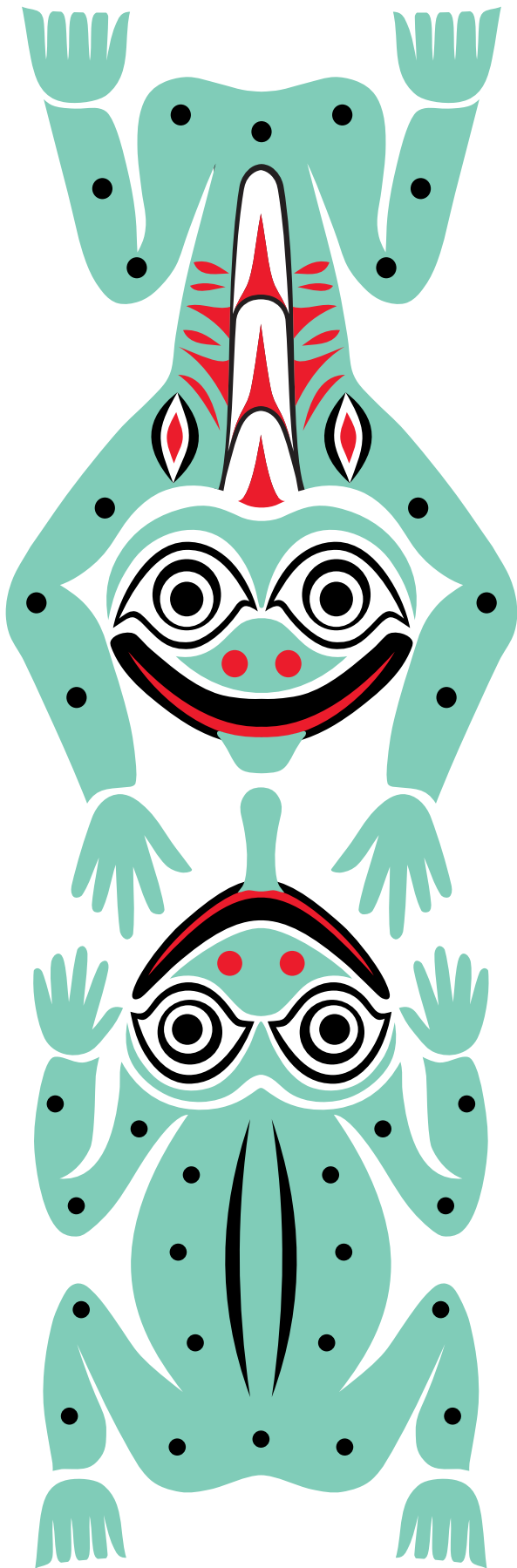
- Colonization has had persistent effects in Indigenous communities in physical, linguistic, economic and cultural domains. Indigenous scholars face an ongoing challenge to hold space in their minds to engage in cultural survival and to continue to support cultural reclamation.
- Bringing Indigenous languages into the light is a global struggle, and the reclamation and use of language and the participation of people in Indigenous cultural work is in itself a political act.

• *“The term sustainability can only be understood, at least in India, in terms of how the Indigenous populations have continued to live.”*

Dr. Sonajharia Minz
Vice-Chancellor, Sido Kanhu Murmu
University, Dumka, India

• *“To me, the idea of Indigenous open access is really interesting. It gives hope to people to work on something valuable to them.”*

Dr. Zanisah Man
Orang Asli, Professor, Universiti
Kebangsaan, Malaysia



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Snuneymuxw First Nation

Key recommendations

- Acknowledge Indigenous knowledge as science.
- Recognize Indigenous spiritual practices as vital to guiding and informing Indigenous Knowledge.
- Support the revitalization of Indigenous cultures and languages, recognizing that they are integral to Indigenous knowledge.
- Work toward an understanding of science that prioritizes relationality—that is, relationships with people, community, land and all creation.
- Recognize an Indigenous concept of time that ensures longevity of relationships and sustainability for future generations.

For *more* information

A [full report](#) and a [complete transcript](#) of the webinar are available as separate documents. The [full webinar](#) itself is available to view online.

Recommended reading

Chan, L., Hall, B., Piron, F., Tandon, R., & Wanósts'a7 Williams, L. (2020). Open science beyond open access: For and with communities. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3946773>

Kawai'ae'a, K. (2020, November 10). Position paper to the UNESCO World Virtual Indigenous Circle on Open Science and the Decolonization of Knowledge. World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium. https://www.unescochair-cbrsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/World_Virtual_Indigenous_Circle_Transcript.pdf p.7

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Meyer, M. A. (2013). Holographic epistemology: Native common sense. China Media Research, 9(2), 94-101. <https://education.illinois.edu/docs/default-source/default-document-library/hereca256a3980b76a29a33dff4b008a8698.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

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• *“When we talk about spirituality, we talk
• about equilibrium. We talk about saving the
• planet, because the planet right now is in crisis.
• This ancestral scientific community deserves
• support from the broader scientific community.
• I consider myself to be a scientific”*

Jazmin Romero Epiayu
Wayuu Activist, Colombia



• *“The real feast of knowledge will come when there*
• *is a sort of Marshall Plan to support the languages,*
• *the knowledges, which have been ‘othered’ and*
• *handicapped for the last hundreds of years.”*

Prof. Wangoola Wangoola Ndawula
Nabyama, MPAMBO African Multiversity,
Busoga, Uganda