

## Red Hope Pedagogy

### Introduction

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Red Hope<sup>1</sup> Pedagogy is education for social and political change. This collection of poems represents an engagement with the Indigenous scholars' experiences and realities of teaching the truths that need to be told in order for reconciliation to occur. The writing offers a lens through which the pedagogy of Red Hope is delivered; that very space where transformation occurs, one in which the student and teacher engage in telling the truth regarding the realities of our colonial experiences. The writing intends to document, in the expressive format of poetry, the pedagogical experiences of Indigenous scholars as we negotiate the complexities and tensions of teaching the harsh realities of our collective history, and its ongoing painful legacy.

The specific course reflected upon within this collection of poems is the province's first compulsory Aboriginal Education course, delivered at the University of Alberta, led by the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPE) Graduate specialization, in the Fall of 2012. Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax, Metis Elder, Scholar and Professor in IPE, was the primary author of the course: *Aboriginal Education and the Context for Professional Development*, EDU 211. The course has reached over 6,000 pre-service teachers since its implementation.

In the following group of poems, Dr. Weber-Pillwax's poetry is featured as the first one. The second is by Dr. Jeannette Sinclair, Coordinator of the EDU 211. The third is by Dr. Claudine Louis, PhD and President of Maskwacis Cultural College. The fourth is by Sarah Auger IPE, PhD student. The fifth submission is by Rebecca Sockbeson, IPE Associate Professor.

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### Endnote:

<sup>1</sup> The concept of "Red Hope" is drawn from: Sockbeson, R. (2011). *Cipenuk Red Hope: Weaving policy toward decolonization & beyond*. PhD Dissertation, University of Alberta.

## **Red Hope Pedagogy**

### **Liberating Ourselves**

Cora Weber-Pillwax  
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*Poetry offered in response to some ordinary experiences, and sharing my thoughts on mental slavery in relation to the sites of lived curriculum.<sup>1</sup>*

Four grandmothers were waiting to walk with me when I was created and born into this world.  
Four grandmothers speaking to me of the who that I am to become.

I try to remember but the grayness infiltrates my mind.  
I feel my being succumbing slowly, like  
frozen syrup sliding down the side of the jar as it melts.  
The fires of anger do not let up.

But I catch hold of myself,  
remembering my grandmothers, grandfathers,  
mother, father,  
sisters, brothers,  
sons, daughters,  
grandchildren of my soul.

Remembering that I cannot sink into that oblivion.

I had chosen life when the sun was shining;  
when the blueberries hung in rich clumps and the cranberries were full red with promise;  
when we shared the same glistening hill,  
sheltered from the fire of the sun by the dancing dizziness of a thousand birch leaves, with our  
souls drugged by the demanding passionate scent of smouldering pines.

Life was easy to live as a gift of joy.

But now, my soul wavers;  
it falters, dangerously close to the edge of a reality that I have never known.  
The fire that burns me no longer warms; neither does it give life.

In the deepest darkness of my mind, a thought begins, so tiny that it cannot really be counted as a  
thought.

It has not the power of a thought.

It is only a flicker of a response, a piece of life that is me only because it begins in me.

A flicker of life threatening to respond to that force, that energy, which I wish not to see; A flicker of life that has the power to respond, telling me that I have to make a choice.

To respond requires engagement; to engage requires a touching, a knowing of that energy. I must make a decision about whether or not I will respond, whether or not I will engage, whether or not I will learn to know this energy.

From a state of not-knowing, of paralysis of mind, arises the warrior woman.

Where did that sense of sacred communion go? It is there, but it is not there.  
It is there, but it refuses to carry me.

It seems I am to stand alone and to feel the darkness engulf my soul:  
To see for the first time the hate, resentment,  
ugliness that cripples and blights the beauty and joyfulness of being human.

I have been watching in horror how the hate enshrouded itself in the passion and poetry of justice,  
how ugliness and resentment wrapped itself in a mirage of shimmering beauty.  
And I have watched and felt my body become sickened:  
my heart heavy, my lungs struggling for purity,  
my gut twisting and wrenching against the invasion of foreign emotions,  
my legs and feet moving more slowly and unwillingly,  
my brain pounding and heaving against the waves of threatening and unrecognizable darkness.

I have watched and felt myself, a being of constant joy,  
swept into the deepest and longest silences of waiting,  
finally to collapse into the most indescribable calling out, and yearning for light.

Payment for the life of Indigenous mind: Indigenous woman, Indigenous scholar.

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**Endnote:**

<sup>1</sup> The concept of *mental slavery* is drawn from Bob Marley's well known, Redemption Song: "...Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds..."

## **Red Hope Pedagogy**

### ***Pakoseyimowin: Finding Hope***

Jeannette Sinclair  
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What will it take to open your mind?  
    More deaths and destruction of the human kind?  
Do you turn your cheek when the casualties are brown?  
    When you are forced to see us, are you wearing a frown?  
Do you talk with forked tongue from both sides of your mouth?  
    And wear a fake smile when you enter my house?  
Were we made equal by the hands of our maker?  
    Or is life really better for those who are takers?  
Your mind I can't change  
    But hope still remains  
That the future is brighter, our loads somewhat lighter  
    When the minds of the young and the hearts of the brave  
Educate their people, no longer enslaved  
    To the worries and fears that they might lose their place  
Of privilege and power  
    In the whole human 'race'.

## Red Hope Pedagogy

### Sacred Ancestral Tears

Claudine Louis  
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I spoke of you today  
I felt your pain  
I shed some tears

I lingered in that pain for only a moment  
It was overwhelming  
I had to cry

I do not know the details  
I only know the hurt  
I felt your spirit

I am honored by your presence  
I miss you and  
I love you

The tears were for you  
I became the vessel  
You worked through me  
Now you can move onward  
And, so can I.

You are not here  
Yet, you are  
I am reminded you are with me  
You shine through me.

## **Red Hope Pedagogy**

### **Truth and Reconciliation**

Sarah Auger  
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Truths are truths, but  
Telling truth becomes a contested space  
Where the knower becomes the known  
And the teacher becomes the face

Of all those little brown girls and boys  
Whose truths had been swept into an abyss?  
Of suppressed memories and stolen babies  
The heartache of empty arms and no last kiss

We wrench them into a world of hurt  
The discomfort of those truths spoken  
Becomes the ennui of a mind overloaded  
And settles into a landscape of the broken

The pain seeps through in unsuspecting moments  
When the learner becomes the learned  
Yet doesn't see the truth laid before them  
An expertise claimed but not quite earned

We reconcile ourselves to the hope  
That something shared of a truth told  
Will capture an imagination  
And the tenuous bonds of understanding will hold

Why do we keep doing this?  
Because it's necessary  
For the ones who came before us  
And the ones yet to come

## Red Hope Pedagogy

### Expressions of Transformation

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*I've already learned about Indian Residential Schools  
Why do we need to learn this again?  
It's not my fault that happened  
That's all in the past get over it  
Move forward*

There were over 150,000 Indian Residential School students  
1 in 25 of them died in Indian Residential School  
1 in 26 Canadians died in WWII  
We didn't blame you  
We asked you to care  
Teaching is a caring profession  
You are responsible for learning the truth  
So you can teach it  
So the 7,000 IRS survivors who told their stories of  
sexual, physical and emotional abuse  
That their pain was not shared in vain

*But Indians get everything for free  
They are lazy drunks  
Unmotivated to be educated  
You can't help someone if they aren't going to help themselves  
Oh you just don't like white people*

We just don't like oppression  
The treaty makes it so we can all live on  
this land together  
Wrongful dispossession of land is no compensation  
for partially funded promises  
We are so very much more than lazy drunks  
our relatives are in chronic pain that this colonial  
system created  
Addictions are not our fault  
Burdened with the responsibility to clean up and  
teach about a mess we did not create but suffer from  
We are your teachers now  
motivated to create social and political change for  
our children and yours  
First Nations receive around 60% of the amount of  
funding that provincial schools get for education  
Even less for child services

Our children are 7-10 times more likely to commit  
suicide than non-Aboriginal peers  
We are here to help you to understand  
And make sense of how we got here

*Why is this the first time I'm learning about this?  
You are the first Aboriginal instructor I ever had  
First time I ever talked to a Native  
You're not angry like the other Natives*

Colonialism and the neoliberal state thrives on  
hiding truth  
We teach through the paralyzing anguish  
and rage about what has happened to our people and  
what is allowed to continue  
angry but not allowed to show it  
Us Aboriginal instructors are less than 2% of the  
professoriate

*I'm outraged I did not learn this before  
I feel guilty and ashamed  
I saw you at superstore parking lot  
You tried to help me with my groceries while I carried my baby  
I thought you were homeless and gonna bum a loonie off me  
Got home and realized that's my prof at the U of A*

The guilt doesn't serve anyone  
It's not your fault either  
It's OUR responsibility we have inherited  
Elder Rene Attean once said  
us Natives are not a convenience store  
You are not allowed to just buy the  
'MnM's' - the dances, food, songs, ceremonies  
and leave behind the cleaning products

*This course made me a better Canadian  
that day at the parking lot  
I was carrying and will continue to address  
the cleaning products  
I'm committed to teach the truth, my students will learn about racism, oppression,  
genocide and accurate history...*

Reconciliation is impossible without truth  
And truth can't be mobilized without someone to teach it  
So that many more can learn from it  
So that it's not repeated  
Our ancestors' suffering compels perseverance  
to teach through the mounds of ignorance and hate  
when students make that Anti-Racist Shift  
Red Hope is felt  
Social and Political Change  
For the Sake of Our People Always