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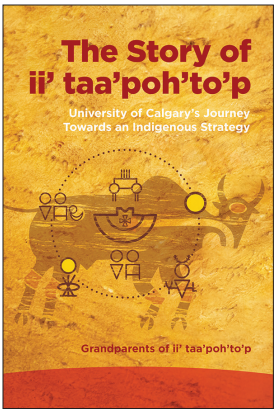

THE NEXT WAR: INDICATIONS INTELLIGENCE IN THE EARLY COLD WAR

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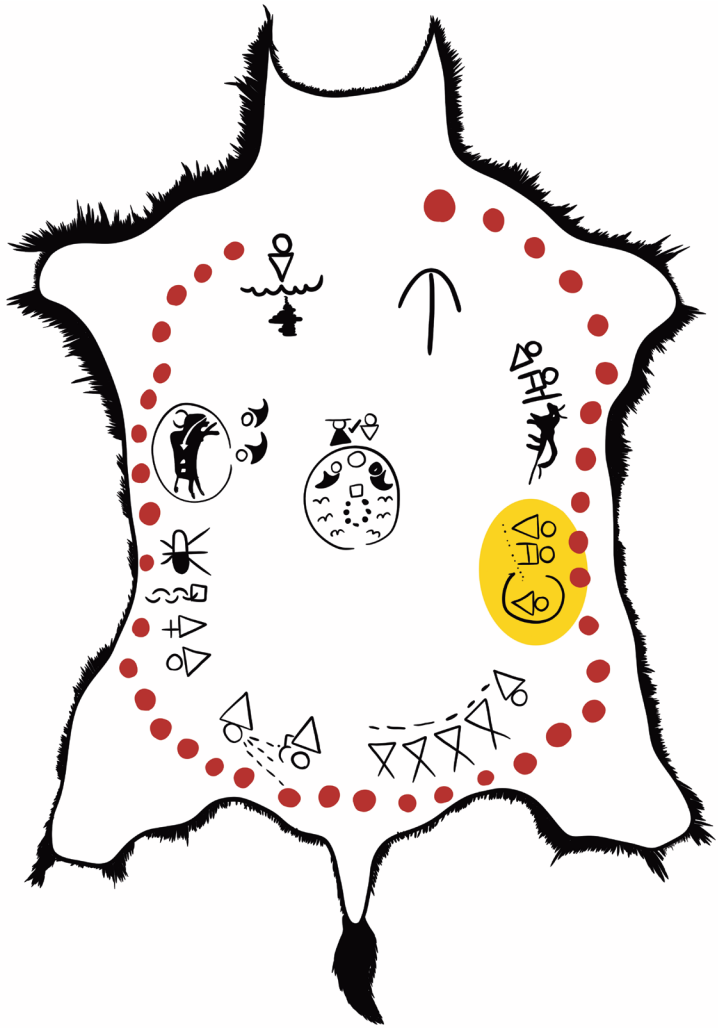
Coming into the Circle

Reg Crowshoe, Shawna Cunningham, Jackie Sieppert



Four Stories

TWO KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

I look at my father, Aapohsoy'yiisai [Weasel Tail], who wrote a story about his life titled Weasel Tail. He was born in 1898, 1899. When he was born, there were already residential schools. When he was sent to residential school, he was sent to residential school along the Old Man River near where he was born. It was called Victoria Home. So he would start talking about his experience—how transformation happened, how he had to follow the residential school, how he had to follow Indian Affairs policies throughout his life, and how the Indian Agent and the churches had so much power over him, and so on. And he would tell me, "Through all these experiences with the newcomers—their writing and their dominion—I know their system so good, I can become one of them." And then he would say, "However, if they knew my system, then they would know me. Then we can work together. But they don't know my system, and we're suffering all these years." So I think about that and say, "Yes, it's at the system level that we need to understand each other." We need to culturally interpret and translate at a practical level so we can understand. Weasel Tail said, "Through Western practice, I know what they do." So, based on that knowledge from Weasel Tail, I say it's that practical knowledge that we have to culturally translate and culturally interpret system languages so that we know the practices so well, so we can know each other. And then, when we know each other, we can achieve the goals we need to achieve. Especially today when we're talking about reconciliation. From that knowledge that came from my father, in our language, the concept of parallels in practice was instilled in my mind in my young years. Weasel Tail's teaching helped me to find those parallels in practice.

Reg Crowshoe

CIRCLES AND LINES

For us, the first creation was number one. The symbol for number one is the Sun, number two is the Moon, number three is Morning Star, and number four is Scarface. Anyway, I knew that, and I can count in an Indigenous way. However, when I went to residential school, I wasn't allowed to speak my language. And there we got different symbols for counting or numeration, I guess we call it. As much as we couldn't speak our language, we couldn't use our Blackfoot symbols either. In residential school, we were taught that a line was the symbol for number one. And in my young mind, I was confused, but I didn't want to speak up. But I knew that the circle, in our way, was the symbol for the sun, and the sun is number one. So Western knowledge was superimposing the line over the circle. That was my confusion. When I went home, I told my Grandmother that story of different symbols for the number one—the circle and the line—and my challenge in understanding the symbol of the line versus the circle. My Grandmother straightened it out for me. She said, "Creator gave us all our different languages and dialects, even in symbols. The circle is right. Creator gave us that to be the symbol for the sun. But he also gave the other people [Western people] the [straight] line up and down. They both mean the same thing. You can use both." I always go back to the old lady's (my Grandmother's) words. When I look at the idea of imposing one over the other, I look at it as cultural confusion. And cultural confusion is alive today, especially when organizations say "We want to intertwine the two distinct cultural ways of knowing or combine Indigenous cultures with 'written' cultures."

Reg Crowshoe

KIMMAPIIPITSINI: SANCTIFIED KINDNESS

To me, sanctified kindness is an interpretation of kimmapiipitsini *(to be kind). It's that humility and humbleness to remember that we (all those in creation) are equal so that we can safely survive together. And I guess that's where kindness comes in, where we take that humility and even the responsibility of kindness, so that we can be kind to everything. If I wasn't kind to the sweetgrass, and I didn't look after the sweetgrass as part of my responsibility, then the sweetgrass is going to disappear from creation. And when it does, then how are we going to use sweetgrass in our smudge as a call to order? So that would be the concept of kindness—when we sanctify kindness for all. When we "call to order" and make the smudge, we consider all of creation. This comes from the concept of natural laws where, as my Grandmother taught me, "All creation respects and is kind to each other, and that's how we learn to then be kind to ourselves." And the other important thing that I learned, as an oral concept, is that, when I have an idea (or a thought), I have to bring it through a smudge process to make it real. I think in Western practice you might refer to that as developing a policy. It's a thought, and you bring it through a process, and that process gives you direction. So, when I come up with a thought, sanctified kindness has got to be a part of it, because I've got to bring that kindness to the gathering, to the smudge—because the gathering is the process to validate or to make my thought real. That's the process of sanctified kindness. I bring my thoughts to the gathering, and then we all have the input into it and validate it as an idea. Then it becomes real. It becomes validated by the venue and the smudge. Through the smudge and sanctified kindness, I have to consider all my people or all my relatives in the environment so that I'm not harming them. The process of sanctified kindness must give us all survival. It's my responsibility to natural laws to make things real. That's how I view sanctified kindness.*

Reg Crowshoe

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE SMUDGED CIRCLE

When I went into the Little Birds, the Elder made a smudge to initiate a "call to order." At the same time, however, she said, "All right, all of you sitting in this circle are all transformed into Little Birds. You're all Little Birds. When we made the smudge, we transformed you." So as soon as that happened with the smudge, we all became equal. We weren't children from different families. We weren't children from different parts of the reserve. We were all equal as Little Birds. With the Little Birds, we had four stories to introduce. The four stories were a part of all those circles as I grew up. We had progressive levels of learning or circles. Each time we went to another level, we were told four stories, or we shared four stories. Those four stories were alignment or concept stories that prepared us to go to the next level. And throughout all the circles, whether it's the Bumble Bees, the Brave Dogs, the Thunder Pipes, the other societies, the four stories are an important concept to set direction through alignment but also through a concept of how we're going to work within a framework of some sort, how we're going to achieve our goals based on the four stories given or offered. So I relate those four stories to a parallel in written systems that talk about building strategies and a framework for a strategy, because we develop a concept that allows us to build a Western written framework or strategies, say to transform or whatever. Those are four concepts that are important. So that's how I relate the four stories in our circle. So we've got the smudge to "call us to order," we've got the circle as a venue, we've got the four concepts to give us the framework of what we're going to enter and what we're going to do.

Reg Crowshoe

Our Parallel Journey

The Indigenous Strategy *ii' taa'poh'to'p* was informed and enriched by consultations, conversations, and ceremonial guidance from many Traditional Knowledge Keepers identified in the Indigenous Strategy document (University of Calgary 2017b, 50). Traditional Knowledge Keepers became an important part of our journey. The creation of the strategy was part of a parallel practice that engaged in ceremonial validation, transfers, and blessings associated with a four-stage journey framework that felt right for the University of Calgary. The parallel practice adopted an oral concept of becoming relatives to inform a collective, collaborative, and ethical space in which to achieve a common purpose. Reg Crowshoe explains the foundation of this parallel approach:

> When I talk to organizations about transformation, or a framework to help develop a strategy of transformation, I always go back to the system of building relatives. We become real to each other when we are relatives. Through this process, we work together so that everyone can survive rather than creating something we must conform to. So it's not building relatives to make people conform to something but to work collectively to transform organizations in a way that we all can survive together. You're putting another option out there, an oral system's option where we are transforming through making relatives rather than mere policies. System change through Western policy creates fear and resistance in the organization. You don't want to be looking at organizational change where people are going to ask, "Why do I have to?" This type of system change creates resistance. So why not use the option of building relatives as a "buy-in" to a system of survival where we work together in achieving a goal? So that's how, through my knowledge system, I thought about how to create a framework to work with the whole institution, the University of Calgary. I thought "We need to work with an Indigenous framework based on building relatives."

This chapter provides an overview of the key cultural teachings that helped to ground, shape, and guide the development of the University

of Calgary Indigenous Strategy. To fully capture and disseminate the story of *ii' taa'poh'to'p*, we wove traditional knowledge into the chapter via a series of conversational interviews with Piikani Elder Dr. Reg Crowshoe [Áwákaasiina/Deer Chief]. He was a key member of the Steering Committee, helping to guide our journey through parallel cultural practices and teachings now embedded in *ii' taa'poh'to'p*. Crowshoe imparted key cultural teachings that reflect a Piikani worldview based on oral transfers grounded in intergenerational knowledge and validated through venue, action, language, and song. This knowledge is interpreted and evoked through lived experiences and traditional oral practices.

Co-creation of the Indigenous Strategy involved walking two parallel paths. The generous teachings from Traditional Knowledge Keepers are embedded in the strategy's unique content and structure, honouring Indigenous ways of knowing. Our parallel path was a journey of evolutionary transformation for the individuals involved, inspiring the University of Calgary to take up the call for reconciliation as guided by *ii' taa'poh'to'p*. Developing the strategy required a mindful and sustainable approach that included space to explore, reflect, and engage fully and meaningfully with community. The process was cyclical rather than linear, and the work was inherently relational. The initial phase of the work, reflected in this chapter, involved moving through trepidation, ambiguity, and anxiety to arrive at a new place of understanding and commitment for all involved in the journey. It was a process of "coming into the circle," creating a common purpose, and taking the first steps toward truth and reconciliation. The journey was enriched and affirmed by Indigenous worldviews and methods as core to the process and experience. In this chapter, we share some of the foundational cultural teachings and onto-epistemological frameworks that shaped the coming into the circle aspect of our developmental journey.

Coming into the Circle

The cycle of life is a process, derived from the natural laws of the universe, that encompasses concepts of circularity. Conceptual circles shape a core understanding of the world and the practices that flow from that understanding. Many Indigenous cultures have adopted practices to reflect circularity in nature, including ceremonial practices, concepts of time,

communal structures, decision-making processes, and architectural designs such as tipis. Below is a reflective conversation with Reg Crowshoe:

> Jackie Sieppert: The book is going to start with the notion of coming into the circle. And part of that, for us, is about the teaching associated with the four stories. So we wanted to start there and ask if you could explain the teachings associated with the offering of four stories.

> Reg Crowshoe: When I think about the circle, to us everything is in a circle. The whole life is in the cycle, a life cycle. The circle itself—we see it in four directions or four circles, also counting to four, or in our creation stories. The knowledge of four gives us that practice of a circle. We sit in a circle, stand in a circle, and dance in a circle. Our tipis are in circles, life is in circles; it gives us the practice of a circle.
>
> I think the way I look at the four stories is that the four stories were created as individuals would come into the circle. When we come into the circle, and the leader asks for four stories, the four stories are an oral narrative of a creation. This is a process of knowledge creation. The practice of creation happens when someone brings in a thought, idea, or truth. This form of truthing represents an invisible infrastructure where there are consequences if we do something wrong. That concept of creation is what we call a power, a jurisdiction, a spirit. So, if we do something bad against this creation, like in all creation, I and my relatives suffer the consequence. That's an important understanding of the creation of those four stories. Then we go to the physical part to say the four stories will talk about how that creation came together and the storied experience of individuals. The narrative or research from that experience becomes the physical representation of what is real to us. So the four stories represent a real concept or event that happened. I would look at the stories as jurisdiction. It's a form of truthing, so it has jurisdiction or authority. So, when you bring the story into a process like decision making or transfer of knowledge, that is part of your jurisdiction going

into the process for making decisions. A lot of Elders speak about it [truthing through story] as a spirit. When you bring the story into the circle, the spirit comes with it, so automatically there's a jurisdiction evoked.

Foundational Cultural Teachings

The development of the Indigenous Strategy was grounded in cultural teachings guided by the concepts of parallel paths, sanctified kindness, and ethical space that helped us to move forward "in a good way." These concepts, together with reflections on the journey, and related learnings, are presented through stories and conversational sections.

For many Indigenous peoples, oral knowledge and worldviews are accessed through language, action, venue, and song,[1] often in the context of ceremony. Complex epistemologies are best expressed and/or understood within the language of origin. In a traditional context, Elders recognized by the community are the keepers of the knowledge, with rights of expression, dissemination, and transfer bestowed through oral practices such as ceremony. For the most part, Indigenous knowledge is held, protected, and articulated within the construct of the language and the intergenerational oral practices therein. Knowledge acquisition, preservation, and dissemination are based on an enduring, relational, and fundamental understanding of the world, grounded by natural laws and cyclical universal principles of living with and within an inextricably interconnected "living" and ever-evolving ecosystem. In that sense, everything in creation is interactive, responsive, and constantly in communication with universal circular patterns found in nature. There is a highly sensory dimension to creation.

In this light, Indigenous knowledge is based on oral traditions and practices rather than the standardized confines of written knowledge that dominate colonial education systems, based on a foundation of what L'nu Mi'kmaq scholar Marie Battiste (2013, 26) calls "cognitive imperialism," by which "a Eurocentric foundation is advanced to the exclusion of other knowledges and languages." Oral knowledge, most traditionally, was and still is accessed through language or the Traditional Knowledge

1 Oral teaching from Reg Crowshoe, January 17, 2023.

Keeper. Most often Indigenous knowledge is based on enduring and fundamental understanding that the world, and all within it are relationally interconnected and cyclical in nature. In that sense, everything is part of a perpetual and relational circular motion, evolving through dynamic spirals emanating from the natural laws of the universe, in sync with and engaged in "universal flux" (Little Bear 2000, 85), the ebb and flow of all life, the pulse of all creation.

IN A GOOD WAY

The following is an excerpt from the Indigenous Strategy document *ii' taa'poh'to'p*:

> *In a good way* is a concept used by many Indigenous peoples to recognize work that is conducted in authentic and meaningful ways, with intention and sincerity, through reciprocal and respectful relationships. It is a demonstration of working with clear purpose and with high levels of integrity, moral strength, and communal spirit. The guiding principle for the Indigenous Strategy therefore starts with the commitment to work together with Indigenous communities "in a good way."
>
> The journey toward an Indigenous Strategy is one that involves deep change at the University of Calgary. This change is evolutionary. It will require ongoing dialogue with Indigenous communities, thoughtful reflection, building upon successes, and changing the general university narrative over time. It is inherently a process of long-term relationship building. The realization of the Strategy will require patience and dedication, as reconciliation will be an ongoing process for many years—perhaps generations. Based on this, another foundational element in the guiding principle is the Indigenous focus on transformation and renewal, a dynamic universal cycle based on natural laws of change, adaptation, and evolution. (University of Calgary 2017b, 13)

In addition to the guiding principle of working in a good way, the following concepts reflect the processes of change built into the foundation of this Indigenous Strategy.

PARALLEL PATHS

Choosing to walk a path toward reconciliation represents a generational commitment based on a foundation of compassion, cross-cultural learning, and humility. It brings tremendous responsibility to commit to building new knowledge and deeply understand Indigenous perspectives, worldviews, histories, cultures, and belief systems. It also demands the ability to interrogate the dominant worldviews, structures, and processes that oppress Indigenous peoples. Walking a path toward reconciliation requires establishing relationships that are mutually authentic, respectful, beneficial, and equal. The journey toward reconciliation therefore depends on creating parallel pathways in which no one particular worldview, knowledge, or way of doing dominates others. Canada's educational institutions share these responsibilities and must be leaders in creating the parallel pathways that will initiate and sustain reconciliation.

Because education played a fundamental part in the implementation of Canada's destructive policies of assimilation aimed at Indigenous peoples, the University of Calgary chose to acknowledge its moral and ethical obligations to walk the path toward reconciliation. The university committed to renewing relationships with Indigenous peoples and to creating an inclusive, mindful, and respectful teaching, learning, and research institution.

Those tasked with developing the University of Calgary's Indigenous Strategy felt this daunting obligation to develop a parallel process. Success would demand new understanding, knowledge, and commitment, in fact a new form of postsecondary strategy development. We knew that the process needed to reflect mandated university governance structures and procedures, including broad institutional consultations, committee processes, and levels of institutional approval. Such processes are inherently based on the historical, written language traditions of postsecondary systems. They result in textual documents such as committee terms of reference, various reports, and an Indigenous Strategy to be presented in written form.

Throughout our journey, Indigenous knowledge systems needed to be given equal standing with historical university processes. The knowledge shared by and the guidance received from Traditional Knowledge Keepers were fundamental to our process as well as the final strategy document. Engagement in ceremonial ways of doing (oral practices) was transformative for individuals involved in the developmental journey. Giving oral and written practices equal standing throughout the journey changed the nature of the strategy and has become synonymous with the story of the university.

The development of the university's Indigenous Strategy therefore embraced two distinct worldviews, neither of which overshadowed the other. One of the teachings shared by Reg Crowshoe originated with his Grandmother, Iikia'yisst siiyi oh'paa'ta [All Listens For], who addressed concepts of what we now recognize as the colonization and contamination of Indigenous knowledge systems. The teachings shared by his Grandmother were passed down to Reg as uncontaminated knowledge in the old Blackfoot language, free from Western interference and acts of colonization:

> We can't intertwine the two worldviews, or we'll get cultural confusion. My Grandmother would say "Creator gave the written system and the oral system as administrative practices to each culture." So they're both equal. Oral practices such as a traditional song [like treaty songs] are an administrative practice that is equal to written documents [like the written treaties]. We must acknowledge oral practices as equally valid knowledge systems—like the Mohawk's use of the wampum belt or the metaphorical concept of two canoes on a river, travelling in the same direction but not crossing, bumping, or crashing into each other. And if we can do that, then we can work together.

Based on this understanding, the resulting process to develop the Indigenous Strategy was iterative and cyclical. Recognizing and respecting multiple and diverse worldviews and ways of knowing became essential. Although we understood the university's dominant processes, non-Indigenous participants had limited understanding of Indigenous

Final Pipe Ceremony. June 21, 2017. University of Calgary. Photo Credit: Riley Brandt, UCalgary.

ways of knowing. We needed to pause routinely to develop understanding, seek guidance from Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and choose practices that reflected an authentic commitment to this parallel path. Such a path had to be grounded in ceremony, and those developing the strategy had to engage in deep learning that often challenged existing values and belief systems, assumptions, and routine practices.

A core challenge in creating this parallel path was ensuring alignment between written and oral practices. For example, many individuals in the Working Group, particularly non-Indigenous institutional appointees, had never participated in an Indigenous ceremony and were apprehensive at first. However, once they became accustomed to the repetitive practice of smudging and taking part in pipe ceremonies throughout the journey, they embraced the safety and belonging that the ceremonies provided. Staying true to this parallel path beyond the Working Group and Steering Committee required constant, mindful attention. Dialogue among Traditional Knowledge Keepers, the Indigenous Task Force, and the rest of the institution was key. There were continual conversations about and cultural interpretations of the parallels between oral Indigenous and institutional, Eurocentric, written practices and structures.

In the spirit of co-creating the Indigenous Strategy, members of the Steering Committee and Working Group were guided by key cultural teachings from the Elders with whom we worked. These teachings ensured the inherent value and role of oral practices. One of the foundational teachings was about the importance of the circle and the smudge, as shared by Reg Crowshoe:

> The circle, the smudge, sanctified kindness, and the four stories (which give us alignment) are all oral practices that allow us to transfer knowledge or make decisions. Those oral practices or oral systems are similar to written practices. Western written practices have a place to make decisions, like a boardroom or classroom. They have their call to order, like the gavel. Therefore, oral stories, like the smudged four alignment stories, may be considered parallel to the directions set by written policy in Western systems. Those written policies are what I consider parallel to four stories or narratives that the Elders represent. Elders are our oral policies. So those are parallels in two systems. One is a written system, and one is an oral. In our oral system, there is system language. Part of my responsibilities and transparencies to natural laws is that we all survive together and sanctify kindness. So, when I think from that perspective, I think about creation. I think about . . . all different jurisdictions of different beings or relatives within creation.

SANCTIFIED KINDNESS (*KIMMAPIIPITSINI*)

Sanctified kindness is an interpretation of a Blackfoot concept named *kimmapiipitsini*. As a cultural concept, it is far broader than the concept of kindness commonly understood in the dominant culture. *Kimmapiipitsini* is grounded in the responsibility to be humble, to see all of creation as equal, to embody and extend kindness to everything around us—to all our relatives. However, it also reflects a collective responsibility to protect and honour natural laws—the source of survival. Relationships and collective processes require sanctified kindness to be real and respectful. One of Dr. Crowshoe's teachings articulates this profound responsibility:

> All creations are natural law. That's what I call them, natural law. However, when they start interacting, there's many different types of interaction. . . . That interaction is creative by nature. So we say that interaction creates. For example, interaction between natural laws creates research; it creates an experience; it creates knowledge. And as it creates those narratives, they come to our circles as absolute laws. They come to our circles as knowledge. So those are the tools we use to be responsible and transparent to Creator, so that we all survive. So I look at the land and the ecosystem as a physical documentation of our laws. Like any other society around the world, we have laws, and we're responsible for them through our relationship within an ecosystem that we are all a part of.

It is perhaps this grounding in natural laws that most clearly separates the concept of sanctified kindness from the more limited understanding of kindness in the dominant worldview. Sanctified kindness embodies the iterative and dynamic interactions that connect all creation with the natural laws of our world—renewal, restoration, rejuvenation, relationship. It is more than the caring interactions among individuals, extending instead to the universal and circular connections noted in Little Bear's (2000) concept of "universal flux." In this sense, sanctified kindness is reflected in the ecosystems in which we are all a part, and it is essential to balance and survival.

ETHICAL SPACE

Willie Ermine (2007, 194) conceptualizes a dynamic space created between "Indigenous and Western thought worlds." The boundaries or parameters of this space are established through the human construction of firm and enduring conceptual models. These models, which define our cultural identities, establish understandings of the world, principles by which we live, and ways of interacting within and being in relations with the ecosystems of our environment. The differences between these "thought worlds" establish the uniqueness and diversity of Indigenous and Western communities based on distinct histories, knowledge traditions, philosophies, and social and political realities (Ermine 2007, 194).

Because Indigenous and Western thought worlds have such unique and often contrasting assumptions about and perceptions of the world, it is a challenge to easily communicate across the "space" that exists between them. Ermine (2007, 194) suggests that this reality has created "two solitudes" that must be bridged if reconciliation is to be experienced. This is particularly true given the extent to which the Western thought world has colonized the Indigenous thought world for centuries.

The idea of ethical space is based on the premise that Indigenous and Western thought worlds have inherent, inalienable rights and standing. There is a sacredness to these distinct thought worlds, and authentic relationships between them require a deep commitment to honouring and protecting the spirit inherent in each world. In essence, an ethical relationship between Indigenous and Western thought worlds requires the dominant culture to fully acknowledge and engage with Indigenous communities through their own histories, cultures, knowledge systems, and autonomous practices. People who espouse Western systems must recognize cognitive imperialistic acts and acknowledge historical and current transgressions against Indigenous communities and the mechanisms by which their thought world has violated the spaces within Indigenous communities.

Like Ermine (2007), Reg Crowshoe and David Lertzman (2020, 18) also suggest that, to realize ethical space, a mutual understanding must be established between Indigenous and Western perspectives on the environment and our place within it. This understanding must restore the trust and respect lost through the colonization of Indigenous peoples. Doing so will create safety in the relationship, one that allows for open, transparent communication. This, Crowshoe explains, is a critical and grounding component of ethical space:

> I look at any bio-ecosystem as one big ethical space. We need to survive together, and survival is the ethical space. . . . To avoid cultural confusion, we need to engage in survival with sanctified kindness and relatives, by allowing each individual to come into that space with their own worldview and responsibilities. We need to provide a safe space for the two individuals from disparate cultures to have a discussion, to understand each other. And that ethical space, it's just going

to be a space until you bring the two together and it comes alive; then it's ethical space. So that's the concept I look at as ethical space. The circle is our ethical space, the nest, the burrow, the beehive, and the mountain, where all those circles come from, those are giving us the basis of the circle, which is ethical space.

So, when I look at ethical space from a Western perspective and my understanding of Western practices, whatever the space is, a boardroom or a classroom, in order to make it safe, you need policies like codes of conduct and procedures, which allow two people to be able to talk about their opinions or share opposite opinions, but that's what makes it safe. So that's the ethical space. So I think about our classes, the circle when I was young, whoa, I think about that, and when I look at the walls of our tipi when I was young I always see the design. In our case, it was the *ii'kokaan* (lodge design), and I feel comfortable in my home looking at those designs. But if you look past those designs to the upper people—the stars, on the north side—we have the seven stars; the seven brothers give us procedure. So, when I make my smudge for sanctified kindness, the seven brothers and their stories, the seven learnings, gave us procedure as to how we do this in a safe space.

Ceremonial Ways of Doing

INVITATION INTO THE CIRCLE

A commitment to Indigenous ways of knowing and doing was essential to developing parallel pathways for the University of Calgary's Indigenous Strategy. One of these pathways was well understood within the university since it followed accepted governance procedures and practices. They included, for example, the use of committee structures, terms of reference, leadership assignments, and adherence to mechanisms of approval within the university governance structure. Such practices were an important part of the process to develop and approve the strategy.

However, development and validation of the strategy also demanded a parallel pathway that honoured and protected Indigenous governance systems. At every step, we needed to determine the parallel mechanism that would put Indigenous ways of knowing and doing on equal footing with the processes inherent to postsecondary institutions. Doing so necessitated constant conversations with Traditional Knowledge Keepers, working through ambiguity, and a willingness to defer or alter typical university processes. The process relied on understanding Indigenous oral practices in ways that most university personnel were not familiar with. Examples included smudging before meetings to open a safe and ethical space for respectful dialogue and meaningful decision making and honouring progress through cultural transfers and pipe ceremonies.

In this process, the concepts of circularity enacted in life and practice, along with the role of "alignment" stories, were critical to the development of an Indigenous Strategy. They became the starting point for coming into the circle with the primary purpose of making relatives and creating processes that affirmed Indigenous knowledge, governance procedures, and the essential role of ceremony. For the entire University of Calgary community, it required that we "live within the circle and think outside the box."[2]

THE SMUDGED CIRCLE

The concept of the smudged circle provides a powerful counterpart to executive decision making, boardroom procedures and rules, use of the gavel, and mechanisms affirming that a decision has been made. As Reg Crowshoe noted in a conversational interview in 2023,

> the smudge calls us to order, the circle is the venue, and the four stories/concepts give us the framework of what circle (or environment) we are going to enter and what we are going to do (or commit to doing). The smudge also constitutes a copyright; it is a framework and an introduction to the systems of truth telling and knowing that Indigenous worldviews are based on.

2 Gregory Cajete, personal communication with Jacqueline Ottmann, February 2014.

As a child, Reg was immersed in Blackfoot Knowledge and pedagogical practices through initiation into Blackfoot circle societies, the first being the Little Birds. Its circle or society, the first of many within his lifetime, represents a teaching and learning or pedagogical structure within a Blackfoot Piikani paradigm. As he reflected on the essential role of these societies, he said that,

> in Blackfoot culture, the bumble bees and their hives are represented in a circle, and the Brave Dog society has its own circle; so too do the Thunder Pipe societies, the Beaver Bundles societies, and the Sun Dance circle. So the circle has many meanings, but it all gives us the same practice of coming together in a common venue and purpose. The circle establishes a venue where we can develop a safe place to have a discussion, to learn, and to transfer knowledge through a call to order of the smudge within the circle.

The teachings imparted through the oral practices of this circle are comparable to, yet different from, the Western notion of a more formal, standardized curriculum. For the individual members and the collective cohort, the circular structures are progressive, building upon each other, a pedagogical model based on natural laws of the land, where belonging is a relational concept, encompassing all living beings and instilling a communal and "relational way of being" (Wilson 2008) through a process of what Crowshoe calls "making relatives." Teachings are shared and understood through a communal and relational lens of respectful reciprocity specific to the land and the Indigenous ancestral community from which they are drawn.

MAKING RELATIVES

According to Reg Crowshoe in an oral teaching shared in 2023, "when we acknowledge the land as a relative when we are sitting in circle, we must ask ourselves: how does that land acknowledgement connect us to the natural laws of the land?" He shared that the "smudge honours the land. Land is a physical representation of our natural laws. Therefore, a land acknowledgement recognizes that our society has governance and laws—and that circle of relations includes all dialects or all living beings

within the ecosystem." In this way, the smudged circle is all inclusive and provides a relational framework within how to best work together with the understanding that we are all relatives. Reg further explained the development of this relational framework:

> A group of people coming together to achieve goals and membership is called *kohoihka'si*, a Blackfoot word for an all-friends group. We become relatives, let's say, within the environment, when we need to do something to survive—when we need to come together as a group. We adopt oral terms of reference through making relatives to protect our goals, objectives, and membership—parallel to a legal entity in Western frameworks or organizations. As soon as you come together as a group to achieve whatever you need to achieve or survive together, then you become relatives. And after you become relatives, everything else is your relative. The snow, the rain, the grass are all your relatives. The four seasons become part of your relatives.

The importance of "making relatives" was quickly apparent in the process of developing an Indigenous Strategy for the University of Calgary. To approach the process with the conscious goal of making relatives meant that the institution would acknowledge Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing and the cultural and governance protocols embedded within Indigenous communities. That is, the process of developing the strategy had to begin with a commitment to creating two parallel pathways. One would adhere to university committee structures, policy frameworks, and approval procedures; the other would adhere to appropriate cultural protocols, ceremonies, and approval procedures. The creation of these parallel, equal pathways was necessary to come into the circle and relate to one another and our collective work in a meaningful way.

The process of making relatives, or creating and maintaining good relations, was also important in establishing the relational understanding and commitment expected of a traditional, Western, postsecondary institution. In the dominant culture, postsecondary institutions wield tremendous power in the community. Universities are large organizations with long histories and entrenched ways of doing things. They also bring

tremendous expertise, respect, and power to relationships. These facts commonly create competition and power imbalances in relationships with postsecondary institutions. In this case, the power dynamics had to change, and the university needed to find ways to rebalance and begin to decolonize those dynamics. The concept of making relatives was a critical foundation for that process. It also served as a constant reminder that humility needed to be invited into the circle in an authentic way.

THE CIRCLE AS A RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Most large Western organizations function with an extensive hierarchy and distinctly tiered decision-making protocols. Postsecondary institutions are clear examples of such organizations, and their processes to develop institutional strategies follow hierarchical pathways. In developing an Indigenous Strategy for the University of Calgary, however, these processes needed to make room for frameworks that would reset relationships, or begin new relationships, with Indigenous communities.

This need to create room for a relational framework was articulated by a Traditional Knowledge Keeper during one of our dialogues. He pointed out that Eurocentric decision-making systems are based on positions or levels of authority in an organization. Even within a single committee or decision-making body, these rules apply. Moreover, decisions are made in square rooms and around rectangular tables, meaning that there are implied hierarchies and boundaries even in the physical layouts of spaces.

The parallel framework for development of the strategy had to balance Eurocentric and Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. The Traditional Knowledge Keeper suggested that we needed to understand the power of circles and alternative ways that circles shape decision making. He said that circles place people in positions of equality and require true understanding of others' perspectives. They also encourage collaborative discussions that support non-hierarchical processes that result in stronger relationships among those involved in decision making. We realized that this was both a key dynamic in creating a successful strategy in the short term and a critical aspect of resetting relationships with Indigenous communities in the coming decades. With the importance of the circle as a relational framework, Reg Crowshoe describes the collective

intention and relationship created with this critical Indigenous structure and process:

> When I acknowledge all of creation as my relatives, then in natural law nothing in creation is stronger than anybody or anything else. We are all equal. So, in that context, I include everything or all my relatives in my processes and/or practices. So we engage in a practice of sanctified kindness: kindness to all. When you include the environment that you live in, and all creation in that environment, then they all become my relatives in working together to survive. So everybody becomes our relatives.
>
> When you think of relatives, most people look at their own blood relatives or human beings. But in a circle framework, with sanctified kindness and the smudge and the four stories, that relational system of working together to achieve the goal of survival includes all of creation as your relatives. So, when you are part of a group, like the Little Birds, for example, we all become Little Birds, but we also have become relatives. And the Little Birds who were together in a nest last year, they're in a different nest today. Once they leave the Little Birds, they become parents to the new members, and we become little brothers and sisters in the nest, and the Little Birds before them become our grandparents. These "relatives" become our terms of reference and provide and protect our practices.

Coming into the circle therefore represents more than simply making decisions using a process that differs from Western committee procedures and use of the gavel. Instead, it reflects a strong commitment to acknowledge and respect relationships with one another, all creatures and creation, and the lands to which we are connected. Coming into the circle also reflects a commitment to sustain these relationships in a good way. Once entered, they and our obligations to each other continue to exist. This was an integral part of the strategy process since those from the university had to commit to the broad, enduring, covenantal nature of the relationships that we were building. Finally, as Crowshoe suggests, coming into the circle

meant that all involved would bring their gifts to the strategy process and both share and mentor where they could. In this way, coming into the circle established a foundation and expectations far different from those that the University of Calgary had ever experienced when developing other institutional strategies.

As emphasized throughout the chapters, establishing parallel pathways that equally represented two unique worldviews, two knowledge systems, and two ways of working together became the hallmark of our process. The normal university process of developing institutional strategies is based on Eurocentric governance structures and written practices. Developing the Indigenous Strategy incorporated typical university processes accompanied and enriched by Indigenous ways of doing through the adoption of a journey framework grounded by ceremonial and oral practices. By coming into the circle, the university fully committed to processes based on oral systems. Indigenous ways of knowing and culturally appropriate ceremonies were vital in this process. Therefore, Traditional Knowledge Keepers became important guides for and connectors of the two worldviews, and they routinely searched for parallels as the process of creating the strategy evolved. Crowshoe summarizes the importance of this search:

> Sometimes the concepts embedded in the language systems don't understand each other. So I can talk to any of our circles in any of our societies about allies and partners. In our language, they understand the idea of achieving goals together; they know what that is, but the concept of allies and partners in the context of Western organizations might not translate, conceptually, to the same understanding. There are different knowledge systems embedded in the languages that we may need to culturally interpret and/or translate so that we can achieve common goals and work together. Cultural interpretation creates space for our oral system. In the written system, the process for achieving goals by bringing people together as a group and creating allies and partners is parallel to making relatives in an oral system. These processes do the same thing. But, in our case, in a different language system, the act of making relatives includes all things in creation. That is an

> important part of that relational process, where sanctified kindness is a necessary act of survival within an interconnected ecosystem.

In this way, the University of Calgary's process for developing *ii' taa'poh'to'p* was a complete reimagining of relationships both within postsecondary institutions and with Indigenous communities. The process involved a journey of co-creation with community guided by Indigenous knowledge Keepers. Those involved quickly committed to our parallel journey and were open to listening to, learning from, and taking spiritual guidance from Traditional Knowledge Keepers.

Committing to the Circle

The University of Calgary's Indigenous Strategy represents a commitment to transformation and renewal, looking several generations into the future. It recognizes the need for real and meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous communities and a commitment to become relatives. As such, it is a visionary strategy that will take many years to fulfill in terms of reconciliation between the University of Calgary and Indigenous peoples. *ii' taa'poh'to'p* is a cyclical strategy that engages constant learning, exploration, and evolution.

As a first step, the university dedicated itself to coming into the circle, meaning that it would strive to understand and value Indigenous worldviews as equal to the dominant systems upon which postsecondary institutions have been built. Working with Traditional Knowledge Keepers, the university's Steering Committee and Working Group sought to develop a common understanding and purpose in the process of creating the strategy. The commitment to parallel paths meant that the work was inherently grounded in ceremony and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. Our journey was informed and shaped by key cultural teachings such as sanctified kindness, parallel paths, and ethical space. It was also an iterative development compelling us to return to the circle for reflective dialogue and ceremonial validation.

A fundamental aspect of the process was the generous sharing of knowledge by Traditional Knowledge Keepers, giving equal status to oral practices. The vulnerability and honest sharing of their lived experiences

also deepened an understanding of the impact of colonization and the devastating legacy of residential schools. Some of these teachings and storied experiences led to an epistemic shift in our ways of approaching the strategy by: engaging in the circle and the smudge; reflecting on the critical meaning and nature of stories; and immersing ourselves in the process of making relatives with humility, respect, courage, honesty, and kindness. These foundations articulated systems parallel to Western practice, guiding those tasked with developing the strategy at every step of the process. The journey was an experience of deep learning and personal and collective transformation for those involved. Transformations were the result of the knowledge shared, the relationships built, and the ceremonies experienced, a gift of renewal.

Transitional Story

RECONCILIATION AND VALUES

Reconciliation is a new concept for Canadian society, one with which we have little experience. This is a challenge, for it is difficult to speak about something for which there is little experience. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has provided a picture of what reconciliation entails with a road map for how we can start on the journey. Reconciliation is increasingly becoming the broad conceptual framework driving Indigenous-related public policy in Canada. It has the power to touch and transform all aspects of Canadian society. As part of the Indigenous Strategy, it is imperative that we take a deep dive into the TRC's materials and develop a strategic response to the 94 Calls to Action and what they mean for the University of Calgary. We must draw from these materials to develop a lexicon for reconciliation and embed this language ubiquitously in the strategy and across campus.

Values are at the heart of the Indigenous Strategy and indigenization more generally. Other factors, such as meaningful engagement of communities, participation of Indigenous peoples in decision making, pedagogies like land-based learning, and the role of Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers in course delivery are integral. Yet all these are connected with and informed by values. Grounded in traditional teachings, such ethical values form the basis for decision making and action. For example, understanding the Earth as alive, with all various aspects coming from the Creator, instills values of relationship and respect with an ethics of stewardship. One Elder shared that "You can only take from the land what you need; if you take more, you have to share it." These ethical values inspire principles of sharing and kindness rooted in a profound sense of relationship with a responsibility to care for those relationships.

Shared by the Late Dr. David Lertzman in
Reflective Notes Addressed to Co-Chairs