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The Four Protocols of Engagement and HOW to Apply Them

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Abstract

Keywords

Stlatimx;
Protocols;
Wholistic;
Wise approaches;
Respectful
relationship
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Land
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Positioning self;
Open minded
/heartedness;
Knowledge
mobilization

In response to concerns as to how to respectfully mobilize Canada's Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) 94 Calls to Action (2015) in our teaching/learning and/or life practices, I developed the *Four Protocols of Engagement* as a starting point for those ready to authentically engage with First Peoples, their/our lands, and ways of doing, knowing, and valuing. I demonstrate how I apply the *Four Protocols* in my own work through detailing how each protocol enacted requires preparatory knowledge seeking and actions to make meaningful and impactful Land Acknowledgements. I conclude by reflecting on the content and practices outlined in this example of implementing the *Four Protocols of Engagement* using the HOW self-assessment tool that I designed for use prior to and during our engagement with knowledges and practices from Nations not our own, in order to ensure that we are approaching this work in authentic, non-appropriating, heartfelt, humble, and mutually respectful and beneficial ways.

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Honouring Protocols to is to Begin in a Good Way

Since the release in Canada of the Truth and Reconciliation Council's Calls to Action in 2015, many educators have been concerned about how to respectfully implement these changes in their work and lives. Teaching a mandatory Aboriginal Education course to several cohorts of teacher candidates made clear to me the feelings of resistance and apprehension triggered in most of my students when reflecting on *how* they would meet their institutions' requirements to Indigenize their practices and curricula. Concerns about lack of knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and their/our knowledges and ways (Dion, 2008) coupled with worries over potential appropriation and/or perpetuating colonizing perspectives through misrepresentation of information (Restoule & Cha-win-is, 2017) are substantial enough to incapacitate even the most confident practitioner. And then, add to that the diversity of Nations, worldviews, languages, histories, territories, and protocols to be considered! In response to these anxieties, I developed and use the *Four Protocols of Engagement* as a framework to guide students through the practices of coming to terms in good ways with 1) Making Land Acknowledgements; 2) Introducing and positioning of self; 3) Learning from the Nation; and 4) Applying the gifts on the lands that sustain them. Mobilizing these protocols in their learning, work, and personal lives represents good starting points in the relationship building that is necessary to begin to reconcile the institutions they represent and their own ways of being on First Peoples' lands.

Because modeling is foundational to my own Stl'atlimx Nation's understandings of pedagogy, I structure this article by modeling how I apply these *Four Protocols*, to emphasize that the changes required are not simply a change of content but represent the need to teach, learn, and act differently. Students in all my courses are being trained to engage with Indigenous knowledges using this framework in their assignment submissions toward learning how to respectfully receive and implement First Peoples' teachings in their lives as opposed to only seeing these gifts as extractable resources (Thomas, 2021).

First Peoples view knowledge as a form of medicine. "Like any medicine, it can be healing when used appropriately. Used incorrectly, it can also cause harm. There has to be great care in the ways that Indigenous knowledge is taken up and is used" (Restoule & Cha-win-is, 2017, p. 7). Knowing this led me to design an evaluation tool, a lens through which we can reflect upon the ways in which we approach something like the *Four Protocols of Engagement* to ensure that we are doing this important work in good, mutually beneficial, and respectful ways. I call this mnemonic assessment tool the HOW method and discuss in the closing sections of this article the ways that it informs and centers in good ways the applications of the *Four Protocols* as presented here. HOW stands for **H**umility, **O**pen minded/heartedness, and **W**ise approaches and when we contemplate our actions through these lenses of self-reflection, we can better see if/how we are doing the work of respectful relationship building.

The Four Protocols of Engagement

Protocol #1 Making Land Acknowledgements

I respectfully acknowledge that this article was written on the stolen, occupied, unceded, traditional, and ancestral territories of the x^wməθk^wəy^əm, Səfɪlwətaʔ/Selilwitulh, Kwikwitlem, and Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw Peoples. I do this to keep myself and those reading these realities of Indigenous Title, mindful of the fact that we must all reconcile our ongoing occupations by honoring the ways of being that are Indigenous to these lands, through causing



Figure 1: The Salish Sea Map

no further harm to the territories or Peoples, by reciprocating for the benefits we enjoy, and through returning the lands and the stewardship of them to their rightful owners.

Land Acknowledgements are meant to do important and often difficult work that extends well beyond, before, and after, the statements are made. Part of the work that this statement does is identified within the actual Land Acknowledgement itself and that is to remind us that we are responsible for how we behave and to give back when occupying someone else's lands. In my classes, workshops, presentations, and written publications, I always provide maps that outline the acknowledged Nation(s)' territories to illustrate the

diversity of First Peoples that continue to exist UNDER and in spite of the all too well-known colonially constructed maps and societies that most are far more familiar and comfortable with seeing. Showing the territorial boundaries during a Land Acknowledgement works to attach the acknowledged Nations to real and existing places and spaces that readers and/or audience members tend to associate with anything but First Peoples and their/our homelands. Simply reciting the Nations' names has nowhere to land in most listeners'/readers' minds. The simultaneous provision of decolonized maps serves to connect the acknowledged Peoples to something already known and present in the imaginations and experiences of the audience. This is one example of filling in the gaps facilitated by the cultivation of ignorance in map making, in education (Godlewska et al, 2010), and in all other public institutions imposed upon First Peoples and their/our territories.

Protocol #2 Introducing and Positioning of Self



Figure 2: Stl'at'imc Territory

Áma sqít. Snilb Kicya7 ti nskwátsitsa. Éntsa s Stl'at'imicw.
Hello. My name is Kicya7 (mother to all). I am Stl'at'imicw.

I further acknowledge that I, my children, and grandchildren are accountable for the benefits that we receive through living, learning, and working on these Nations' homelands. I strive to reciprocate for these many gifts and privileges in the anti-colonizing work that I do as an educator and scholar to the benefit of the acknowledged Nations and my own Stl'at'imicw People. While living on the lands of our Stl'at'imx¹ relatives, I remain closely connected to my Nation through familial ties and community events such as Band Meetings as well as through my grant writing and project facilitation work in our efforts to revitalize our endangered Stl'at'imcets language.

¹ Stl'at'imx is the name of the Nation, Stl'at'imicw is the name of the Peoples of the Nation, and Stl'at'imcets is the name of the language we speak. There are different spellings for each, but I believe that is because our language was spoken, heard, felt and not written.

In the context of this article on the *Four Protocols of Engagement*, I emphasize in my positioning statement the work that I do as an educator to define and disseminate anti-colonizing and respectful approaches to being on stolen lands as acts of reciprocating for the privileges that I enjoy on them. Examples of that work in my teaching practice include having students use only the Nations' names and spellings for themselves and their territories, and to learn what those names mean. Another is to assign term papers or projects that require students to seek out and learn the ways of being in relation to their own areas of study that are Indigenous to the lands on which they hope to mobilize their future careers. Students must also provide examples of how they could respectfully engage with what they have learned in ways that honour and give back to the Nation(s) they learn from.

Protocol #2 is dedicated to positioning oneself in relation to the lands and Peoples acknowledged in Protocol #1. Positioning statements are unique to the individual and require much preparatory learning, reflection, and action. What relationships do we have with the lands and Peoples that sustain us? How do we benefit from these lands in ways that the Original Peoples cannot/do not? How does our being here contribute to the depletion and/or destruction of First Peoples' lands and resources, to their health and well-being? How do we perpetuate and/or counter colonizing perspectives and practices in our work and/or personal lives on Indigenous lands? What ways of seeing, knowing, and doing are Indigenous to these territories and how might/do we respectfully employ them to assist in our ability to work and live with integrity on these lands? When we can respond to all these questions, we are ready to position ourselves in meaningful and impactful ways. It is important to recognize that our positioning statements will and must change over time. As we learn and mobilize more ways of knowing and doing learned from local Nations, we ourselves will be changed. It is through consistently building on what we know and do that we and the systems we represent may one day begin to reconcile our ongoing occupations of Indigenous lands.

Protocol #3 Learning from the Nation

Now that we have acknowledged the Nation(s) and Peoples whose lands we are on and/or learning from, and positioned ourselves in relation to them, we turn our preparatory actions to Protocol #3: learning about a topic from the Nation(s) we acknowledge. Indigenous ways of learning carry with them good intentions (medicine) for learning that is meaningful and practical to the learner. At this phase of engaging with Indigenous knowledges, we seek out and come to understand the Nation's perspectives on and practices of a topic that we are connected to, as well. That may be teaching, it may be governance systems, or family systems, or health care. It may be environmental sustainability or justice systems. First Peoples have experiential understandings of and centuries-old wisdom in all these domains, all rooted within the lands that grew and sustain them. Learning from the Nation about topics that frame your work and/or personal life makes the learning relevant to you. It also shifts the focus from learning ABOUT First Peoples to recognizing that they are the first teachers of these lands, and there is much that we can learn from them. You are an important part of the relationship building process. This is critical to understanding your intentions behind learning from First Peoples and it is practical to learn Indigenous perspectives and practices of the domains in which you work and live because these teachings will then naturally find places of significance for you when you begin to apply them.

Many Indigenous teachings and protocols are becoming more and more accessible on the internet and/or via university and other publicly accessible databases. This is why following a framework like this is important; it reminds us that while these knowledges may appear to

come to us out of thin air, the reality is they were and are hard fought for and exist due to the resiliency and fortitude of Indigenous Peoples. The least we can do is take the time and space to honour and fully/wholistically receive the gifts. Please know that the teachings and protocols ARE gifts that are shared with the best intentions for anyone who implements them in their lives. That brings us to the next protocol in this engagement framework.

Protocol #4 Applying the gifts

Now that we have taken the time to learn whose lands we are on, the names the Nations call themselves and their territories, mapped out those ancestral and traditional territories, authentically positioned ourselves in relation to the Nation(s) and their lands, and learned the perspectives and practices Indigenous to these lands on a topic that is central to our work and/or personal lives, we are finally ready to determine how we will mobilize those teachings.

The first step is to begin by publicly presenting/sharing the information gathered for Protocol #1 and Protocol #2. This may be at the beginning of a department meeting, at an event that you are hosting on the Nation's land, or in the Acknowledgement section of a book that you are writing. By practicing these first two protocols in your various communities, you are already reciprocating for the giftings of knowledge received in Protocol #3 and modelling respect for the ongoing presence, generosity, and sovereignty of the Nations you acknowledge.

The next step is to apply the Nations' perspectives and/or practices in the way that you now strive to do your job or live your life on their territories. One example that comes to mind for me is the way that a non-Indigenous Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) worker who attended one of my workshops positioned herself at a subsequent team meeting. This MCFD worker called everyone in attendance to recognize the harm that the Ministry has inflicted and continues to inflict upon Indigenous children, their families, and communities and challenged herself and everyone present to work differently so as not to cause further injury. Another worker for the Ministry sought out the ways of being of the Nation that the children she was working with were from to incorporate into her weekly sessions with them.

Another example comes from my own experiences of respectfully working with pedagogies of *Tákem Nsnekwnúkwa* (All My Relations) in the way that I design and deliver my courses. I always begin with providing contextual information on and maps of the *Státlimx* Nation from which this term/practice comes before defining what it means. The root word of this perspective regarding all beings in *Státlimx* worldviews is "to help" and I explain the significant role that supporting each other plays in student engagement in my courses. The ways that I apply this pedagogy are numerous and each makes explicit the paramountcy of process in *Státlimicw* knowledge seeking, making, and sharing. In some courses, I do not post my lectures so that if a student misses a class they must connect with members of their assigned small groups for the notes. These students must then reciprocate for the notes shared and are warned of the detriments to the group if they are always on the receiving side. I make explicit in the syllabus and in class how it is not a bad thing to hold oneself and each other accountable, and that this can be done in respectful ways.

I also assign collaborative projects that are worth between 10-20% of the students' grades. All group members receive the same grade for the group submission, and they are encouraged to first determine the strengths and preferences of each student before assigning roles and tasks. "To help" also applies to me. So, I honor this teaching by providing in class time and activities for students to become comfortable with their small group members and to work on their group projects with me present and ready to support or answer any questions that arise.

I am also known for offering bonus points for outside class activities if EVERYONE in the class completes them before a set deadline. I explain that even if the student does not feel the need for one bonus mark, it is a collective-minded practice and gift to complete the assignment anyway for their classmates.

The important thing here is to try. It is through practicing them that we come to understand the intentions behind the teachings. We become increasingly comfortable with knowing, doing, and valuing in new ways with the comprehension that comes with more practice. It may be helpful for some to begin by first apologizing for any mistakes they may make, noting that they are new to this, and their intentions are to work respectfully with these ways from Nations not their own. It will require humility to make such a statement, and humility is the first self-reflective lens in the HOW self-assessment tool.

HOW to Apply the 4 Protocols of Engagement?

Committing ourselves to the time and space that it takes to fully honour the work of the *Four Protocols of Engagement* may prove to be intimidating at first and may even feel impossible, for a variety of reasons. Leaning on the HOW self-assessment tool to evaluate the ways in which we enact each protocol can give us the strength and/or energy needed to push through our practice in these new and potentially transformative ways.

Humility

Land Acknowledgements of today serve different roles in the post-contact worlds of First Peoples. When my ancestors made these acknowledgements, they were aware of the importance of keeping good relationships with kin and neighbours who lived close by; they WERE positioning themselves in-relation to the Peoples and to the lands that they were travelling through and/or harvesting on. These acknowledgements indicated that we were aware of whose territories we were in, and we knew how to behave respectfully while there. We were acutely cognizant of the consequences of disrespecting the Peoples or their lands. Striving to honour the ways of being Indigenous to the lands we were entering required humility, respect, and reciprocity.

Today, Territorial Acknowledgements have come to be a form of sanitized Indigeneity (Barman, 2007) or as a means of Settlers presenting themselves as being in good relations with local First Peoples while not even understanding what Land Acknowledgers are committing themselves to when making these statements. Moving beyond the performative nature of acknowledging the territories of First Peoples will require, for many, not only great strength to consider and then publicly express how they are in relation to the stolen lands that they acknowledge, but it will also require great humility. Being authentic in this context, especially in public before our peers, takes humility. And it requires practice. In many situations, it will also require being and making others uncomfortable. But no change comes without some form of discomfort. Know that this too will change with every instance of practice. We will increasingly provide more informed and in-depth acknowledgements; we will get better at authentically positioning ourselves and speaking to how we continue to adjust the ways in which we live and work on First Peoples' lands. We will eventually get over the discomfort of making these statements and the discomfort it may cause in our audiences because we are beginning to experience the gifts of enacting these ways. In fact, eventually we will begin to call on our audiences to do the same.

Humility reminds us that we are not good at anything without preparation and practice.

Please know that I speak from experience. The first few dozen times that I acknowledged the occupied, stolen, ancestral territories of local First Peoples and positioned myself in relation to them, I felt anxious and was intimidated by the very tangible resentment that I felt in the classroom, but I pushed through in my practice. Today, I call on my audiences to hold themselves accountable for the privileges they enjoy on Indigenous lands without calling them out or alienating them, but that is another article that needs to be written.

One other significant role that humility plays when choosing to mobilize what we have learned from the Nation(s) is the capacity it offers us to recognize the fact that the Indigenous teachings we do have access to and the degree to which we believe we understand them is but the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the actual depth and breadth of knowledges embedded within them. We must always remember only that which can be shared with the public has been made accessible to us. We do not and cannot know the extent of the teachings and that is how it is meant to be. We must preface any engagement with Indigenous knowledges by stating as much and only after providing the contextual information on the Nations from which these knowledges come as illustrated in the *Four Protocols*. Humility allows us to accept that we will never become the experts in these knowledges or pedagogies. It allows us to acknowledge that what has been made available to us is a gift that has been shared with good intentions for us to experience the teachings so that we can come to wholistically understand the value of that Nation's ways of seeing, doing, knowing, and valuing in the world. Most of these experiential "findings" will tend to center on being in balanced, harmonious, reciprocating relationships with all our relations.

Open minded/heartedness

Learning from and not about First Peoples can require a significant paradigm shift for many who have been assimilated by education, health, governance, justice, and media systems designed to socialize them into holding the single-story perspective of Indigenous Peoples (Adichie, 2009). It will require an open mind to accept the fact that not only the Indigenous students sitting beside us in mainstream classrooms are being colonized by the curricula and pedagogies that are privileged in most learning environments. Knowing and believing only the stereotypes of First Peoples must be addressed prior to working with the framework modelled herein. This is mandatory because what we put into something affects the outcomes of it. Once our minds open to the possibility that we have much un-learning (decolonizing) to do, we are better able to fully receive and honour the teachings we find in our quest to populate and implement our own *Four Protocols of Engagement*.

It is through experiencing the teachings we implement in our lives and work as shared by First Peoples that we begin to experience open heartedness. Indigenous Knowledges that are shared tend to center on respectful relationship building, balance, harmony, and spirituality with all our relations, and it is only natural that we come to wholistically understand the intentions behind the shared teachings after we implement and practice them. This is not simply the work of the mind. Wholistic comprehension is required and is not possible using only our intellectual capacity to learn. Feeling a sense of belonging, being in mutually beneficial relations with the lands, Peoples, and their teachings opens our hearts to each other and facilitates strength and resiliency in our interconnectedness and interrelatedness.

Approaching this work with an open mind and an open heart will shift our ability to better understand perspectives, intentions, and practices outside of the ways of being, doing, knowing, and valuing that we have been trained in all our lives. Open mindedness and

heartedness facilitate transformation. If your mind does not get it, put the teaching into motion in your life and after some practice, you will come to understand.

Wise approaches

The mobilization of ways of being, doing, knowing, and valuing Indigenous to the lands that sustain us, as learned from/informed by the Peoples of those lands, are wise approaches to living with integrity on those lands. Wise approaches are local approaches that value and implement the wisdom of Nations that have lived in harmonious and sustainable ways with each other, the land, and helper-beings over millennia (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010).

Remind yourself that when you begin with making the time and space to share and enact the protocols of acknowledging where you are, making introductions, positioning self, and mobilizing ways of doing what you do in ways that are Indigenous to the lands that sustain you, you are practicing wise approaches.

The *Four Protocols of Engagement* represent a good starting place for anyone wishing to begin building respectful relationships with First Peoples and their/our knowledges. It is a wholistic approach to mobilizing Indigenous Knowledges because it requires making the time and space in our busy lives to learn with our minds and hearts in ways that situate that learning within and contribute to the languages and lands of the Peoples that sustain us. Aligning our intentions in and practices of implementing the *Four Protocols* through the HOW self-assessment tool further ensures we engage with knowledges from Nations not our own in humble and grateful ways, with open minded/heartedness, and in ways that are rooted in the wisdom of the Nations and lands that we learn and benefit from.

Tákem Nsnekwnúkwa

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Figures

Figure 1

The Salish Sea Map Credit @Deborah Reade, accessed from <https://legacy.uvic.ca/gallery/salishcurriculum/coast-salish-territories-maps/>

Figure 2

Státimx Territory Map Credit Státimx Government Services, accessed from https://www.wcel.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018_statimc_relaw_legaltraditionsreport.pdf