

# ASPECTS OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF CANADA

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to provide second language teachers and course designers working with Indigenous learners with elements of theories and practices that best suit their learners needs. In order to do that, two reviews of literature are presented: the first one deals with Eurocentric second language didactics paradigm in use today and the second one deals with traditional Indigenous education principles and techniques. A conceptual frame of second language teaching to Indigenous learners is then provided and practical suggestions are given to teachers and course designers working with this clientele.

## **Résumé**

L'article a pour but de fournir aux enseignants et créateurs de cours de langue seconde travaillant auprès d'apprenants autochtones des éléments de théorie et de pratique qui conviennent le mieux aux besoins de leurs apprenants.

Afin de faire cela, on revoit les écrits antérieurs là-dessus de deux angles : le premier examine le paradigme de didactique des langues secondes euro-centrique dont on fait usage aujourd'hui et le second examine les principes et techniques des traditions pédagogiques autochtones.

On fournit ensuite un échafaudage conceptuel d'enseignement de la langue seconde aux apprenants autochtones et on fournit aux enseignants et créateurs de cours travaillant auprès de cette clientèle des conseils pratiques.

## Introduction

In this article, two literature reviews will be made and discussed to find a link between two research areas: second language (L2) didactics and aboriginal<sup>1</sup> teaching.

This should provide a framework for training sessions for L2 teachers to aboriginal learners and the creation of effective L2 exercises for aboriginal learners.

Elements of L2 didactics will be examined first, then elements of aboriginal teaching will be studied and, finally, elements of L2 didactics to aboriginal learners will be suggested.

## Elements of L2 Didactics

L2 didactics is the scientific study of L2 teaching and learning theories and practices.

A language is the most important tool human beings use to communicate with each other. Language is a human being faculty; it is specific to human beings, and it is used by all human beings.

A language can be studied as such or studied in the more general context of communication and culture.

## Linguistics Aspects

Linguistics is the study of languages in general or of a specific language. A language has a phonology, a syntax, and a lexicon. The phonology of a language is a set of sounds that are specific to that language and that bear a function in the language. The sounds that have a function in a language are called phonemes and their role is to render words and structure of words possible. A limited number of sounds can produce an unlimited set of words, phrases, sentences, and texts. The way words are related together is a syntax and is particular to every language. Syntax is most often called grammar and its role is to connect the phonemes to the lexicon. The lexicon is an open set of words, words being arbitrary relations between mental images and specific sounds.

As a matter of fact, a language is a set of sounds that have meanings for those who speak that language, because the relation between the sounds and the significance is purely arbitrary. It is an unconscious convention between the speakers of the language. Only people who share the same language will be able to communicate among themselves, other people who do not are consequently excluded.

All languages (except for some dead languages and for sign languages for the deaf) are oral and some are also written. The use of writing is a major contribution to language study and to humanity in gene-

ral. Indeed, this invention marks the beginning of history and changes the way people use languages<sup>2</sup>. The invention of writing changed the way languages are taught to people who do not speak the language. Indeed, people who speak the language learned it in a natural way in their family environment where the language is spoken, whereas people who do not know the language learn the written version of the language in a more formal context. This tendency to teach a written language to L2 learners was in fact greatly encouraged in most countries where writing existed. Antique India is the only exception known to this day because Indian scholars wanted to encourage the use of memory, thinking that writing was a sign of laziness (Pujyasri, 1991).

Nonetheless, this tendency to teach the written version of a language to L2 learners has been used and is still in use today all over the world.

## Communication Aspects

Even though language is critical to human communication, it often does not suffice facial expressions, gestures, proximity, social contexts, for instance, are also very important for human components of communication. Those aspects of human communication have been neglected if not completely ignored for a very long time in the context of L2 didactics.

As a matter of fact, it is only recently that they are considered important in L2 didactics. As emphasis was put on the teaching of writing, other aspects of the oral language and even oral language itself were not deemed important and were, therefore, not taught. Researchers in the field of L2 didactics were focusing on writing. That can be explained by the fact that maternal languages (L1) were, as previously mentioned, learned in a natural way, in a family context, while L2 were mainly taught in formal settings, generally a classroom. As school was the place people went to learn how to read and write a language they already mastered orally, it was the place to learn languages and therefore, L2 were to be taught there and in the same manner.

Moreover, as the ways to teach writing seemed to be working well for those who already knew the language orally, it was taken for granted that those teaching methods would also work well for the teaching of L2. Therefore, L2 didactics was focusing on teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. It is no wonder why many methods that were supposed to show good results in L2 teaching did not work. L2 teaching was wrongly copying L1 teaching, because L2 learners did not know the oral component of the language they were learning. L2 methodologists had to find new theoretical frameworks and methodologies that would be effective in L2 teaching and learning. Linguistics had been very useful in the teaching of formal aspects of L2, but not so helpful in the tea-

ching of communication.

## Cultural Aspects

For L2 didacticians, a culture is not only the visible aspect of a society such as religion, architecture, music, literature and so on, it is also and mainly, a way to see and understand the world in which a society lives. The way a society sees the world is not the way the world is, it is rather a construction of the mind trying to understand specific aspects of the world and only that. This means, for example, that the world as it is seen and understood by a society is not the world as seen by another society. That basic misunderstanding between societies created a lot of chaos, conflicts and even wars between societies in the past and, even today, chaos, conflicts and wars continue.

The language and the culture of a society are so closely related that it is almost impossible to distinguish between the two as they are constructions and adaptations of the mind that members of a society share. Languages and cultures are adaptations of the persons' mind to understand the world they live in and exchange between themselves.

The conventions of a society do not consider important aspects of the world that can be expressed by another society.

## Historical Aspects

As all other human sciences, L2 didactics has a history that goes back to a long time ago (Caravolas, 1994).

The principal eras of that history can be defined as follows: the paleolithic, the writing, the linguistics, and the communicative eras.

1. In the paleolithic era, L2 were taught and learned in a natural way in an informal context and since writing had not been discovered, only oral L2 were taught.
2. in the writing era, L2 were taught and learned in a formal context and the emphasis was put on writing.
3. in the linguistics era, L2 were taught and learned in a formal context and the emphasis was put on oral.
4. in the communicative era, L2 were taught in a formal context and the emphasis was put on communication.

The paleolithic era of L2 didactics goes back to times immemorial and is still used today in communities where writing does not exist.

The writing era of L2 didactics goes back to the invention of writing, some five thousand years ago and is still in use today for people who want to be able to read and write in the L2.

The linguistics era goes back to the invention of the *International Phonetic Alphabet* (IPA) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is still used today.

The communicative era goes back to the late 1960's and is used today by people who want to be able to understand and speak a L2.

Because those eras focus on different aspects of L2 didactics, they constitute different paradigms.

Not too many scientific studies have been devoted to the paleolithic era. The writing era (often called the traditional era) has been studied for a long time, however not often in a scientific manner as it basically consists in the teaching of grammar, vocabulary, translation, and literature. The linguistics era (often called the structural behavioristic era) has been extensively studied by linguists who were focusing on the oral language. The communicative era has also been extensively studied by psychologists, but, as it is the newest era in L2 didactics, a lot of studies have still to be done. As it is the L2 didactics era that offers the possibility for learners to acquire the L2 to speak, it will be described in further detail.

## The Communicative Era

When L2 didacticians realised that both the traditional and the linguistics eras were not efficient in teaching for communication, they had to look at alternatives to linguistics, such as sociolinguistics<sup>3</sup> and pragmatics<sup>4</sup>. As a matter of fact, both traditional and linguistics eras focused on the study of the language itself and not on its use. That is why teachers and learners knew rules and words of the L2 without being able to use it for oral communication.

The new era started in Canada in 1965 with the French immersion programs for English speaking learners. In an immersion program, teachers and learners use the L2 to teach content and, therefore, both teachers and learners communicate in the L2. By contrast, in a regular French program, grammar and words are studied, but French is not used as a communication tool, because it is taught as a subject matter.

In the late 1970's, when it was realized that L2 teaching methods used in regular programs did not get the learners to properly master the L2 oral components, (something that immersion programs could achieve), L2 didacticians and L2 teachers had to abandon their methods. Since their methods were based on the psychological trend of behaviorism and the linguistic trend of structuralism and because there did not seem to exist an adequate theoretical framework for L2 teaching and learning, there was a long period of trial and error and, quite frankly, many L2 teachers were confused and looking for new ways to help learners master the oral component of the L2. Indeed, Germain (1993, page V) even states the following<sup>5</sup>:

“It is not easy to define what the communicative approach is. Indeed, there is not ONE communicative approach but many conceptions or interprétations of what the communicative approach is. And the authors seem to agree more on what IT IS NOT than on what it is: an approach that aims at having the pupils communicate efficiently in a second or foreign language”.

It was then almost impossible to define what the communicative approach was, since many researchers and teachers in the field were trying various techniques, often with no real results.

In the middle of the 1980's, *The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers* launched a national study whose goal was to elaborate an effective communicative approach to L2 teaching and learning for regular programs. Indeed, this was an important endeavor which would propose a method that would enable English Canadians to become competent in French. Immersion programs were producing bilingual learners, but the regular French programs were not. Leblanc (1990) published a synthesis of the research containing 92 conclusions and a multidimensional curriculum composed of four syllabi, including a cultural syllabus and a communicative-experiential syllabus (Tremblay, R., M. Duplantie and D. Huot, 1999). In a communicative-experiential syllabus, learners are the focus of the communicative activities, and they are asked to speak about something that is motivating and familiar to them. That syllabus inspired what was first called intensive French and is now called the neurolinguistics approach to language teaching and learning.

Nowadays, there are various methods that focus on communication: among them, there are the action-oriented approach, the neurolinguistics approach, and the radical approach.

## The Action-Oriented Approach

In *Le Conseil de l'Europe* (2019, p.15), the action-oriented approach considers that “the users and learners of a language as social actors having tasks to accomplish”. That is the reason why the tasks to be completed must be in a context meaningful for the learners.

Kwadzo (2016, p.80) even specifies that, in that approach:

“It is worth noticing that the accomplishment of the tasks must be situated in a social context that is pertinent to the learner: this context allows the learner as a person to identify and realise her or his learning projects. It is by situating this task realisation goal and pertinent projects in the learner's life in relation with the learner's context that her or his learning will be meaningful.”

The focus being on a task to be accomplished by the learners, the approach uses the L2 in a meaningful fashion. In that sense, it is like the immersion programs. It focuses more on the use of the language than on the study of the language itself (Puren, 2007).

## **The Neurolinguistics Approach**

Created from the communicative-experiential syllabus previously mentioned, the neurolinguistics approach of Netten and Germain (2012) is since there are two kinds of memory: the declarative or explicit memory and the procedural or implicit memory. In L2 teaching and learning, the declarative memory is responsible for the memorisation of grammar rules and words, while the procedural memory is responsible for the acquisition of linguistic reflexes. It is important to know that there is no direct relation between both, and that grammar rules and words learned through the declarative memory will not be acquired by the procedural memory. That is the reason why teaching L2 grammar rules and lists of words will not be useful for the fluent use of the L2.

Krashen (1981) already made a distinction between L2 learning and L2 acquisition whereas L2 learning leads to the knowledge of grammar and words and L2 acquisition leads to the mastery of the language. However, it is only later that a psychological framework was described to explain differences between the two kinds of memory (Paradis, 2009).

In this approach, the focus is on the use of the oral language by the learners and the activities must be motivating and close to the needs of the learners.

## **The Radical Approach**

This approach is related to two main theoretical frameworks: the new communication (Winkin, 2014)<sup>6</sup> and the transpersonal psychology (Grof, 2000). According to those frameworks, communication is a holistic process that involves all aspects of human beings, including the spiritual aspect.

In this approach, it is critical to create both a good and trustful relationship between the teacher and the learners and a pleasant and relaxed classroom atmosphere. Demers (2008, pp. 52-53) specifies that:

“In the radical paradigm, L2 teachers want their students to be opened to the specific world view, the L2 culture in the broadest sense and also to tap on their unused full potential, knowledge and skills, something that can be achieved by using diverse means such as music and imagination...”

One of the objectives of the radical approach is to address both hemispheres of the brain to help the acquisition of the L2. Using the L2 will involve the left hemisphere of the brain, because the language centre is essentially located in the left hemisphere. As for the right hemisphere, that can be done by using diverse techniques such as listening to baroque music, using gestures, relaxing, dreaming, etc.

For example, the author of the *Accelerative Integrated Methodology* (AIM), Wendy Maxwell, explains why her method works (Maxwell, 2014, p. 3)<sup>7</sup>:

“Through this approach, all target vocabulary to be acquired by the student is taught kinesthetically, visually and in an auditory manner, thus responding to a variety of learning styles. Because words are kinesthetically presented through gesture, and contextualized through story and drama, students learn to see and feel the language.”

The action-oriented approach, the neurolinguistics approach and the radical approach are very widely used in Canada today and could even be complementary since they are all in the communicative paradigm or, as Rouse-Malpat (2019, p.79) says:

“The most important principle of these methods is to provide lots of meaningful L2 exposure and use in the L2 classroom. To achieve that goal, teachers and learners only use the target language in the classroom from day 1 and focus on providing input and scaffolding the output, from pure repetition to use and reuse of chunks present in the input. To do so, a lot of attention is put on oral skills and in a later stage on writing skills.”

In this part of the article, different eras of L2 didactics were explained. The most recent era, the communicative era focusses on the teaching of oral communication in the target language.

## Elements of Aboriginal Teaching

Before looking at aboriginal teaching per se, it is important to know what the word aboriginal really means. In Canada, there are three groups of people: the First Nations, the Inuit, and the Métis.

In Canada, many people of aboriginal descent now live in communities created for them, but many people of aboriginal descent now live elsewhere, mainly in large cities, such as Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, or Montréal. In fact, it is not so easy to define exactly who is aboriginal, because many aboriginal peoples no longer speak their na-

tive language and no longer practice their traditional ways of living. Allain and Demers (2016, p. 6) say:

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“Indeed, we must realise that the word Aboriginal can lead to confusion...The word Aboriginal referring...to the first inhabitants of a region, a country.”

It is therefore important to remember that Aboriginal peoples may be very different from one another and, in fact, sometimes, it is almost impossible to know who is aboriginal and who is not. This is the reason why Gatti (2009, 34), speaking of aboriginal writers, says that:

“If it is true that identity comes from the subjective conscience that a person feels that distinguish her or him from the others... And that identity is a project in constant movement, I propose a first general definition...: an aboriginal author is someone who considers and defines herself or himself as such.”

The definition of who is an aboriginal writer proposed by Gatti is important in an educational context whereas an aboriginal learner could also consider himself or herself as such. What we will say about aboriginal education is nevertheless important for many aboriginal learners, but not necessarily for every one of them.

Looking at aboriginal teaching is, in a way, looking back at paleolithic teaching. Indeed, as paleolithic refers to a long period of time before the invention of writing, a fundamental trait of traditional aboriginal teaching is the exclusive use of oral language.

As there is no written document from that period, the only way for us to see how teaching was done in these ancient times, is probably to look at how teaching is done presently in paleolithic cultures of today or, in the Canadian context, to look at Elders from our aboriginal com-

munities who remember how teaching was done not too long ago.

Speaking about the Inuit ways of learning, the anthropologist Saladin d'Anglure (2006, p.34) says that "...In such a society, knowledge was acquired by imitation, sensory experience or oral transmission; by dreams also or contact with the spirits." In fact, in some aboriginal cultures, the Elders are the oral traditions' transmitters, and the Shamans are the dreams' interpreters.

The late Matthew Iserhoff, a Cree elder from Mistissini and a highly respected educator, once told me that traditional teaching is based on the three Ls methodology: Look, Listen and Learn. These three words are, in fact, at the heart of traditional teaching. It happens in a meaningful context, involves many physical senses, and produces immediate results. Researchers in the field of traditional aboriginal education elaborate on the three Ls methodology. For example, according to Toulouse (2011, p. 1),

"In traditional (time immemorial to colonial period) education practices of Aboriginal children and youth were, historically, a community responsibility ... Each of the 50 Nations in Canada had its own unique way of ensuring its young were culturally and linguistically educated. Elders and key cultural teachers worked with children in an engaging manner through observation, hands-on activities, reflection, storytelling, and practice... Education was defined as a lifelong process that honoured and valued the learner."

Researchers in the field of traditional aboriginal education also mention diverse characteristics of traditional aboriginal education and teaching techniques.

For example, Gélinas (2013, p.178) mentions 20 traditional techniques:

"The community is of the highest importance.  
 The tradition is oral.  
 Present time dominates.  
 The world is seen through myths.  
 Goals are reached with patience.  
 Propriety is often communitarian.  
 Presents are considered as elements of social cohesion.  
 Work is often motivated by the needs of the group.  
 Getting older is seen as a source of wisdom.  
 Direct visual contact is perceived as of aggressive nature.  
 Silences are respected and do not lead to a lack of comfort.  
 Self confidence is not a communitarian element.  
 Listening capacity is put forward.

To speak softly is normal.  
 To nod means to understand.  
 Handshake is light, unthreatening.  
 Collective decisions are made from consensus.  
 To believe in the harmony of nature is put forward.  
 The family is the extended family.  
 People react to group praise."

Other researchers give less characteristics. For instance, Allain, Demers, Grigoroiu and Pelletier (2017. P.10) give seven characteristics of traditional aboriginal teaching:

1. "The transactional distance, the relation there is between the teacher and the learners and among the learners themselves must favor communication for learning to happen. It is not possible, in such a context, for the teacher to use a masterful approach. The creation of this transactional distance that favors communication requires from the teacher a great deal of confidence, humility, patience, and attentive listening to students.
2. The oral language is put forward. As a matter of fact, for Aboriginals, traditions, culture, history, all the knowledge in fact, is transmitted orally.
3. Learning Is always practical;
4. Work is done in group and in a collaborative way.
5. Learning is holistic;
6. Communication is done from person to person and considers all the person's dimensions: the person has many dimensions, physical dimension, emotional dimension, intellectual dimension, and spiritual dimension (the dimension of internal world, of dream, of imagination, of altered states of consciousness).
7. The evaluation has no importance because it is made on a spontaneous and continuous way."

The first characteristic mentioned above, the importance of the creation of a trustful transactional distance, a strong pedagogical relationship, is also mentioned by Battiste (2002), Chartrand (2010) and Toulouse (2015) among others. This is not surprising since, as we saw, in the context of aboriginal cultures, human beings have four important facets: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. The traditional teachers, the oral tradition transmitters, the Elders, and the Shamans, know the importance of this strong pedagogical relationship. If the Elders have this strong pedagogical relationship because they have the respect of their communities, the Shamans<sup>8</sup> go even further to intensify it using diverse techniques (drums, dance, etc.) to induce an altered state of consciousness that will improve the learning experience.

An altered state of consciousness is defined by Clothes and Lewis-Williams (2001, p.14) as: "States of consciousness are linked... However, we may consider that they are parts of a continuous set (a continuum). At one end of this set there is what we can call the awake consciousness. At the other end, there is the deep trance" That way, the Shaman will be able to better help the community when it is needed (for ceremonies, medical purposes, etc.) as mentioned by Demers and Simard (2015).

Moreover, the cultural genocide that happened to aboriginal peoples in Canada for more than a century renders a trustful pedagogical relationship even more important. It is difficult to trust anyone related to euro-centric teaching after such a long period of mistrust. The cultural genocide created many problems in aboriginal communities in Canada, one of them being poor self-esteem. On that aspect, Toulouse (no date, p.2) says that:

"A growing body of research demonstrates that Aboriginal students' self-esteem is a key factor in their school success... An educational environment that honours the culture, language and worldview of the Aboriginal student is critical to this process. The curriculum and pedagogy of schools need to meaningfully represent and include Aboriginal people's contributions, innovations, and inventions. Aboriginal students require schools in all aspects to honour 'who they are' and 'where they have come from'. Aboriginal self-esteem is described as the balanced and positive interconnection between the physical, emotional/mental, intellectual and spiritual realms."

It is important here to underline the deculturation process intended by authorities of the residential schools who adhered to this federal government endeavour. The deculturation process aims at the disappearance of a culture and a language. It leads to a cultural genocide or, even worst, a genocide. According to the *Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada* (2012, p. 1), Hector Langevin, Minister of Public Works of Canada, said, in 1883, the following about this cultural genocide:

"To educate the children correctly, we must separate them from their family. Some people may think it is a drastic measure, but we have no other choice if we wish to civilize them".

Indeed, from 1879 to 1996 (dates contested by some), the federal government of Canada took away aboriginal children from their families and put them in religious residential schools to educate them. However, history shows that many children were abused and some even died in those residential schools. According to the *National Inquiry into Missing*

*and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (2019, p.23)

“The history of colonization has altered Inuit, First Nations, and Métis Peoples’ relationships to their culture and identity through targeted policies designed to sever their cultural and kin connections...Cultural rights are inseparable from human rights, and within the international rights context, are defined as the right of access to, participation in, and enjoyment of culture.”

It is therefore not surprising that, after such a genocide, many researchers in the field of aboriginal education underline the importance of going back to traditional aboriginal cultures. For example, Maina (1999) emphasises the importance of reaffirming the validity of aboriginal cultures. This is also the reason why Campeau (2016) underlines the importance of a place-based curriculum and instruction: euro-centric schools reflect the cultural values of the dominant society and are, therefore, not adapted to aboriginal learners. Grigoriou (2016) recognising the importance of oral narratives in traditional aboriginal teaching, preconizes the use of legends and storytelling, noting that oral narratives are still in use in modern societies. On the same topic, Rahan (2009, p.25) says that:

“The influence of culture on the academic performance of Aboriginal students has been studied for decades. Many educators and researchers attribute the low success rates and frequent alienation of Aboriginal students to the cultural clash they experience in a school environment which contradicts their traditional values and norms.”

Yunkaporta (2009) identifies eight ways to help teachers improve their teaching practices with aboriginal learners while Osborne (1996) identifies nine strategies aiming at the same purpose. On the same subject of improving teaching strategies, Gower and Bryne (2012, p.386) say that ‘to embrace differences in knowledge, experiences and understanding’ are important characteristics of culturally competent teachers.

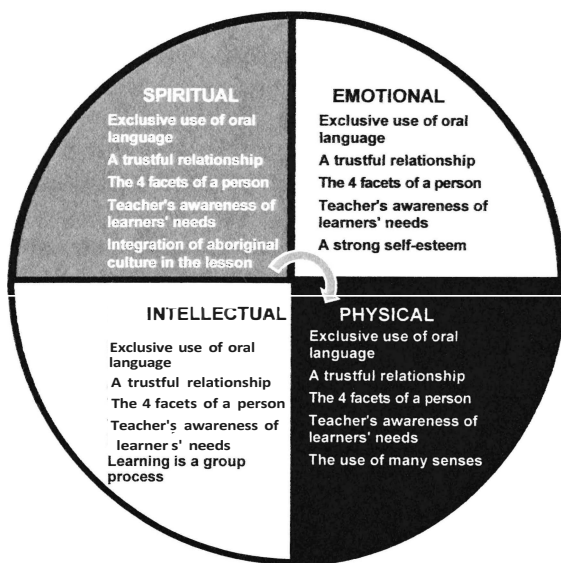
Of all the elements of traditional aboriginal education given by researchers, some seem more important than others because they keep coming up in the research literature. They are:

1. Exclusive use of oral language.
2. A trustful relationship between the teacher and the learners.
3. A strong self-esteem.
4. The use of many senses in the learning/teaching process (looking, listening, feeling...).

5. Learning is a group process.
6. A learner is a person and has four facets: physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual.
7. The teacher must be aware of the aboriginal learners' needs.
8. Elements of aboriginal cultures must be integrated in the curriculum (traditional legends, ceremonies, feasts, etc.).

## The wheels

Moreover, as the wheel is often mentioned in the review of literature in aboriginal studies, it is possible to create a traditional aboriginal education wheel with the eight elements listed above. The wheel symbolizes the cyclical conception of the world in aboriginal cultures and world view. It is also useful to know that colors are often used in aboriginal cultures.



Although their meanings may vary according to a specific culture, generally, the red color is related to the spiritual facet of human beings, the yellow color to their emotional facet, the color black to their physical facet and the color white to their intellectual facet as in the following example of a traditional aboriginal education wheel.

Wheels are used to represent many aspects of aboriginal cultures. Medicine wheels are particularly popular in aboriginal cultures and Joseph (2013, p.1) explains the use of the medicine wheel in aboriginal cultures the following way:

“...medicine wheels represent the alignment and continuous interaction of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realities. The circle shape represents the interconnectivity of all aspects of one’s being, including the connection with natural world. Medicine wheels are frequently believed to be the circle of awareness of the individual self; the circle of knowledge that provides the power we each have over our own lives.”

### The Circles

Circles are also important in aboriginal cultures, especially the talking circles, when a group of people get together to solve a problem or to speak about a particular topic concerning the community. In a talking circle, an essential norm is to listen attentively to the participant who speaks so that the wisdom of the speaker’s words may be heard. Indeed, according to Graveline (1996, p. 178) ‘through respectful listening we are better able to enter into another’s experience through their words. Tufts (1998, p.12) enumerates the following **set of rules for a talking circle**:

“ One person speaks at a time.  
 No one is forced to speak.  
 No time limit is placed on what the speaker has to say.  
 Everyone in the circle listens respectfully to the words of the speaker.  
 The person on the speaker’s left is the next one to speak.  
 No one is permitted to criticize or speak negatively of what is shared in the circle.”

Moreover, according to the web site of First Nations’ Pedagogy online (n. d., p.1) on talking circles,

“Several varied objects are used by different First Nations peoples to facilitate the talking circle. Some peoples use a talking stick, others a talking feather, while still others use a peace pipe, a sacred shell, a wampum belt, or other selected object. The main point of using the sacred object, is that whoever is holding the object in their hand has the right to speak. The circle itself is considered sacred.”

In addition, aboriginal groups have values that are specific to their

community. For example, Saulis (2019) identifies seven values for two First Nations:

1. The Ojibwa Seven Grandfather Teachings are: love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, truth, and wisdom.
2. the Micmac Seven Sacred Gifts of Life are: love, honesty, humility, respect, truth, patience, and wisdom.

In this part of the article, several characteristics of aboriginal teaching were explained and the importance of the wheels and the circles in aboriginal education was underlined.

## **Elements of L2 Teaching to Aboriginal Peoples**

In this section, the elements of the aboriginal education wheel (that come from the aboriginal education literature review above in the text) will be related to L2 didactics eras (that come from the L2 didactics literature review also above in the text). This will make a link between two research fields, L2 didactics and aboriginal education, the aim of this link being to help L2 teachers with their aboriginal learners.

However, many L2 teachers already experienced teaching to aboriginal learners without any training in the field. Some of them had very successful experiences because they instinctively adapted their teaching to their aboriginal learners. Here is an example of such an experience.

### **A Successful Experience of L2 Teaching to Aboriginal Learners by a L2 Teacher with No Previous Experience Teaching Aboriginal Learners**

Many experienced L2 teachers are surprized to see that techniques that seem to work well with their learners in general do not necessarily work well with their aboriginal learners. This is because they are not aware of the specificity of aboriginal teaching. Pelletier in Allain, Demers, Pelletier (2013) provides a good example of that. This is a summary of Pelletier's first teaching experience with aboriginal learners

Pelletier was teaching English L2 to Cree adult learners. Although she had a thorough knowledge of andragogy, she was surprised by what she observed in her learners.

First, she realized that she had to **respect the silence of her learners**. Later in her career, she had the chance to work with Cree colleagues and understood that silence was pleasant, and she did not have to speak with her colleagues as much as she would have to in a euro-centric environment. She nevertheless succeeded in creating a trustful relationship with her learners and with her colleagues and was much appreciated by

both.

Then, she realized that **her learners** did not seem to work well on their own but **were working well in groups**. In euro-centric education, working on your own is valorized, but not in aboriginal education.

Pelletier also realised that she had to **listen to her learners** despite their silence. **Observation can tell you many things** that are not verbally expressed. By observing her learners, she noticed that they very much liked to work on computers and that there were not enough computers in the classroom. Fortunately, she was able to get more computers for her learners.

Pelletier finally realised that she was using a very euro-centric method that was not adapted to her learners' culture. **She therefore integrated Cree culture elements in her teaching**. For example, one of her learners had a presentation to make in front of the class, a task difficult for someone who is not used to make a presentation in front of a group. To alleviate the stress, **she decided to use a circular table** in the classroom for the students who came to hear the presentation. **Everyone was then sitting in a circle**, something familiar to their way of communicating. They came to the presentation out of respect for the presenter, **respect being an important Cree value** (even if Pelletier did not know that at the time).

All the learners came to the presentation and learners from other groups also came to show their **solidarity** with the presenter.

Although this is only an example, it gives us a good idea of the differences between euro-centric education and aboriginal education.

Indeed, the traditional aboriginal education wheel shows aboriginal students' needs as follows:

1. exclusive use of oral language.
2. a trustful relationship.
3. the 4 facets of a person.
4. teacher's awareness of learners' needs.
5. a strong self-esteem.
6. the use of many senses.
7. learning is a group process.
8. integration of aboriginal culture in the lesson.

To help L2 teachers, suggestions are proposed below to answer the specific needs of their aboriginal learners,

### **Exclusive Use of Oral Language**

As shown above, L2 didactics contains many eras. Of all the eras, **only the communicative era is suitable for aboriginal learners**, because its aim is to teach oral communication and traditional aboriginal tea-

ching uses exclusively the oral language to communicate.

### **A Trustful Relationship**

Aboriginal students also need a trustful relationship between the teacher and the learners. A way to attain this trustful relationship between the teacher and learners is for the teacher and the learners to meet as a group before the beginning of the L2 course. The meeting, that can be seen as a lesson zero, is carried in the learners' L1 in the presence of an interpreter (or, whenever possible, by an elder who can act as an interpreter) if the teacher does not know the learners' L1. During the meeting, the teacher asks the learners the reasons why they want to learn the L2, their expectations and their fears. The teacher also explains the way the method works and what could be expected from the learners. The teacher and the learners define their roles in the learning process and what linguistic outcomes are to be expected from the learners. **At the end of the meeting, the teacher and the learners as a group agree on what is to be done by the group.**

Moreover, it is important for **the L2 teacher to greet the learners when they arrive to the class.**

### **The 4 Facets of a Person**

Aboriginal learners must be considered as persons with emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs. **This will happen when L2 teachers see themselves as guides or transmitters**, not as traditional euro-centric teachers who possess the knowledge and who need to stick to a method or a program without regards for their learners.

### **Teacher's Awareness of Learners' Needs**

Aboriginal learners also need L2 teachers who are aware of their needs. It does not suffice for L2 teachers to know the L2 language and the euro-centric teaching techniques that focus on good performances at quizzes and tests.

### **A Strong Self-Esteem**

The aboriginal learner also needs a strong self-esteem. As a matter of fact, **self-esteem is a key factor in L2 teaching** and has been underlined by many researchers in the field of L2 didactics. For example, Yang (2012, p. 1) states that:

"Learners who possess high self-esteem and positive personal image have more chances to succeed in learning. The reason for

this phenomenon is that those people usually dare to adventure and are not afraid of making mistakes which give them more opportunities to communicate in a foreign language. On the contrary, people with low self-esteem lose many chances under the same circumstances.”

To improve learner’s self-esteem, L2 teachers can show learners openness, careful and patient listening, and encouragement. This will happen when the L2 teacher considers his or her **learners as persons and as equals and shows respect for the learners’ cultures.**

### **The Use of Many Senses**

Aboriginal learners must use many senses: they must see, to listen and to feel what the L2 teacher is transmitting. To do that, the L2 teacher can use a blackboard with chalks of different colors, posters, gestures, songs, music, computers, various technologies, and the Internet.

### **Learning Is a Group Process**

Aboriginal learners learn better in a group where they can share the knowledge transmitted by the L2 teachers. To do that, **learners should be sitting in a circle**; the L2 teacher should be able to sit in the circle, because he or she is the learners equals, but should also be able to stand inside and out of the circle to help learners share among themselves the knowledge transmitted by the teacher.

### **Integration of Aboriginal Culture in the Class**

L2 teachers must integrate elements of aboriginal culture in the class (and the program). This can be achieved by:

1. having **aboriginal paintings**, posters, and decorations in the classroom.
2. using the L2 to speak of **elements of traditional aboriginal cultures** (such as hunting, fishing, berry picking, walking out ceremonies, etc.).
3. sharing **traditional food**.
4. listening in the L2 to **traditional legends**.
5. watching in the L2 movies and documentaries with **aboriginal content**.
6. reading in the L2 texts with aboriginal content or **aboriginal authors’ writings**.
7. inviting **Elders** to address the class in the L2.
8. having **aboriginal guests** to address the class in the L2.

9. **listening to soft music** (baroque, classical, aboriginal, etc.) while the learners read and write in the L2.
10. asking the learners to **imagine a dream** induced in the L2 by the teacher.

Aboriginal education's goal is learners' empowerment.

According to Saulis (2019, p. 12),

"Empowerment is a wholistic experience, in that it affects our mental (the way we think), spirit (the way we acquire and sense meaning in life), emotional (the way we feel about ourselves and the world), and the physical (the actions we take)".

In this part, a link between L2 didactics and aboriginal teaching has been made. An example of a teacher who adapted her teaching to aboriginal learners was given and suggestions were made on how aboriginal learners' needs can be answered.

## Conclusion

In this article, two literature reviews were made: the first one dealt with L2 didactics while the second one dealt with aboriginal teaching. In the third part of the article, a link between the two literature reviews was made to provide L2 teachers with practices that should help them adapt their teaching to aboriginal learners.

Moreover, most of the practices that are suggested for aboriginal learners can also be successfully used with non aboriginal learners.

Indeed, aboriginal teaching should be studied more by researchers in the field and better known by L2 didacticicians and teachers, because it could improve L2 teaching in general.

## Notes

1. In Canada, indigenous peoples are called aboriginal peoples.
2. The invention of writing goes back thousands of years ago, and it is believed that the first writings happened in Iraq (then called Mesopotamia) and, soon after, in Egypt, China and India.
3. The study of a languages in relation to social factors
4. The branch of linguistics dealing with language in use and the contexts in which it is used
5. All the French are translated in English by the author.

6. Among other things, the new communication theory suggests a way to classify languages that differ from what is proposed by traditional linguistics which classifies languages in groups and families. For example, speakers of a language may use more gestures when they speak than speakers of another language. Gestures, proximity, eye contacts, touching and conception of time can be used to classify languages (see Hall, 1959, for further details)
7. Lozanov (1978) uses baroque music to improve the memorisation process of L2 acquisition because this allows the two hemispheres of the brain to function together.
8. See Walsh (2011) for further details on shamanism.

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