

WHOLISTIC EDUCATION

Where do we go from here?

by

Yakowenntoken & Karenni:yo

INTRODUCTION

The Six Nations Lifelong Learning Taskforce's mandate is *to explore options and make recommendations on a world-class lifelong learning (education) system grounded in language and culture*. In an effort to meet this mandate, the Six Nations Lifelong Learning Taskforce office has let a number of contracts that work together to provide information and guidance to meet this mandate and look to future planning.

This Wholistic Education paper will provide a history and benefits of a move toward a school system or an individual school that can be founded on natural child development, natural learning, sustainability, our languages, our knowledges, and ways of being and doing while at the same time providing a framework for child empowerment and meeting identified educational objectives through wholistic teaching and learning.

RATIONALE

The Ted Talk below gives a summary of how we got to where we are today in the field of education. Readers are asked to view this Ted Talk before moving on. Click on the link below. Hold CONTROL and click again. The short video will start.

https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_changing_education_paradigms 11 minutes 41 seconds
Ken Robinson – Changing Education Paradigms

Why Wholistic Education for Six Nations?

Wholistic Education aims at addressing the whole child; the emotional, social, ethical and academic needs of the child. This is done by providing a positive school environment and multiple supports for the child. This is not a new way of educating but one that started to gain traction in the 1980's. This approach to education was adopted by educators such as Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner and Emil Molt. We see these methods used today in both Montessori and Waldorf schools.

Wholistic Education methods are not new to Indigenous people. We have always utilized the holistic approach in our societies for our division of labour, gender roles and in the transmission of knowledge. It is this approach that makes sense to us and is the reason that Holistic Education will work in our community as it already aligns with our cultural practices. Below, this paper will discuss the main features that promote the use holistic education, followed by a comparison of Onkwehón:we Education and Western Education.

Before getting into what Wholistic Education is all about, watch and listen to Ken Robinson's Ted Talk about educational change.

https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_bring_on_the_learning_revolution 17 minutes 41 seconds

Wholistic Education for Us as Onkwehón:we People and Why We Need to Begin a Shift in Thinking.

A Whole Child Approach

The whole child approach looks at fostering the mind, body and spirit of the child. For Onkwehón:we people, this is critical to our way of life. For us as Haudenosaunee, we talk about *Ka'nikonhri:yo* – A good mind, *Kasha'sténtshera* – Inner strength, and *Skén:nen* – peace or tranquility. These are the values that we are to live by and use in our relationships with one another and creation. What's interesting is that these align with the wholistic education pillars of mind, body and spirit. *Ka'nikonhri:yo* not only addresses one's mind, but one's spirit or sense. It is our goal in life go obtain a positive mind and we live this way and demonstrate this to children. *Kasha'sténtshera* is the inner fire or strength that fuels us. It's what gives us our drive and our strength to endure. This includes our physical strength. *Skén:nen* is our inner peace which can give us our search for balance and harmony in our lives. In educating our children with these principles in mind, we are demonstrating and creating opportunities for critical thinking and problem solving. We are creating well rounded children who are aware of their emotions and their bodies. We are educating our children to find their interests, passions, gifts and be better than we are as we move forward considering for the coming faces. With these principles at the heart of our education system, we can be sure that our children are given the tools needed to live as the Creator intended.

Skill Mastery

In many wholistic education programs, there are no marks given on report cards. Each child is evaluated on skill mastery. How is a child able to master a skill? What can the child do and not do and at what level? Children are supported to achieve their own successes and the combined success of the group. Children's gifts are recognized and fostered. There is no competition to be the best but only to learn and grow. The idea is that every day, each individual works to be better than they were yesterday. When we're all approaching life in this way and building ourselves, we are building a community of skills for the future. This mindset grows a community in the classrooms and schools since kids aren't competing against one another but are learning to depend on each other and each other's skills.

Interconnectedness

Wholistic Education's primary difference is its approach to interconnectedness. Western education operates in silos. Social Studies is taught separately from math, language, and science. Wholistic Education bridges the gap and recognizes the relationship and interconnection. This aligns to Onkwehón:we teachings and knowledge transmission in that we recognize that the world is interconnected and we are, as humans, are not more and no less as important a part as the earth and sky. It is our way to these understandings about our own person, clan, community and nation's responsibility

Holistic Education

to them and with them. Our way of learning and living is cyclical and not hierarchical and linear. We see ourselves as equal and as such, we remember that relationship in our learning.

Comparison Between Western Education and Onkwehonwe Education

Below is a comparison chart between Onkwehón:we Education and Western Education. Currently, in our community, most of our schools are using a western model of education for school programming. Granted, all schools try to infuse as much culture and language as possible in their programs, however, we would be much further ahead in our language and cultural revitalization efforts if we made the focus or philosophy one that aligns with our way of thinking, learning, doing and being. Wholistic education can be that. Making a change to a philosophy that mirrors our worldview and ideology can make for a better and longer lasting success in education.

Onkwehonwe Education	Western Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interconnected• Soul & Intellect• Interrelated• Harmony & Balance• Adapt to External Change• Team Approach• Cyclical• Partnership & Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual• Accumulation of Knowledge• Separate & Individual• Master & Control Reality• Apart from & Individual Based• Self-Interest• Linear• Competitive

Transitioning to wholistic education will take time. Big changes won't happen overnight but is something that we can commit to and work towards as a community. We are at a time of change and growth, and this is one thing that we can do that can help break down walls and the negative impacts that western education has had on our community. Change is often difficult. Change brings unknowns and vulnerability but a commitment to work together as a community means positive change for our children and our future. We have the capacity to do this! And we have the drive to do this! It will take everyone working collectively. This is a concept that is ours. We may be out of practice but we were built for it.

You may be asking how this is related to wholistic education. For us as Onkwehón:we people, our entire world is organized around the wholistic concept – living and working in an organic way. The concept is natural for us in that it reinforces our ways of thinking, knowing, doing, and being. It fosters the mind, body, and spirit connection and allows us to see and experience the interconnectedness that is reinforced in our languages. By infusing our values, language, culture and history into a wholistic education system, we are ensuring that the traditional transmission of knowledge continues. We are ensuring that our children understand relationships and systems in a way that connects things in an organic, natural manner.

Wholistic education and our way of organizing our world in a cyclical fashion are very similar. The images below show the organization of wholistic education in graphic representations of our 'words that come before all else'. The *ohentón karihwatékhwen*, is shown below as a graphic for lifelong learning.



As Onkwehón:we people, we understand the interconnectedness of the world around us. Wholistic education aims to instill these same values by teaching the subject-matter in a way that connects to other subjects, reiterating the idea of interconnectedness that allows for a deeper more well-rounded understanding of the content and therefore guides the children in a more natural way. Likewise, since Onkwehón:we worldview is organized in this manner, it makes sense that the concept of wholistic education continues to be investigated as a model for education at Six Nations.

The Onkwehón:we Mind

Over time, Lifelong Learning Taskforce participants have spoken often and with passion of the need to include Onkwehón:we Language and Culture as the fundamental reasons for education change.

For those of us who are not speakers of any of our languages, this section will speak to what it means to have an Onkwehón:we Mind, which is what is hoped for in the children in a wholistic education program.

“The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached ... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.”
— Edward Sapir

The Whorf-Sapir hypothesis states that the languages that we speak influence our perceptions of reality (Lucy, 1997). Language and culture are interconnected and together they define who we are as a people. Despite generations of assimilation leading to the attempted eradication of our languages, we are still here. Our languages are being used in homes and schools in many of our Haudenosaunee/Rotinonhsyon:ni communities.

Our ways of being have stood the tests of time because of how we understand our ways, even though the majority of our first language speakers have gone. Our ways of knowing and being persist in the English language because we have become masters at understanding and passing our knowledge on into a foreign language as a survival tactic. Despite the foreign language we speak today, many of our families have retained, in some capacity, the ways of interacting as a family with traditional value systems. One example of this from our family is when the late Dr. Sal Weaver formerly of the University of Waterloo Anthropology Department, attended a family function while doing research in our community. My aunt, my grandmother's younger sister, had just had a baby and at the end of the day, Dr. Weaver asked my mother who was the mother of the baby. She said that she had seen all the women holding the baby, changing the baby's diapers, washing and feeding the baby and she couldn't really tell who the mother of the baby actually was.

In the Mohawk language, the same word is used for both mother and aunt. Given the cultural understanding of this word, our mother's sisters are also responsible for the upbringing of the family and clan children. This is a clear example of how this cultural practice is carried on even among English speakers. One could refer to this as having an Onkwehonwe mind, in that our mindset is based on our traditional value system even in the instance where the players do not speak one of our languages. Such values are more clear for language speakers.

Here, we will investigate an Onkwehón:we mind and its meaning. First and foremost, in attempting to explain such an abstract concept as the Onkwehonwe Mind, one needs to understand the translation of the concept itself. *Onkwehón:we* is literally translated as Real or Original People, referring to all Original People to the land. What is most interesting is that based on the nature of how this is talked about in the *Kanyen'kéha [Mohawk]* language, the *Kanyen'kehà:ka* people already understand that as *Onkwehón:we*, our minds are different. We see this dichotomy as *Onkwehón:we* in our relationship to the cosmos and in our social structure. In the language, this mind would be talked about as, *Onkwehón:we na'ka'nikonhó:ten*, literally translated it is 'the kind of mind of the Original People'.

Our understanding of the word "mind", is not the same as the English word as our word does not only encompass cognitive abilities but also includes one's spirit or sense. Thus, the word 'mind in' our language cannot be separated from our spirits or emotions. In our language, to talk about "my" *Kanyen'kehà:ka* mind, we would say, *Kanyen'kehà:ka na'ka'nikonhró:ten*. To refer to the collective *Kanyen'kehà:ka* mind, or, "our" *Kanyen'kehà:ka* minds, one would say *Kanyen'kehà:ka niyonkwa'nikonhró:ten*. Thus, by referring to this concept of the *Kanyen'kehà:ka* mind in this way, it reiterates our perceptions about our group connectivity of our minds, spirits and sense.

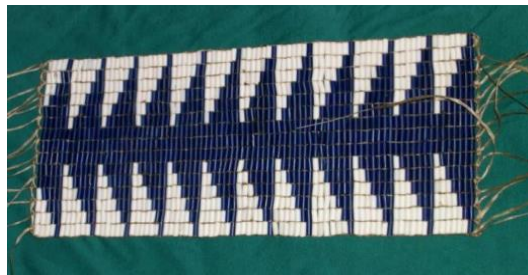
As Onkwehón:we people, we understand our connection to creation. We begin our days with the *Ohén:ton Karihwatékhwen*, "the words that come before all else". We understand and acknowledge the

Holistic Education

work of the plants, animals and cosmos and how they work for and with us, so that we may live in peace and harmony. We understand that we are a small part of a greater whole and we understand our responsibilities to acknowledge, give thanks and respect all other elements of creation.

The Onkwehón:we mind is a powerful thing. It's a mind that has endured much but still survives. It's a collective mind with vast wisdom and experience. It's a mind that transcends generations and still lives in each of us today. Our minds and spirits are connected and this is what drives us as Onkwehón:we into the future. We are all a part; we are all connected; we are all an important piece of the greater whole. We need to foster this in our children so that they may be confident, whole, happy beings who are strong of mind, body, and spirit. Western education has not and cannot foster this for us.

This is doable with some reflection and a willingness to learn and change. As adults, it means that we need to be open to change. We have stories or prophecies about this time of change. Below is *Ayonwatha*'s story depicted in the Everlasting Tree or Wing and Dust Fan Belt.



This belt, symbolizes the Tree of Peace that The Peacemaker and Ayonwatha uprooted in Onondaga. It symbolizes the *Tyonara'taseko:wa* or white pine, which represents peace and tranquility among people. Metaphorically speaking, it creates a safe haven for people who wish to take shelter under its branches. It is a peaceful place where positive thinking, tranquility and strength are possible and it still exists within our individual and collective minds.

The Everlasting Tree Belt tells us that *Ayonwatha* presented this prophecy at the time the Confederacy was to be formed. He prophesized that there will be a law that will come and it that will settle on the land like dust. It will fall thick and heavy on our people, the land, the trees, the animals, and all of creation. There will be people who will shield themselves from the falling dust and they will dust themselves off and remain free.

He then said that those people will go to the *Tyonara'taseko:wa* where the roots of the tree of peace have been hacked. They will find the roots of the tree and follow their way back to the *Tyonara'taseko:wa*. They will find that the tree had fallen and was resting on the arms of the chiefs. He said that at this time, they will stand up *tyonara'taseko:wa* once again and they will find peace, tranquility and strength again under that tree. Once this is done, slowly, the other people will begin to dust themselves off. The tree will take root and the roots would grow and extend to the edges of the earth. The tree will grow tall again and pierce the sky and the fire of the

Haudenosaunee/Rotinonhsyon:ni will grow. When this happens, the *Kayenere'ko:wa*¹ will be stronger and bigger than it was the first time.

When looking closely at what this means metaphorically, the message is that the people will use the principles of the *Kayenere'ko:wa* to shield themselves from the dust, which represents colonization. The people will dust themselves off and free themselves from colonization. The metaphor of the hacked roots represents the systemic attack on the natural laws of creation. The chiefs are the ones who are responsible for holding up the tree and are the peoples' connection and reminder of the *Kayenere'ko:wa*. Together, around the tree, the chiefs will hold up the beliefs of the *Kayenere'ko:wa*. Once this happens, they will stand the tree back up, meaning that the principles of the *Kayenere'ko:wa* will gain strength again and the roots will extend to the edge of the earth which means that the message of the *Kayenere'ko:wa* will spread across the world. The tree piercing the sky shows that the *Kayenere'ko:wa* will be seen by the world. When all of this happens, the *Kayenere'ko:wa* will become stronger than ever.

We are at this time now. We have an opportunity in educational change to reinvigorate and to re-build and flourish. This story is an important part of our cultural history in that it speaks of a time that our *Kayenere'ko:wa* will grow again and will become strong. This means that the people will again follow our principles and that it will extend to other people worldwide. It is important that we share this with other people because our way is representative of natural law. This story or prophecy speaks to the importance of our individual roles. As individuals, families and clans we can use our voices and our actions to do our part to stand the tree back up. By remaining true to who we are and by spreading the message of the *Kayenere'ko:wa*, we are dusting ourselves off; we are working as individuals to help strengthen the collective. As we dust our eyes, our ears and our hearts we will see, hear, and feel the disconnection and loss disappear. Then we can begin, as individuals, one at a time, to rebuild the collective. This can be done through education, conversation, action, communication, the arts, media, etc. As individuals, we all have gifts, we all have something to offer the collective and we can help the collective in this way, by dusting ourselves off and being carriers of the message, by touching others, modeling, and encouraging others to do the same.

This prophecy is important to the collective because we see these things happening to our people today. People are making change and teaching others about the *kayenere'ko:wa* and its importance. The collective is growing strong because individuals are doing their part. As those individuals continue to do their part, the collective is strengthened to do its part in holding up the tree and helping to stand it up, straight and tall as it once was. This truly speaks to *ka'shastentshera*, the power and strength of the people.

As individual people, our tasks are more difficult, as we cannot bear as much alone, but together, we are strong. Recall the metaphor of a single arrow can be broken but when bound together, the arrows cannot be broken. When we are of one body, one mind and one heart, united in the beliefs of the *kayenere'ko:wa* we will again be whole again. We will become stronger and we will again be at peace. All of the heartache that we have felt through the years through racism, extermination attempts, language loss, loss of identity, mental, physical, emotional and spiritual abuse will not matter. We will

sing our songs, dance our dances, use our own words and live in peace with one another and with the natural world and we will again live with pride and joy. We will again be one, united with each other and with *yethihmistenha ohwentsya* our Mother the Earth.

To do this, we need to be open to reflection. We need to be vulnerable and to take risks for the good future of our children, grandchildren and ‘the coming faces’. We have endured generations of trauma that attempted to eradicate us but we’re still here. Now is the time for us to thrive. This will require a paradigm shift and a time for us to look inward and heal, then to come together to do the outward collective work. We’re at a precipice; a time when change is imminent. We need to not be afraid to make a paradigm shift in education to regain what was lost. We come from some of the strongest most determined people in this hemisphere. We need to harness our power, find our inner fires and grow. Wholistic Education for our children can help us.

The Wholistic Curriculum

This section is a basic outline of what a wholistic program can look like at Six Nations. The body is revised from *Equinox Wholistic Curriculum*

1. Narrative-based

Oral storytelling is a way of life for Haudenosaunee/Rotinonhsyoni. Stories that are told orally (not read from a book) naturally capture children’s imaginations. An imaginative story brings concepts to life. New concepts are introduced through stories. Many subjects and new units can be presented through stories, which are also a way to connect children to their cultural heritage. Our stories and histories can be told and re-told throughout the children’s school journey. When students get older, they learn the art of storytelling, tell stories about their ancestors, and role-play historical events. Our people were natural orators and this is one skill that can be revitalized in a wholistic school program.

2. Arts-based

The arts engage children in the learning process with their hands and hearts. Arts are central to the wholistic program, because arts help to integrate subject areas and thinking for the child. Examples include dramatization of a story, painting plants for science, clapping rhythms to learn about music or math, and learning about fractions through quilt patterns. The arts can also be taught on their own. Teachers show students how to paint and draw throughout the grades. Teachers can consult a music curriculum, as it an ideal place for students to learn our own cultural songs and dances. Drama is integrated throughout the wholistic program and, for older children, students can be involved in specialized drama education and the production of a class play.

3. Experience-based

Children learn through experience and exploration. In the primary years, a lot of the science and math contents are taught outdoors, which lends itself to hands-on, experiential learning. Students will need to take part in activities around the natural/longhouse calendar such as Opening and Closing the Trees, Seed ceremonies, planting activities and methods, Harvest celebrations, traditional ways of preserving food. In addition, students can learn math while doing these activities such as by collecting data about plant species or insect populations. Older students can learn abstract concepts through real-life, learning activities for example students could form a mini clan meeting in class.

4. Inquiry-based

Students can learn techniques to develop intuition, visualization and metaphor. Visualization can facilitate cohesiveness in the classroom, motivate student interest, and support creative writing or re-telling of our stories. Using metaphors encourages students to make connections between ideas and subject matter; they encourage students to see patterns, ask questions and encourage the creative process. Using inquiry-based activities, students could interview parents, grandparents and community people about history, science, medicine, traditional celebrations.

5. Cooperative-based Learning

As is our traditional way of learning, the inquiry and problem-solving model lends themselves to children working collaboratively on problems and in groups. Students work in small groups on tasks that are either initiated by the students or assigned by the teacher. These kinds of activities build within children our traditional ways of working collectively to complete a job like planting gardens or building shelters. The very young children's exploration program helps to lay a foundation for the students to work cooperatively.

6. Teacher-led Learning

Wholistic education aims to balance the program between student-led and teacher-led activities. Throughout the program when students are learning new concepts and techniques in various subject areas it is important for teachers to lead activities. At other times, children may wish to do other tasks that are within their interest level such as cooking or looking after animals.

7. Project-based Learning

Small-scale, project-based learning begins with young children. For example, students explore math and science by documenting (by video or audio technology) how to plan out a beading exercise or how to make corn soup the traditional way. In the middle grades class projects are on a larger scale. For example, students could design and build a sustainable dwelling or a mini longhouse. Projects help to bring together a number of concepts and skills into an authentic learning activity. Projects could also encourage the involvement of families to help with the project that students have identified.

Implementation of a Wholistic Education

Building a world-class wholistic education program based on our language and culture at Six Nations will take many minds, many hands, much work, patience and fairly long timeline. To build a solid foundation many activities will have to take place.

These discussions can include the following:

* information for community * development of new speakers * development of teachers * discussion of what the program should look like	* sufficient land for the program * type of buildings needed * school leadership & governance * school policies * family involvement	* transparency & accountability plans * types of equipment & tools needed * funding ** and much more**
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Such decisions will be made by discussions within the Six Nations community and our Education community. Making decisions will take time, energy and commitment among community members, parents, political groups and educators.

The sooner we begin, the sooner our community can enroll students who will begin to learn old and still valid ways of knowing through our own languages and culture.

Often, we don't even realize who we're meant to be because we're so busy trying to live out someone else's ideas. But other people and their opinions hold no power in defining our destiny.

Your calling isn't something that somebody can tell you about. It's what you feel. It is the thing that gives you juice. The thing that you are supposed to do. And nobody can tell you what that is. You know it inside yourself.

~ Oprah

Further Reading & Viewing

Essential

1. Miller, Jack
The Holistic Curriculum - Third Edition
2. Miller, Jack et al
Teaching from the Thinking Heart
3. Williams, Kayanesenh Paul
Kayanerenko:wa - The Great Law of Peace
4. Steiner, Rudolf
The Education of The Child
5. Harwood, A.C.
The Way of a Child

Recommended

1. Petrash, Jack
Understanding Waldorf Education - Teaching from the Inside Out
2. Miller, Jack, Editor
International Handbook of Holistic Education
3. White, Louellyn
Free to be Mohawk: Indigenous Education at the Akwesasne Freedom School
4. Berreiro, Jose
Thinking in Indian: A John Mohawk Reader

Supplemental

1. Points, Emerald
Inclusive Education in South Africa and the Developing World
2. Smith, Laura Tuhiwal, et al
Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education
3. Ashton, Donna
The Waldorf Homeschool Handbook
4. Katz, Jennifer
Ensouling Our Schools: A Universally Designed Framework for Mental Health, Well-Being and Reconciliation
5. Smith, Sheena
All Kids Can Thrive
6. Fullan, Michael & Joanne Quinn
Deep Learning: Engage the World - Change the World

You Tube Videos of Interest

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=3q4HVnAuQ6w> 41 minutes

Jack P Miller, Holistic Education, Norway 2017

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=QRq4ASlCuug>

Jack P. Miller's keynote talk on March 17, 2016, University of Toronto 53 minutes