

# Rooted in perpetuity: Weaving grandfather teachings as an ongoing journey for CRE, IE, and evaluators

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## Abstract

Through an intergenerational lens, we recognize that trauma and healing are integral parts of the responsibilities and lineage we carry as Indigenous scholars honoring the Seven Generations before us and after us. This chapter frames and illustrates the intertwining of rooted relationships and kinship while broadening the standard norms and concepts of culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) and Indigenous evaluation (IE). By rooting CRE and IE kinship together in the field of evaluation, we complement and contribute to the legacy of Dr. Stafford Hood and the CRE/IE movement using the framework of the Seven Grandfather Teachings: Love, Honesty, Bravery, Respect, Humility, Wisdom, and Truth. Traditional teachings provide conceptual and practical Indigenous perspectives on how we continue to move forward together as good relatives. Academically, we confront western ideologies and systems that reflect and uphold settler-controlled frameworks, while we seek to empower, celebrate, and advocate for our rights, voices, and visibility. The ongoing push for recognition and acknowledgement of CRE and IE and the integration of their innovations into theory, methodology, policy, and practice presents a transformative process for the evaluation field to embrace.

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*Responsive* “fundamentally means to attend substantively and politically to issues of culture and race in evaluation practice.” (Hood et al., 2001, p. 32)

## INTRODUCTION

North America/Turtle Island people follow the “Seven Generations” concept: the belief that individual choices will affect seven generations before and after us. Tribes might relay the Seven Generations concept in a variety of mannerisms, as traditions and cultures differ among our people. Kimmerer et al. (2021) sees the word “kinship” as a verb, the action and movement of gifts among all inhabitants: “the exchange of those gifts that makes kinship more than ancestry or common history” (p. 128). Dodge Francis et al. (2023) believe that we embody and reciprocate this ongoing interrelationship of kinship with the land and the Seven Generations. Though our stories are different, we live and forge our work from the memories and DNA of ancestors, with the presence of elders, families, and communities.

Dr. Stafford Hood, like many evaluators of color, experienced systematic colonization and assimilation into a world that imposes a westernized viewpoint not just on life in general but also on evaluation theory and practice. As a collaborative relative to Indigenous evaluators, Dr. Hood embodied Kimmerer’s definition: “Being a relative is more than shared blood from a common past. Real kinship arises when we realize that we have a common future, that our fates are linked” (Kimmerer et al., 2021, p. 121). Dr. Hood saw his fate as linked with that of Indigenous people and the intersection of CRE and IE.

## GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS

The Seven Grandfather Teachings—Truth, Humility, Respect, Love, Courage, Honesty, and Wisdom—form a framework to honor the importance of contributions to the fields of traditional Western evaluation, CRE, and Indigenous evaluation. Applying the Seven Directions and Grandfather Teachings to evaluative thinking, teaching, and practice is a formative way of thinking and growing in the field of evaluation practice and doing evaluation with Tribal/First Nations and Indigenous communities. We look to our Anishinaabe and other Indigenous relatives of the Great Lakes communities and Nations on Turtle Island for their ways of addressing these teachings.

**Love:** (*Àhwáaleew*): Love is the first teaching for Lunnape way (Lunaape Language Camp 2019). Shows tenderness, kindness, and being in good relationships with all the Creator has given us.

Being in a good relationship means abiding by the natural laws of interdependence. It represents a commitment to learning about Indigenous communities and peoples and making an intentional effort toward honoring the land before you practice evaluation there. Natural laws of interdependence require an evaluator to be open to knowing their ancestors’ origin story and how it affects Indigenous lands, the people, and their learning, in the past and today. The learning process differs depending on cultural context, for example, the Diné (Navajo) culture and ways of life relate to the American educational system with angst. While working within the Navajo Nation, Hood (2009) et al. (2009) relied upon “cultural liaison” Diné teachers and the Navajo community to provide understandings for navigating these tensions between culture and education praxis. In turn,

these experiences were pinnacle moments for Hood to push for broader conversations about the importance of culture not only in education but also in evaluation and within CRE. This obligates evaluators to learn how to become comfortable and in harmony when conducting Indigenous evaluations.

**Truth:** (*Wulaamweewaakan*): Speak the truth and be true to your community, others, and yourself. Think about the future of the Seven Generations.

Finding factual and responsible truth is a journey that evaluators must continually walk by attending to the cultural realities in which they are working. “Culturally responsive evaluators honor the cultural context in which an evaluation takes place by bringing the shared life experience and understanding to the evaluation tasks at hand” (Frierson et al., 2002). As is known among Indigenous learners, however, cultural pluralism continues to be inadequately illustrated and defined. Hood et al. (2001) spoke of constructs created by others based on their values, not by or with the values of the targeted culture groups and suggested cultural pluralism constructs might have different results if this discrepancy were addressed. Neubauer et al. (2023) discuss scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) as a practice to invite educators to critically examine themselves. Small steps begin with demonstrating perseverance and attentiveness within community contexts and Indigenous evaluations. Be aware and sincere with evaluation designs and expectations based on the lived realities and histories of the Indigenous communities.

**Humility:** (*Tangaalundamuwaakan*): Cultural, professional, and academic humility are the foundation to living a good life and being in good relations.

Hood et al. (2022) called out the marginalization of Indigenous viewpoints, reminding the field of evaluation to look beyond the standard evaluation practices and to embrace alternative epistemologies, methodologies, data sovereignty and ways of knowing. As Indigenous evaluators, we understand the critical need to legitimize Indigenous evaluation societies, agendas, and communities as true partners in the field of evaluation. With intentional cultural humility, we can ensure protection, preservation, and responsiveness through a social justice lens. “Culturally responsive evaluation in the Indigenous context goes beyond the legal and academic structures of an evaluation by including cultural, linguistic, and other community safeguards that protect Indigenous communities’ knowledge and data” (Bowman et al., 2015, p. 345). Bringing cultural humility into evaluation is a service to society.

**Respect:** (*Wulii-punaweew*): Living as a respectful relative and holding others in consideration, appreciation, and honor are important elements for this teaching.

The evaluator who respects cultural variations among Indigenous people recognizes that traditional knowledge and wisdom have applications to the field of evaluation. Evaluators must determine how to incorporate these applications and ensure that they are appropriately vetted and approved by Indigenous peoples/Nations. Respectful and reciprocal relations are a requirement in Indigenous evaluation. Whyte et al. (2021) states that reciprocity is a crucial element of relationships, “one in which each relative is confident that the investment made in the well-being of others will be gifted back to the same relative” (p. 37). Evaluators should not request Indigenous peoples or Nations to do physical or emotional labor without reciprocity.

As articulated by Nelson-Barber et al. (2005), “Failure to understand how cultural context interacts with program implementation and impact jeopardizes the validity of the evaluation” (pp. 61–62). It is not just knowing cultural contexts, but respecting and honoring them that makes for true cultural pluralism. Dr. Hood (2009) illustrated how cultural constructs, lived experiences, and the multidimensional aspects of a sovereign Nation play roles in a respectful culturally responsive evaluation process.

**Courage/Bravery.** (*Maskaniitee*): Willingness to shoulder traditional and contemporary responsibilities, and having the ethics and strength to be vulnerable, to face our fears, to recognize who we are, and defend what we believe in and what is right for the community.

For evaluation to be culturally responsive, evaluators must be willing to bravely face their own positionality and biases and present themselves to an Indigenous community that might be hesitant to welcome outside entities that exclaim: “*We are here to help*,” a phrase too often followed by devastating consequences. Having the courage/bravery to show your authentic self, bravery that stems from cultural humility, can create allies for life. Reflection and growth within culturally responsive practice and understanding is a continuous journey.

**Honesty.** (*Shaaxkaapeewuu*): Honesty means one walks through life with integrity, knowing who you are; accepts the gifts from the Creator; and uses them appropriately.

Indigenous peoples or Tribal/First Nations should lead or co-lead studies, and Indigenous theories, methods, and models should be prioritized. Indigenous scholars and their related publications address culture, ethics, and aspects of governance or policy that are essential to the evaluation. This includes incorporating the tenets of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)* and ensuring that data ownership remains with Indigenous peoples. An evaluator can also serve as a cultural broker, translating and negotiating with funding sources to build their capacities to work more effectively, and justly, with Tribal/First Nations and Indigenous peoples.

**Wisdom.** (*Lëpweokàn*): Wisdom (moral, ethical, practical competencies) is applied discernment for the betterment of one’s own life/community/society/earth. The wisdom of our ancestors is timeless.

Dr. Hood had over three decades of learned and practical wisdom regarding culturally responsive evaluation and assessment. His ability to combine CRE theory, practice, and relationships elevated community partners/allies. Like the wisdom of the ancestors, Dr. Hood’s wisdom demonstrates that our collective lived experiences enlighten culturally responsive evaluation and Indigenous evaluation by having our voices and culture seen, heard, and understood within the field.

## REFLECTIVE CONCLUSION

Utilizing decolonized language and understanding Indigenous traditional knowledge as expressed in lived experiences are foundational for culturally responsive practice in evaluation. These contextualized truths represent the experiential learning in a natural setting that has been passed down for thousands of years. Hester and Cheney et al. (2001) asked how important truth is to knowledge and Native epistemology. Our answer: it is the pathway of sense-making, the way we think and practice our lifeways (including evaluative practice). This would include the epistemology of truth or perspectives and understanding of the nature of Indigenous knowledge.

We challenge the essence of privilege and Western ways of knowing and doing because we want to pursue creating and rebuilding positive community relations for evaluative thinking, teaching, and practice (Potapchuk & Leiderman, 2005). Can one have true and honest knowledge as an evaluator if you have no community-informed sense of cultural humility, ethics, and understanding of lived experiences? We need to explore these universal truths, transcend the current environment and practices for evaluators, and lift the field of evaluation to a higher standard that encompasses evidence-based policy, practice, governance, and models that represent and work for the underrepresented and

marginalized. We must walk together, as good relatives to each other and in a good way, as we travel together in our evaluation journey.

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