DOUGLAS COLLEGE
Library

Book Club Kit

Discussion Guide

Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies: An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education by Jo Chrona

Contents

Biography

Jo Chrona is a speaker, education consultant, Indigenous education advocate, and author of *Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies: An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education* (2022). She is Ts'msyen (a member of the Kitsumkalum First Nation) through her mother, and has European ancestry through her father. Jo is Ganhada (Raven) of Waap (House) K'oom.

Jo's professional experience includes over 25 years teaching in both K-12 (secondary grades) and post-secondary education, working as a Faculty Associate in Simon Fraser University's (SFU) Teacher Education Program, an Advisor with the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education, and a Policy Analyst then Curriculum Manager, for the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) in British Columbia.

Over the past two decades, she also been actively involved in the areas of curriculum development and resource writing, professional learning through inquiry networks, literacy development, and Indigenous education. Jo was also involved in various aspects of educational transformation in the BC's K-12 system, including the development of Indigenous education policies, as well as managed and contributed to the creation of authentic Indigenous teacher resources.

Jo has a Bachelor of Arts in English and Women's Studies from SFU, a Diploma in Education (Guidance Studies) and Master's Degree in Educational Technology from the University of British Columbia (UBC), and also completed UBC's Transformative Educational Leadership Program (TELP). She also maintains her BC Teacher Certification.

Jo is passionate about helping create systemic change in education systems to support inclusive, high-quality, responsive, and strength-based education experiences for all learners. In between consulting and providing professional learning sessions that focus on the intersections of Indigenous and anti-racist education, how Indigenous-informed pedagogies create stronger educational experiences for all, and how high-expectations relationships can help move us forward, she is currently examining the connections between the First Peoples Principles of Learning and authentic assessment.

Jo currently lives on Salt Spring Island, traditional territories of the W̱SÁNEĆ (Tsawout) and Quw'utsun.

Source: **Author Website**

https://luudisk.com/about/

Review by Kenneth Favrholdt

Educating Educators
November 6, 2023

Jo Chrona uses a rallying cry for her book: *Wayi Wah!* (Let's go; it's time!) It is time to make education a force in reconciliation. This is the message.

Chrona has assembled in eight sequential chapters what could be called a workbook on how to help non-Indigenous educators who are learning about Indigenous pedagogies, Reconciliation through education, and creating Indigenous -specific anti-racist education environments.

In Chapter One, Chrona situates herself. Chrona is of the Kitsumkalum First Nation, along the Skeena River, where her mother and grandmother were born. She has a European biological father and stepfather. She was born in *Kxeen* (Prince Rupert). She ended up teaching K-12 and went on to obtain a masters degree. As I write this review on this year's Truth and Reconciliation Day, I am reminded of my own pathway into the world of education. Like Chrona, I went to Simon Fraser University to obtain my teaching certificate. She makes an important observation that applies to all teachers: "In all my experiences as an educator, I have also been a learner." This is what her book is about.

In Chapter Two, Chrona makes an important point that Indigenous education is not multicultural education. She says that attempts to embed Indigenous education within a conversation about multiculturalism "deny the distinctiveness of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and undermine actions to acknowledge Indigenous rights."

In Chapter Three, Chrona touches on the subject of residential schools but also ongoing colonization and decolonization – "the continuing process of critically examining and challenging beliefs, values, structures and processes that are steeped in mindsets that devalue or exclude Indigenous peoples…"

Chapter Four is about the *R*-word – racism. Chrona speaks about investigating our assumptions that we live by. She provides a list of approaches "to interrogate our own practices and our own biases." She talks of how "[e]xamining privilege helps us understand how people's experiences differ."

Overt racism, such as bullying, teasing, or name-calling felt by Indigenous learners in the classroom needs to be addressed. Systemic racism is where services reflected in inequities, policies, and processes perpetuate disparity in educational outcomes.

Chapter Five focuses on "the First Peoples Principles of Learning" (FPPL) – a set of learning principles that represents "an attempt by a diverse group to identify commonalities in Indigenous knowledge systems about effective approaches to teaching." The FPPL encompasses a pedagogical approach and an

explicit valuing of Indigenous knowledges. Chrona provides a closer look at the principles: learning supporting the well-being of self; learning supporting the well-being of family and community; learning supporting the well-being of the land; and learning supporting the well-being of the spirits and the ancestors.

Indigenous knowledge, states Chrona, refers to "the complex knowledge systems that have been developed over time by a particular people in a particular area and that have been transmitted from generation to generation." She uses the plural because there is not one but many sets of IK. She quotes Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaw from Potlotek First Nation and *professor emerita* at the University of Saskatchewan, quotes Chrona,

> [IK] … *embodies a web of relationships with a specific ecological context; contains linguistic categories, rules and relationships unique to each knowledge system; has localized context and meaning; has established customs with respect to acquiring and sharing of knowledge…; and implies responsibilities for possessing various kinds of knowledge* (Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations*,* 2005).

Chrona underscores "how important it is to teach only knowledge that I have permission from the Nation to share." Including IK in the curriculum "honours the fact that Indigenous Peoples have rich, robust and deep knowledge systems that have previously either been ignored or devalued as a result of colonial policies and racist attitudes."

"Non-Indigenous educators should not see themselves as teachers of Indigenous cultures, rather, to teach about Indigenous Peoples, cultures, knowledges, histories and communities."

Chapter Six is devoted to a discussion of resources used in the classroom and schools in general. Chrona emphasizes the importance of using locally-developed resources and makes an important point throughout the book about avoiding the "pan-Indigenous approach to Indigenous knowledge systems, perspectives and worldviews." Referring to her own experience, Chrona says that she is a Ts'msyen person currently living on the traditional territories of the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations. But she would not use the traditional knowledge of her homeland and teach that elsewhere.

An example of a locally-based resource is one I was involved in as a teacher at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, as part of a research team which produced a booklet, "A Handbook for Educators of Aboriginal Students" (2010) based on the knowledge of the Secwépemc people of the Interior Salish in south-central BC. It draws on the work of scholars like the late Dr. Mary Thomas and that of various First Nations and schools such as Chief Atahm School founded in 1991 at Adams Lake Band.

There is an important section in this chapter on cultural appropriation which occurs when non-Indigenous people take and present elements of Indigenous knowledge as their own, without consent, and without recognition of the source. Such appropriation is often due to ignorance or intentional

acts. Cultural appropriation has been defined as “the inappropriate or unacknowledged adoption of an element or elements of one culture or identity by members of another culture or identity” (*Wikipedia*, accessed Oct. 1, 2023). It is a controversial matter. Art is an area where cultural appropriation is particularly common, given the exploitation of Indigenous culture in areas like art, fashion, and commercial products.

Chapter Seven discusses government commitments and obligations such as British Columbia’s adoption of UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Changes in curriculum and Indigenous-focused courses for graduation requirements are described.

Throughout the book Chrona poses “Reflection Questions,” meant to awaken our own beliefs and biases. For example, “What is your story of how you came to be where you are?”; “What are the stories you are telling about how this country came to be?” Questions are followed by “Taking Action” points.

The book includes an excellent list of resources with each chapter. There is also a selective list of references at the end of the book.

Chrona ends with a truism of education: “We learn, we unlearn, we relearn.” An example of this transformation is displayed in Figure 4.1 in the book, “Becoming Anti-Racist in Canada.” It asks you, the educator, to identify what you used to think about something, then compare it to what you think after engaging in a learning experience, and how your thinking has changed as you continue to learn.

The journey of an educator, that Chrona has so ably shown, is never-ending. She has written, in a clear, direct voice, an important book which is essential reading for everyone working with Indigenous peoples in the education system.

Source: **The British Columbia Review**

Educating educators

Favhrholdt, K. (2023, November 26). *Educating educators*. The British Columbia Review. https://thebcreview.ca/2023/11/06/1983-favrholdt-chrona/

Review by Tom Eccleston

What I'm Reading: Wayi Wah! Reflections and the Work of Educational Leadership

I often find myself looking for books, articles, and resources that deepen my understandings and challenge me to think and lead differently. Jo Chrona's *Wayi Wah!* (2022) is one of those rare books. It invites educators into a conversation about Indigenous pedagogy, reconciliation, and anti-racist education, not as abstract ideals but as urgent, ongoing commitments embedded into the daily fabric of their schools. Reading it wasn't a routine act of professional learning, rather, it felt like an act of joining, a way of saying, "I'm here, I'm listening, and I'm willing to try and do the work."
From the language (Sm'algyax) of the Ts'msyen people, "Wayi Wah!" translates to *Let's go; it's time!*, and the title captures the spirit of the book perfectly. Chrona's writing is clear, grounded, and generous. She doesn't preach from a distance; she walks alongside the reader, blending personal narrative with critical questions and practical tools. The tone is both invitational and direct. I appreciate this approach in that it speaks to educators who are ready to move beyond awareness and into meaningful action.

One chapter in particular, on Indigenous-informed pedagogies, became a shared touchstone for our staff. We read and discussed potions together, hoping to open up the kind of rich, vulnerable dialogue that doesn't happen every day in schools. We found ourselves asking different questions: Are we truly valuing Indigenous ways of knowing? Are we fitting them into existing molds? How might land-based, relational, and experiential learning reframe what we consider in our instructional designs? These weren't casual conversations; they were necessary ones. And they marked a shift in our thinking about how we begin to design learning experiences and professional inquiry with Indigenous epistemologies as a foundation.

Chrona's work aligns powerfully with the leadership framework outlined in *Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry* by Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser (2022), a book that has shaped much of our British Columbia school system's approach to collaborative learning and school improvement this century. The guiding questions of the spiral process: *What's going on for our learners? How do we know? Why does it matter?*, take on added depth when placed in conversation with Chrona's calls for reconciliation and anti-racist education. When we ask what's going on for our Indigenous learners, we're uncovering stories, histories, and truths that have too often been marginalized or misunderstood. The spiral of inquiry, in this light, becomes an effective a leadership lens for making the next steps a reality.

At the same time, I found that *Wayi Wah!* echoed many of the leadership principles articulated by Simon Sinek in *Start with Why* (2009). Chrona's approach is grounded in a clear sense of purpose. She reminds us that education for reconciliation is not about ticking off curricular boxes or complying with ministry mandates. Instead, it's about fundamentally shifting our relationships with knowledge, with students, and with each other. Understanding the "why" of reconciliation work is crucial, especially when the "how" feels complex and professional challenging. And while the book provides practical pathways, it

never loses sight of the moral center that must guide educational leadership in this area.

Of course, moving through this kind of change work brings emotional weight. I've experienced it myself and seen it among colleagues—the fear of getting it wrong, the fatigue that comes with sustained unlearning, the discomfort of confronting long-held assumptions. Here, I found a helpful parallel in *Emotional Agility* by Susan David, Ph.D. (2016) which offers powerful mentorship for staying values-aligned in moments of challenge. David's insights helped me learn and lead through the discomfort that *Wayi Wah!* surfaces by making space for it, listening to it, and using it as a compass for growth.

Like any text, *Wayi Wah!* has its limitations, though I see them more as opportunities for deeper engagement. The book focuses on multiple levels, offering rich guidance for classroom educators and school-based leaders. But systemic transformation, at the level of district policy, decolonisation, and structural change needs expansion. That's not a shortcoming of the book, but rather a call to action for those of us in leadership roles. If Chrona has laid the groundwork, it's our job to carry it forward into the decisions we make at the structural level—decisions about curriculum development, hiring practices, professional learning, and strategic planning. In this respect, the challenge is clear: leadership must be more than facilitation; it must be transformation.

I also found myself wishing for more direct student voice, especially from Indigenous youth. Chrona rightly centers Indigenous perspectives throughout, and hearing more explicitly from learners themselves would add urgency and inspiration. As an advocate for student perspective and empowerment, this absence became an invitation to me. How can I elevate student voice in our inquiry processes, to co-construct pathways forward with those most impacted by educational inequities, and to listen more deeply to what success looks like from the perspective of Indigenous learners?

Another opportunity lies in supporting educators new to this journey. While the book is highly accessible, the depth of learning it demands can be overwhelming at first. That's where leadership plays a critical role: creating the conditions for slow, sustained, and supported learning. The invitation Chrona extends is not on of one-off workshops or checkbox PD sessions, but to an ongoing practice of curiosity, courage, and vulnerability. Leading and shaping that kind of culture is not simple, but it is necessary to work towards.

For me, *Wayi Wah!* is not a book to be read once and filed away. It's a book I'll return to, one that's shaping how I engage with staff, how we design inquiry and school growth cycles. It is one that impacting how we interpret what it means to create an inclusive, future-oriented school. It reminds me that reconciliation isn't a finish line to cross. It's a commitment to keep walking, together, even when the path is unfamiliar.

Chrona offers an invitation to re-examine our practice, and that's what makes her voice so essential. Her message is clear: let's move forward in a transformative way—not perfectly, but intentionally. Let's go, indeed.

References (used in Tom Eccleston review above)

Chrona, J. (2022). *Wayi Wah! Indigenous pedagogies: An act for reconciliation and anti-racist education*. Portage & Main Press.

David, S. (2016). *Emotional agility: Get unstuck, embrace change, and thrive in work and life*. Avery.

Halbert, J., & Kaser, L. (2022). *Leading through spirals of inquiry: For equity and quality*. Portage & Main Press.

Sinek, S. (2009). *Start with why: How great leaders inspire everyone to take action*. Penguin.

Source: **Tom Eccleston (blog)**

What I'm reading: Wayi Wah! Reflections and the Work of Educational Leadership

Audio Interview by Amanda Cardenas and Marie Morris

Indigenous Education Isn't Multicultural Education: An Interview with Jo Chrona [s5e159]
July 6, 2023

Listen to this interview from Brave New Teaching: A Podcast for High School and Middle School Teachers:

https://www.bravenewteaching.com/home/episode159

Source: **Brave New World.**

Cardens, A. & Morris, M. (Hosts). 2023, July 6. Indigenous education isn't multicultural education: An interview with Jo Chrona (No. 159) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Brave New Teaching Podcast*. https://www.bravenewteaching.com/home/episode159

Discussion Questions

1. From page 7, the author gives some reflection questions: What is your story of how you came to be where you are? Where did your parents and ancestors come from? What is your relationship with where you are now?

2. How much discomfort have you experienced in your learning journey towards anti-racism and decolonization in both personal and professional sphere? How have you dealt with that discomfort?

3. Have you ever experienced or witnessed racism in any form? How was it handled?

4. Situated yourself in the image of Figure 4.1: Becoming Anti-Racist in Canada on page 60. Identify a concrete action you can take that fits the statements in the growth zone.

5. On page 118, there is a list of First People Principles of Learning. Have your own learning journeys reflected these principles? Which principles resonated most with you? Which ones do you feel resistance about?

6. One of the contexts that affect learning that the author explores on page 134 is a sense of Place. How is your teaching grounded in a sense of Place? How localized is your curriculum?

7. Do you know your students' stories? How can you give them opportunities to share their stories and voices? To build relationships and to learn from each other?

8. In your opinion, what kind of institutional support is needed in building an equitable education system for Indigenous learners and other learners as well?

Discussion Themes

Reconciliation | *Racism* | *Indigenous Education* | *Pedagogy*