Decolonizing Journalism Education: Integrating Global Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Upholding Educational Sovereignty

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Abstract

This essay explores the concept of decolonizing journalism education through the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems, focusing on educational sovereignty. Drawing from the story of my grandmother—an African Indigenous woman skilled in pottery, traditional medicine, and storytelling—it highlights how Indigenous knowledge offers a rich, immersive learning experience outside formal schooling. These practices, rooted in cultural heritage and holistic understanding, challenge the rigid structures of Western education. By integrating Michelle Bishop's framework of Indigenous education sovereignty, which includes elements such as intergenerational reciprocity, agency, time, pattern thinking, country, and relationality, this essay advocates for an innovative and transformative approach to journalism education. The essay also uses the work of Indigenous scholars from Canada, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand to provide a global perspective on educational sovereignty. It argues for moving beyond simply adding Indigenous content to reimagining education that centres Indigenous ways of knowing. Through this framework, journalism programs can become more inclusive, fostering a dynamic learning environment that values deep cultural understanding and self-determination.

Keywords: decolonization, journalism education, education sovereignty, Indigenous knowledge systems

Introduction

The most educated woman I have ever met

In her late seventies, with her skin full of wrinkles, her silver hair protruding from a head covering, and her mind sharp as ever, my grandmother—or Nkuku as we called her in my language—was an embodiment of knowledge, wisdom, and resilience.

Though unschooled in Western traditions, she was the most educated woman I have ever met. She possessed a wealth of Indigenous knowledge and life experience that far surpassed the formal education of many. She was a clay potter, a medicine woman, and a storyteller.

In the twilight of her life, I got to watch her as she used her hands to mould traditional pots or vases, called di-Nkgwana. Engaging in the traditional yet scientific process of clay and soil selection, she meticulously chose the right types of clay and sand, mixing them with water to achieve the perfect consistency. She would then shape the pots with her skilled hands, using age-old techniques passed down through generations. As she moulded the pots, she was methodical, ensuring that the dimensions were precise and well proportioned. Without any measuring tool, she had an intuitive sense of balance and form. She made pots of all sizes, each one carefully crafted to serve its purpose. After moulding, she would smoothen the pots using special stones to avoid cracking. Instead of drying them in the sun, she would let them dry in cool places, sometimes covered, to ensure they dried slowly and evenly. Finally, she would carefully fire them in a homemade kiln in the backyard of our house, turning them into beautiful, durable ceramic pieces of art. She was perhaps one of the best-known clay pot makers in my village, and her skills attracted customers from all over the village and the country. Her pots were more than functional items; they were cherished works of art that represented our heritage and traditions.

As a medicine woman, she was the most sought-after healer of children's ailments. In fact, in my view she was an unschooled pediatrician. I watched her go into the bush to collect specialized herbs, sort them, dry them, sometimes boil them, and prepare them for her young clients. Her home was like a clinic, with people coming in and out throughout the day to seek her medical help. Mothers would bring their children from all over the village and beyond, hoping for a remedy for their little ones. Those who were healed often named their children after her or her late husband, my grandfather, as a gesture of gratitude and honour. She did this with no expectation of monetary gain. But despite the reverence others held for her, she never considered herself to have divine or special powers, nor did she see herself as a miracle worker. Instead, she humbly acknowledged that her healing knowledge was a gift passed down to her by her parents and relatives, refined over years of practice and careful observation. For her, it was simply a continuation of the ancient traditions and wisdom of our people—a duty to share what she had been taught to help those in need.

As a storyteller, she eloquently told stories of our origin, history, and the ancient traditions that shaped our culture, seamlessly switching between two languages, Setswana and Kalanga. Every night, we would gather around the fire to listen to her stories about the past. Sometimes she would tell these stories as she smoothens the pots or prepares a meal. Through

her stories, we learned about the bravery of our forebearers, the wisdom of our Elders, and the mistakes that taught valuable lessons. Sometimes she would reinforce her stories with idioms and metaphors, rhythmic phrases and proverbs. And sometimes, she would sing and act, bringing the characters and events to life in vivid detail. Her performances were captivating. Her voice and movements added depth to the tales.

In all these three practices, my role was that of apprentice. I was required to observe, learn, reflect, ask questions, and assist wherever possible. Learning was not timed, nor was it structured in the way Western education is. Instead, it was deeply immersive and continuous. I learned by doing, by observing, by listening, by reflecting, and by being present. There were no penalties, grades, or deadlines. There were no textbooks or exams, but the lessons were profound, and the knowledge gained, invaluable.

Colonization has deeply impacted education systems worldwide by imposing Western ideologies, devaluing and erasing Indigenous knowledge and practices (Battiste, 2013; Grande, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This violent imposition marginalized Indigenous people's epistemologies, ontologies, cultural practices, and educational pedagogies (Cajete, 2012; Simpson, 2011; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Nevertheless, Indigenous scholars and allies have been working to decolonize education by advocating for recognizing, integrating, and centring Indigenous knowledge systems, pedagogies, languages, and cultural practices. In this essay, I build on these efforts to decolonize education. I adopt Bishop's (2022) concept of Indigenous education sovereignty to explore how it can serve as a transformative framework for journalism education. I begin by offering a conceptual framework of Indigenous education sovereignty, outlining its fundamental principles and goals. Then, using my grandmother's story, I argue that education, especially in Indigenous contexts, must include the rich, lived experiences and traditional knowledge passed down through generations. To do this, I use storytelling as a methodological approach to emphasize its role in preserving and transmitting Indigenous knowledge. Throughout this essay, I use decolonizing storytelling methodologies that "aspire to re-cover, re-cognize, re-create, re-present, and 're-search back' by using our own ontological and epistemological constructs" (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 6). To frame this discussion, I draw on Bishop's (2022) six elements of Indigenous education sovereignty and apply them to my professional practice in journalism education. For students, this framework invites deeper engagement with diverse knowledge systems, encourages critical self-reflection and challenges them to rethink whose voices and stories matter in journalism.

Conceptual Framework: Decolonizing Education and Indigenous Sovereignty

What is Indigenous Sovereignty? Writing in the context of North America, Lomawaima (2000) noted that "sovereignty is the bedrock upon which any and every discussion of Indian reality today must be built" (p. 3). She explained that Indigenous sovereignty encompasses the inherent right to self-governance, self-determination, and self-education, which Indigenous nations have asserted despite historical subordination to colonial powers (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). This concept extends beyond politics and law to include cultural and spiritual autonomy, ensuring Indigenous communities control their governance, education, and ways of life (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kingston, 2019; McDonald & Figueiredo, 2022; Sikka, 2023).

Indigenous scholars assert that sovereignty was never ceded; rather, it endures through long-standing, pre-European governance systems grounded in inclusivity and diversity (Behrendt, 2003; Bishop, 2020). This sovereignty is not reliant on European law or state paternalism, as Indigenous peoples have occupied their lands long before the formation of nation-states that invaded and dispossessed them (Bishop, 2022). Similarly, Chilisa (2019) emphasized African Indigenous knowledge systems as sovereign intellectual frameworks that predate colonial disruption.

Michelle Bishop (2020), an Australian Indigenous scholar, further extends this concept of sovereignty into education, advocating for a system grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Indigenous education sovereignty involves a radical shift from colonial-controlled schooling to an educational system based on Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. According to Bishop (2020), Indigenous education sovereignty involves restoring ancient knowledge practices to create culturally safe and engaging spaces for youth, "who may be disillusioned with mainstream schooling, who aspire to think critically and to connect with Place and Knowledges from and for Country" (p. 427).

This decolonizing approach emphasizes dismantling colonial educational structures and ideologies perpetuating systemic harm and assimilation (Bishop, 2022). It demands the reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous educational practices that have sustained communities for thousands of years.

As Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2009) and Bishop (2020) argue, true Indigenous education sovereignty rethinks and restructures educational systems to prioritize Indigenous knowledge systems and ensure cultural survival, self-determination, and the empowerment of Indigenous communities in shaping their own educational futures. After all, a decolonial lens, as defined by Tuck and Yang (2012), focuses on resisting colonial structures and re-centring Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

According to Bishop (2022), Indigenous education sovereignty integrates six interconnected elements: pattern thinking, country, time, relationality, intergenerational reciprocity, and agency, which function as ongoing, interconnected processes rather than static concepts. Bishop (2022) advised that this framework is not a model for all Indigenous people, and that it "is neither an exhaustive list, nor a checklist" (p. 138). She also cautioned that these elements are not designed to fit into a Eurocentric school setting, as Indigenous education sovereignty involves a fundamental shift in how education is approached, emphasizing processes grounded in Indigenous axiologies, ontologies, and epistemologies. Rather than reforming schools, Bishop (2022) argued that Indigenous education sovereignty seeks systemic change, reorienting education away from colonial structures and towards practices that honour Indigenous knowledge systems.

Building on this, I believe that these six elements provide a valuable foundation for reimagining educational processes not only in the Canadian context where I currently teach but also in the African context, where I grew up, studied, worked, and witnessed the impacts of colonial education systems. Moreover, these principles hold relevance for other Indigenous

contexts worldwide, where communities continue to assert their educational sovereignty and resist colonial legacies.

Indeed, Bishop's six elements provide a strong framework for rethinking education in both Canadian and global contexts. While Bishop's model uniquely groups these interconnected elements, similar decolonizing approaches have been implemented elsewhere, albeit structured differently to reflect local Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and histories. For example, Battiste's (2013) *learning spirit* model in Canada emphasizes Indigenous self-determination in education by integrating land-based learning, language revitalization, and cultural mentorship. In New Zealand, the Te Whāriki curriculum similarly incorporates Māori values and traditions, emphasizing relational learning and cultural identity without organizing these principles into defined categories (Te One, 2013). In Australia, the Ganma Model employed by Yolngu communities merges Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, fostering educational equity through dialogue and shared learning spaces (Yunupingu, 1994). While the Ganma Model reflects Indigenous education sovereignty principles such as relationality and country, it functions as a holistic integration of knowledge systems rather than through distinct elements.

In Africa, scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Bagele Chilisa (2019) have advocated for education systems rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, with a strong emphasis on language, oral histories, and cultural practices. Similarly, South Africa's Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Centre at North-West University has successfully integrated Indigenous sciences, environmental knowledge, and spiritual teachings into academic programs (Koitsiwe, 2016).

These models demonstrate that Indigenous sovereignty in education is not theoretical but actively applied across diverse contexts. While Bishop's six-element model offers a powerful framework, alternative approaches highlight the need for flexible, context-specific strategies that reflect localized Indigenous knowledge. Notably, Bishop's model presents a valuable tool for transforming journalism education by challenging Western epistemologies and fostering inclusive, Indigenous-centred storytelling that amplifies marginalized voices.

Indigenous Education Sovereignty: Lessons from My Grandmother's Knowledge

I began this essay with a vignette about my grandmother, an African Indigenous woman who was a master potter, medicine woman, and storyteller, to illustrate the profound depth of knowledge and education that exists outside formal schooling and to demonstrate that I benefitted from rich, traditional education. In other words, the education I received was holistic, practical, and deeply rooted in our cultural heritage.

In the Eurocentric schooling system, my grandmother's knowledge, her pedagogical approaches and her cultural teachings she imparted are often undervalued, deemed irrelevant, and dismissed as non-academic. This dismissal reflects a broader pattern of epistemic injustice that scholars such as Battiste (2013), Chilisa (2019), Simpson (2014), and Smith (2012) have critiqued, arguing that Indigenous ways of knowing are frequently devalued within colonial education frameworks. Such devaluation overlooks the fact that education systems within Indigenous communities worldwide have sustained communities for centuries, fostering

resilience, cultural continuity, and a deep connection to the land and each other (Bishop, 2020; Laenui, 2000; Seroto, 2018; Simpson, 2014).

For instance, among the Anishinaabe people, education is viewed as a lifelong journey where learning is interwoven with daily life, ceremonies, and the natural world (Simpson, 2014). Among the Māori in New Zealand, education encompasses not just academic learning but also spiritual and cultural development, ensuring a holistic approach to knowledge transmission (Bishop, 2020). In the context of Africa, as in other Indigenous communities, Dei (2000) emphasized that education is deeply rooted in communal values and collective responsibility. Education is not merely about individual achievement but about contributing to the well-being and advancement of the entire community (Dei, 2000). In Norwegian Sámi communities, Yoik— a traditional form of song—preserves history, identity, and spiritual ties to the land (Gaski, 1997; Lindbolm & Nutti, 2022).

My grandmother's teachings embodied the essence of African Indigenous education. It was education deeply rooted in the principles of Indigenous education sovereignty, as outlined by Bishop (2022). Her pottery was a craft and a scientific and artistic practice that connected us to the earth and our ancestors. She often said that *Lehatshe* (the land) was the main provider of the material she needed for her pottery and that without it, her work would not be possible. Her knowledge of herbal medicine provided practical health solutions and reinforced our relationship with the natural world. Her storytelling preserved our history, taught moral lessons, and instilled a sense of identity and belonging. These comprehensive educational practices engaged the mind, body, and spirit and fostered resilience.

Can educational institutions, which have long been dominated by Western ideologies, make space for such forms of learning? Can they recognize and integrate the rich, Indigenous knowledge systems that have been marginalized for so long? Or, as Bishop (2022) suggested, is it time to envision an entirely new educational paradigm that transcends the limitations of the current system? Bishop (2022) argued that Indigenous education sovereignty is not about reforming existing institutions but more about creating new spaces where Indigenous knowledge systems can flourish independent of colonial constraints.

While I agree with Bishop about the need for a new educational paradigm, there is value in pursuing both paths concurrently. Creating new spaces for Indigenous knowledge to thrive is essential, but we must also push for significant changes within existing institutions to make them more representative of diverse knowledge systems. This dual approach can help ensure that Indigenous ways of knowing are respected and integrated across all educational landscapes. This is no easy task. By nature, entrenched colonial structures resist change, making this integration difficult, but it is vital for achieving genuine educational transformation.

My focus is not on creating a new paradigm as suggested by Bishop (2022) but on exploring how existing educational institutions, particularly within journalism education, can be transformed to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems effectively. I advocate for an approach that rejects token inclusion or assimilation, instead positioning Indigenous frameworks as foundational and transformative forces in journalism education.

In the next section, I apply the six elements of Indigenous education sovereignty as outlined by Bishop (2022) to demonstrate practical strategies for achieving this transformation. I do this with caution because Bishop warned that these six elements are not meant to fit neatly into existing Western schooling systems or be viewed as a checklist for easy implementation. Rather, they represent interconnected processes that require systemic transformation in how we understand and engage with education, particularly through Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Bishop, 2022).

Reimagining Journalism Education: Lessons from Indigenous Educational Sovereignty

According to Bishop (2022), Indigenous people should take the lead in reclaiming and revitalizing their educational practices, ensuring these systems are grounded in Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. This has been echoed by both Canadian Indigenous scholars such as Battiste (2013) and Simpson (2014) and African scholars such as wa Thiong'o (1986), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), and Chilisa (2019) who all advocate for decolonizing education by centring Indigenous knowledge systems and reclaiming cultural identities from colonial influences.

This approach holds transformative potential across disciplines, such as journalism education. Building on the six key concepts of Indigenous education sovereignty introduced earlier, pattern thinking, country, time, relationality, intergenerational reciprocity, and agency Bishop, 2022), this essay explores their implications for institutional change. As previously noted, these concepts are not presented in any particular order, reflecting the fluid and interconnected nature of Indigenous knowledge systems. Here, I extend that discussion to examine how they might reshape journalism education beyond token inclusion.

Pattern thinking: Integrating interconnectedness in journalism education

Bishop (2022) described pattern thinking as recognizing interconnectedness within systems, as well as fostering holistic and critical thinking. From my experience, journalism often pathologizes Indigenous people and fails to connect these narratives to broader systemic issues and historical contexts. From the Australian context, Waller (2010) noted that research, including journalistic research, has historically been used by colonizers to objectify Indigenous knowledge and undermine sovereignty. The news media frequently portray Indigenous people through lenses of deficit, dysfunction, and dependency (Callison & Young, 2020; McCue, 2022; Nyamnjoh, 2005). To address this deficit portrayal, efforts must extend beyond newsrooms to journalism education, where Western frameworks are firmly established. Journalism education should ensure students understand the interconnectedness of societal, historical, and cultural factors.

When talking to students about interconnected thinking, I often use my grandmother's pottery as a metaphor for this type of thinking. In her pottery, she carefully combined various materials—clay, sand, and water—to create beautiful and functional ceramic pieces. Each element plays a crucial role: the clay provides the foundational structure, the sand adds strength and texture, and the water binds everything together, making it malleable and workable. This interconnectedness of materials is essential; without one, the others cannot create a cohesive

whole. Similarly, as Bishop (2022) advised, journalism requires an understanding of interconnected societal, historical, and cultural factors to create nuanced reporting.

The question now is how can we incorporate pattern thinking in the journalism curriculum? The starting point is ensuring truth in education. As Bagshaw et al. (2022) outlined, truth is essential to decolonizing education and addressing Eurocentrism. Without confronting the colonial histories and systemic erasures within education, the integration of Indigenous knowledge and holistic thinking in journalism risks remaining superficial. The curriculum must be designed to explore and consider historical injustices, systemic inequities, racism, and cultural contexts that shape the experiences of marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous peoples. The journalism curricula should integrate case studies that highlight the interconnectedness of issues such as colonization, racism, and media representation. Students must be guided to understand that stories are not isolated events but are embedded within broader socio-political and historical contexts. They should learn that every story is part of a larger narrative shaped by power dynamics, systemic inequalities, racism, and cultural histories.

As a journalism educator, the following questions may guide you to integrate pattern thinking in the curriculum: *How can Indigenous epistemologies and knowledge systems be integrated to promote holistic understanding? What tools, such as metaphors like my grandmother's pottery, can make interconnectedness tangible for students? How can collaboration between journalism programs and disciplines like history, sociology, and cultural studies support this integration?*

Time: Rethinking deadlines with Indigenous wisdom

In Indigenous education, time is understood as cyclical and reflective rather than linear and rigid (Bishop, 2022; Sifuentes, 2021). This applies to Indigenous cosmologies around the world. Janca and Bullen (2003), writing in the Australian context, described Indigenous time as circular and multidimensional, placing individuals at the centre of time circles where events are ordered by personal and communal significance rather than sequential linearity. This allows for deeper, more meaningful learning by giving students space to explore material thoroughly. Journalism operates within the constraints and pressures of time, often prioritizing speed over depth. Deadlines are often tight, leading to rushed reporting that can overlook crucial details and context. This applies not only to mainstream media but also to alternative creators such as citizen journalists, podcasters, and YouTubers, who face similar pressures to maintain audience engagement.

Replicating the industry's structure, journalism educators, including myself, often impose strict deadlines, penalize late submissions, and maintain fast-paced curricula. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if my grandmother had emphasized time in the same way—rushing through the processes of pottery, medicine preparation, or storytelling. The quality and depth of her work might have undoubtedly suffered, and the rich, nuanced knowledge she imparted could have been lost. What would have happened if she had demanded that I mould a pot under the pressures of time? I would have been unable to fully grasp the intricacies of the craft and lost the opportunity to internalize patience, precision, and wisdom. In other words, I

would have been a terrible student. This is a lesson that journalism education must embrace to foster deeper, more thoughtful reporting.

Journalism programs and courses in universities and colleges are structured and delivered within semesters, modules, and rigid weekly schedules, which impose a linear framework that can be limiting for students' deeper engagement with material. This semesterization and modular approach often prioritizes completion over comprehension and deep understanding. While convenient for administration, this structure can limit reflective learning processes central to Indigenous knowledge systems.

In my professional practice, I tend to often, though not always, try to emulate my grandmother's traditional pedagogical methods of not allowing time constraints to dictate the depth or flow of learning. Over and above flexible deadlines and accommodations, I often emphasize to my students that after the end of the semester or the end of their program, I remain available to continue offering guidance, support, and mentorship as they pursue projects that go beyond classroom constraints. I do so without expectation of remuneration. This open-ended approach reflects the values my grandmother instilled in me, seeing learning as a lifelong, relational process that isn't confined to formal settings or schedules.

The following questions are pertinent in guiding educators to reflect on how they can integrate Indigenous perspectives on time into their teaching practices: *How can I balance deadlines with deeper student engagement? What alternative structures can I introduce to reflect cyclical and relational approaches to time in Indigenous pedagogies? How can I encourage students to prioritize depth and quality over speed, especially in an industry driven by quick turnarounds?*

Intergenerational reciprocity: Co-creating curriculum in journalism education

According to Bishop (2022), intergenerational reciprocity involves the exchange of knowledge between different generations, enriching learning with diverse perspectives and wisdom. Bishop (2022) emphasizes that intergenerational reciprocity is not about authority or qualifications but about acknowledging that everyone has something to share and learn. This principle suggests that instructors, rather than being seen as the primary source of knowledge, should adopt a more facilitative role, guiding students in collaborative knowledge-sharing rather than positioning themselves as the sole bearers of expertise. My grandmother embodied this principle. She loved to teach yet never claimed to know everything. In fact, according to Bishop (2022), intergenerational reciprocity recognizes that "knowledge is held communally, no one person holds (or should hold) all the knowledge" (p. 141).

My aunt once told me how my grandmother decided to use modern paint to decorate her clay pots after my aunt advised her that this would appeal to those who wanted decorative rather than utilitarian pieces. Without hesitation, my grandmother embraced the idea, recognizing that innovation and tradition could coexist. And above all, that she, a celebrated master potter, can still learn from the younger generation.

Journalism education can benefit from the principle of intergenerational reciprocity by fostering an environment where knowledge flows freely between generations. This has the

potential to enrich both the educational experience and the practice of journalism. This can be achieved in several ways. For example, connecting students and early-career journalists with seasoned professionals allows for the exchange of field knowledge and ethical considerations that are often gained only through experience. While we occasionally invite speakers to class to engage students, what I am proposing here is something deeper and more sustained than occasional guest lectures. I envision a more structured, ongoing system where students and experienced journalists can form genuine, reciprocal relationships that go beyond one-off engagements.

I am often intrigued by how much I learn from my students year after year, in particular, in the area of digital skills and new media trends. My students bring fresh perspectives on platforms, storytelling techniques, and engagement strategies that are essential in today's rapidly evolving media landscape. By establishing a framework of intergenerational reciprocity, we not only allow students to learn from industry veterans but also provide an avenue for experienced journalists to gain insights into contemporary tools and practices that can enhance their work.

The questions here are designed to guide educators in fostering intergenerational reciprocity within journalism education: *How can I create a classroom environment where knowledge is viewed as communal and reciprocal, rather than hierarchical? How can I encourage seasoned journalists to learn from students, especially on emerging media trends? How can I meaningfully involve Indigenous knowledge keepers and Elders to share their wisdom and lived experiences with students?*

Agency: Nurturing independent journalists through Indigenous knowledge

Agency empowers students to take control of their educational journeys, fostering autonomy and engagement (Bishop, 2022). Indigenous educational practices emphasize self-determination and responsiveness to local contexts, allowing learners to navigate their paths meaningfully and relevantly (Bishop, 2022). My grandmother believed true learning comes from within and that each person must be an active participant in their educational journey. I remember when my father and I joined her to dig up clay for her pots. We were intrigued by her ability to find the exact spots of quality clay. She explained the process and then asked us to find similar spots ourselves, saying, "Let me know if you have questions," as she continued her work. This teaching method made learning more engaging and instilled a sense of responsibility and ownership in me.

Journalism education that embraces Indigenous knowledge should foster agency among students. This means creating an environment where students are encouraged to explore their interests, take initiative, and engage deeply with their work. In our current Eurocentric rigid educational system, students often follow structured paths with limited flexibility. This often discourages exploration outside established Eurocentric norms, values, and practices. We often teach journalism students to adhere strictly to established writing and reporting conventions, focusing on traditional storytelling formats, objectivity standards, and news values that often reflect Western perspectives. This often limits their capacity to think independently, engage with diverse communities, and consider alternative ways of knowing and reporting.

Perhaps what we, as journalism educators, need to do is to challenge this rigidity with vigour. We can do this by promoting an adaptive and student-centred approach where learners can pursue topics and projects meaningful to them and relevant to their communities. Just as my grandmother guided us to find our own paths, journalism educators can empower students to identify and develop their voices by fostering spaces where they feel a deep connection and investment in their work. In my view, this approach not only strengthens students' sense of responsibility and independence but also prepares them to think critically and creatively about their role as journalists in diverse communities.

The following questions are designed to guide educators to foster agency among journalism students: *How can I design my journalism curriculum to provide students with the flexibility to explore topics and projects that align with their interests and community contexts? What teaching methods can I adopt to encourage students to exercise agency in their learning process and become active participants rather than passive recipients? How can I assess students' work in a way that values creativity, independent thinking, and cultural responsiveness alongside technical proficiency?*

Relationality: A foundation for holistic education and journalism

Relationality centres on building and maintaining respectful relationships within the learning community (Bishop, 2022). According to this concept, knowledge is gained through relationships not only with humans but also with the land, community, ancestors, and even non-human beings, like animals or natural elements (Bishop, 2022; Smith, 2012). This perspective sees knowledge as something that is shared, lived, and practiced collectively, not just stored or passed down individually.

My grandmother's approach to education was deeply relational. She taught me and others that everything is interconnected: the land we live on, the plants we use for medicine, the stories we tell, and the animals we share our lives with, and the people in our community. For instance, she modelled relationality in her profound connection with the natural world. She knew plants intimately–their names, where they grew, when they were most potent, and how they could heal. In short, she knew how to engage with non-human beings with care, respect, and humility.

In journalism education, embracing relationality means encouraging students to build authentic, respectful relationships with sources and the communities they report on. But this must extend further. I want to argue that incorporating relationality in journalism education also means teaching students to engage with non-human entities. Journalism educators, as such, should foster an awareness that stories often extend beyond human subjects to include relationships with the land, animals, ecosystems, and the broader environment. This perspective is often missing in our journalism, media studies, or communication fields. But this is a perspective that will encourage journalism students to recognize that communities are not solely defined by their human members but also by the landscapes, wildlife, and resources that sustain them.

For instance, reporting on environmental issues goes beyond covering a topic or an issue to include understanding and communicating the profound ways in which environmental

changes impact and are interconnected with human and non-human lives alike. Students can be encouraged to explore how non-human entities—such as rivers, forests, or even individual species—have agency and play vital roles in the community's well-being. By respecting these relationships, journalists can portray the environment not as an inert backdrop but as an active, vibrant participant in the stories they tell. For example, a story about land use might involve understanding the cultural significance of that land, the spiritual connections of a community to it, and the ecological role it plays, portraying these elements as integral parts of the narrative.

My argument is that this approach might also mean seeking Indigenous perspectives or other worldviews that see land and animals as kin rather than resources. This will involve working with Indigenous communities to ensure that their voices, knowledge, and perspectives are authentically represented and respected within the storytelling process. Collaborating with Indigenous nations means honouring their sovereignty and consulting with community leaders, Elders, and knowledge keepers to gain a deeper understanding of the connections they hold with land, animals, and other non-human entities.

I offer the following questions to guide journalism educators on ways to ensure the concept of Indigenous relationality is integrated into their teaching practices: *How can I encourage students to view journalism as a relational practice? How can I incorporate non-human agency into the curriculum to highlight the roles of land, animals, and ecosystems in storytelling? What tools or frameworks can I introduce to help students move beyond seeing the environment as a resource and instead as an active participant in stories? What assignments or projects can help students explore relationality in practice?*

Country: Place-based knowledge and respect for natural environments

According to Bishop (2022), Country encompasses a deep connection to place-based knowledge, where land is not just geography but a living, teaching entity that embodies wisdom and memory. In Indigenous worldviews, land is a collaborator in learning, guiding individuals through relational engagement with the environment and fostering respect for its complex interdependencies (Bishop, 2022; Simpson, 2014). According to Simpson (2014), land as pedagogy is a fundamental approach in Indigenous education, where learning happens through direct engagement with the land itself, viewed as both a teacher and collaborator. This method respects land's agency as part of a broader relational web that includes humans, animals, plants, and spiritual entities. Country represents more than physical space (Kulago et al., 2023). It holds the stories, histories, and relationships of its people, as well as the presence of ancestral and non-human beings who inhabit it.

My grandmother embodied this concept of Country, living in harmony with the land and honouring the wisdom it offered. She viewed the land as a teacher and collaborator, from whom she learned and with whom she cultivated a relationship. She often argued that *Lehatshe* (land) gives us everything we need. Through her practices as a clay potter, medicine woman, and storyteller, she demonstrated a profound respect for the land's agency and its interwoven connections with all life.

I concede that as a journalism educator, the aspect of land as a teacher and collaborator is something that I have often overlooked. This omission is significant because it neglects the

foundational role that land, and place-based knowledge play in shaping not only Indigenous education but also a holistic understanding of the world (Simpson, 2014). How does one now integrate this vital component into journalism education?

To integrate this vital component into journalism education, I see the need to rethink traditional approaches to knowledge, mass communication, and storytelling. Thereafter we must embrace place-based pedagogy and Indigenous epistemologies as foundational elements of the journalism curriculum. Indeed, journalism often emphasizes objectivity, speed, balance, and detachment, but the Indigenous concept of Country offers an alternative framework. This framework is grounded in relationships, respect, and accountability to the land and its communities (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2007; Simpson, 2014; Bishop, 2022).

From African and other Indigenous perspectives, land is not merely a place for human activity. It is a dynamic participant in the stories we tell. In African traditions, the land holds ancestral wisdom, histories, and spiritual connections. For example, Ubuntu—a philosophy deeply rooted in Southern African thought—emphasizes interconnectedness and mutual care among all beings, including the land (Waghid, 2014). Storytelling in this context becomes an act of honouring these relationships, centring the voices of both the human and non-human elements of a narrative.

Integrating these perspectives into journalism education could involve creating assignments that require students to report on stories from a place-based approach, encouraging them to engage deeply with the communities and environments they cover. This could mean learning from Indigenous storytellers and knowledge keepers about how to relate with the land or emphasizing the responsibility of journalists to represent not only human perspectives but also the ecological and spiritual dimensions of the places they report on. Some questions that may help journalism educators, students, and practicing journalists to centre land and country in their news stories are as follows: *How can students be taught to understand the cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance of the land in the communities they report on? How can journalism educators integrate the concept of land as a teacher and collaborator into the curriculum? What practical methods can be used to teach students about the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization on land and its representation in journalism?*

The questions posed at the conclusion of each thematic exploration are by no means exhaustive. I have included them to guide educators in reflecting on how they can integrate Indigenous epistemologies and practices into their teaching. These questions are intended as starting points for deeper conversations and explorations to spark a shift toward educational sovereignty. They offer a practical framework that educators can adapt and implement in their own teaching contexts. See **Appendix A** for a detailed table.

Conclusion: Embracing Indigenous Knowledge and Challenging Colonial Legacies

I want to conclude this essay with a vignette below as once narrated to me by my aunt.

Sometime in the late 1990s, a middle-aged nurse brought her six-year-old son to my grandmother to seek healing for an ailment that had plagued him for over a year. The boy had

developed sores all over his scalp that refused to heal. Despite her medical expertise, the nurse had found no success with modern treatments.

Hearing of my grandmother's renowned healing gifts from some villagers, the nurse arrived at our home still wearing her uniform, standing out conspicuously as she pleaded for assistance. My aunts were with my grandmother when the woman and her child arrived. Initially suspicious, my grandmother pulled my aunts aside and confided her unease. "She called us aside and confided that she was uncomfortable helping the nurse because it seemed like a trap," my aunt recalled. "What trap?" one of my aunts asked. My grandmother explained that she feared being accused by the authorities of offering medical consultation without 'proper medical qualifications.' Indigenous knowledge during that time, and even now, was often treated with suspicion, leading to potential legal repercussions for those practicing traditional healing methods.

However, my aunts convinced her that the nurse's desperation was genuine. Reluctantly, my grandmother agreed to treat the child. She prepared a traditional medication to be applied to his scalp. Two weeks later, the nurse returned, elated and grateful, reporting that her son was completely healed. The treatment had worked, and it was not a miracle but science, Indigenous science.

The story of my grandmother's courageous act of healing illustrates the resilience and power of Indigenous knowledge systems—knowledge that continues to be marginalized and undervalued in education. Faced with suspicion and fear of persecution, my grandmother hesitated, uncertain whether her traditional healing methods would be seen as legitimate. Yet her ultimate decision to trust her knowledge and offer help demonstrates the transformative power of Indigenous wisdom—a power rooted in relationality, experience, and cultural teachings.

This story mirrors the challenges educators face when integrating Indigenous principles into journalism education. Concepts such as pattern thinking, time, intergenerational reciprocity, agency, relationality, and country require educators to step beyond traditional structures and embrace alternative ways of learning and storytelling. Just as my grandmother's knowledge challenged dominant medical systems, these principles challenge the Eurocentric norms that have shaped journalism education for decades.

By embracing Indigenous epistemologies, journalism educators can empower students to move beyond surface-level reporting and develop stories that are holistic, ethical, and reflective of marginalized voices. Much like my grandmother's decision to trust her knowledge and share it despite systemic obstacles, journalism educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, must have the courage to challenge colonial frameworks and foster learning spaces that value relational wisdom and Indigenous knowledge systems.

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Appendix A: Practical Framework for Integrating Indigenous Education Sovereignty in Journalism or Communications Education

Elements	Application in Journalism Education	Guiding Questions
Pattern Thinking	Integrate case studies and discussions highlighting the interconnectedness of societal, historical, and cultural factors in journalism. Use metaphors (e.g., traditional crafts) to teach how interconnected elements create cohesive narratives.	- How can journalism educators incorporate Indigenous epistemologies into the curriculum? - How can collaboration with disciplines like sociology, history, and cultural studies enhance pattern thinking?
Time	Balance industry deadlines with reflective learning. Allow students flexibility to explore topics in depth. Promote open-ended mentorship even beyond the semester.	- How can I balance deadlines with deeper student engagement? - What structures can reflect cyclical time approaches? - How can depth and quality be valued over speed?
Intergenerational Reciprocity	Facilitate sustained exchanges between students and seasoned journalists. Include Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers to share wisdom. Create a collaborative learning environment where knowledge flows freely between generations.	- How can classrooms foster communal and reciprocal knowledge sharing? - How can digital trends from students benefit seasoned professionals? - How can Indigenous knowledge be integrated meaningfully?
Agency	Encourage students to pursue stories meaningful to their interests and communities. Introduce flexibility in project selection and evaluation. Teach students to critically engage with journalistic norms while exploring diverse ways of storytelling.	- How can curricula allow students to explore topics meaningful to them? - How can learning environments foster independent thinking? - How can creativity and cultural responsiveness be valued?
Relationality	Teach journalism as a relational practice. Encourage students to build respectful relationships with sources and communities. Include the role of non-human entities (land, animals) in stories, highlighting their interconnectedness with human experiences.	- How can journalism be taught as a relational practice? - How can non-human agency be included in curricula? - What tools/frameworks help students recognize non-human elements in stories?
Country	Use place-based assignments to encourage students to explore the cultural, ecological, and spiritual significance of the land they report on. Collaborate with Indigenous communities to honour their perspectives and stories.	- How can students understand the cultural and ecological significance of land? - What practical methods teach the impact of colonization on land? - How can land be integrated as a collaborator in stories?