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## Foundations of Indigenous Worldview

“According to tradition, the government and law of Native culture were designed to produce harmony and peace.”

- Caroline Yellowhorn, Elder



### module summary

*This module will explore some of key tenets of Indigenous worldviews, how they shape cultural, political and social practices of Indigenous societies, and how understanding our own and other's worldviews is essential to building trusting, productive relationships.*



### video summary

(45:32 minutes)

Understanding differing worldviews can provide a basis for understanding actions, reactions, and interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities. Lewis talks about the importance and sacredness of relationships, Ceremony and the importance of Creation stories. Lewis talks about how what we do today effects those around us and the next 7 generations.



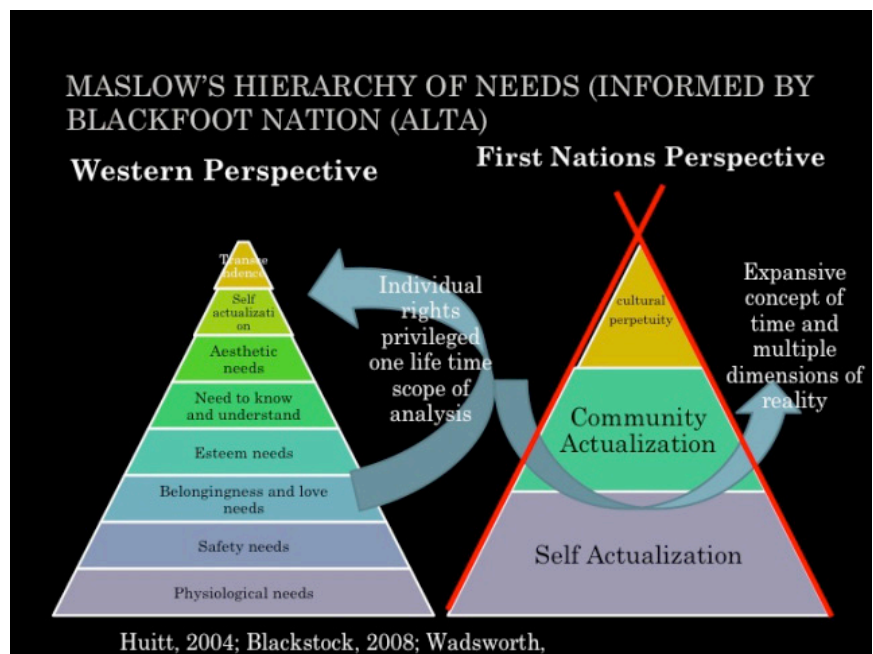
### key concepts

- Origin Stories
- Ceremony
- Honour
- Respect
- Equality
- Reciprocity
- Connection
- All my Relations
- Transfer of Knowledge
- Significance of the Circle
- Humans as Spiritual Beings
- Role of Children and Elders



Our worldview shapes the way we view the world. It gives a point of reference, a starting place. What happens when our worldview is not our own? Indigenous peoples have occupied these lands of Turtle Island since time immemorial. There are many sacred sites still here that tell our stories of how we come to be here. Many of these stories are not told anymore or have been lost in translation to English. This is the importance of language and how our language also shapes our worldview. When we learn another language, we not only learn the language itself, but we also begin to see the world through the eyes of the language. Learning language is a way to build relationship and can be done on many levels in many settings. We still have Elders that know the Creation Story of their Nation. Our stories are not written in books or even recorded on tape as they are oral stories and are told during certain times of the year. The more we can learn about other worldviews the bigger our own world becomes. The more we can learn about our differences the more we see our sameness.

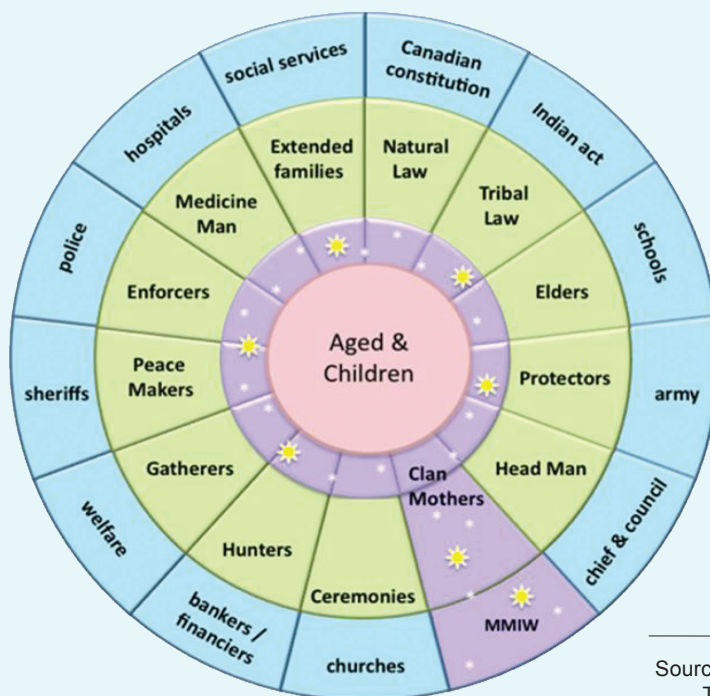
An example of the importance of worldview can be found in Abraham Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs. His theory is taught in many universities and used widely in various fields. What many people do not know is that Maslow spent several summers on the Siska Nation in southern Alberta working with the Elders there and used their knowledge on how they view the world to create his now famous theory. Ryan Heavyhead and Narcisse Blood have done extensive research uncovering the untold story of how Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs is grounded in Indigenous knowledge.



Others have also done work on the differences between the original Blackfoot teachings and how Maslow interpreted and appropriated them. This image from a presentation by Cindy Blackstock, shows how self-actualization is seen as the base of the pyramid instead of the pinnacle. This is only one example of how Indigenous knowledge has shaped the way we see the world today, there are many other teachings, stories, songs and Ceremonies that teach us how to live a good life the way it was intended for us.

Colonization disrupted many of our traditional ways and replaced them with western worldviews, leaving holes in our own systems that cannot be fully filled with the paternal system we see today. The diagram below shows this conflict of worldviews and how the western system has attempted to replace traditional Indigenous governance structures. This image illustrates how easy it is for Indigenous people to fall in between the cracks of the different worldviews. It also shows how people were displaced or replaced within traditional roles. For example, the women that were the Clan Mothers had a very important role within the community, they were looked to for guidance and decision making, with that role no longer available it has left many women vulnerable and susceptible to becoming victims. The gaps and improper fit may explain many of the issues we see today in Indigenous communities and individuals.

## First Nations Governance Structures



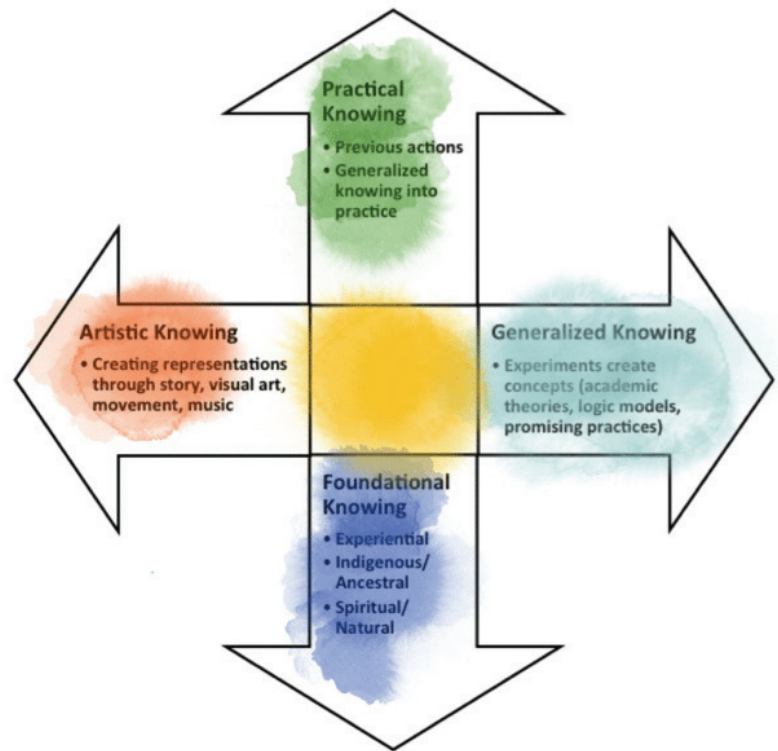
### Conflicting worldviews

- **Traditional** (inner circles): circular, consensus, shared resources, focus on collective wellbeing
- **Contemporary** (outer circle): hierarchical, competitive, mandated resources, focus on personal achievement

Source: Mike Steinhauer, 2000, Elder teachings, Saddle Lake, Treaty Six Territory. Revised by Vincent Steinhauer, 2018

## Researchers Perry and Duncan describe four ways of knowing (2017):

- 1. Foundational Knowing:** There at least three major foundations for how we make sense of the world: experience, indigenous/ ancestral wisdom, and spiritual/ natural wisdom.
- 2. Artistic Knowing:** To understand our experiences and to help others understand them, we create representations through story, visual art, movement, music, etc.
- 3. Practical Knowing:** We act intentionally in the world in ways that are informed by our previous actions, as well as our generalized knowing. We take our generalizations and turn them into practice.
- 4. Generalized Knowing:** We look at patterns and experiment to create concepts. This is where academic theory and proposition live, as well as theories of change, logic models, and promising practices.



They go on to say,

*“... privileging one way of knowing over others (e.g., generalized knowing, with its focus on measurable data) marginalizes and ignores other truths that people bring from other ways of knowing. This marginalization often lies at the core of conflicts, systemic barriers to change, and inequity. We invite others to engage in practices that bring forth our multiple ways of knowing. Through this, we are creating space for all of us to bring our full selves to the tables so that together we can continue to – in the words of Dr. King – ‘bend the long arc of history toward justice.’ As our understanding and practices deepen, the possibility for justice seems within closer reach.”*

These ways of knowing are not saying my way is the only way, or I know more than you, they allow for us to realize that we learn about the world in many different ways. It allows for us to be human

and to open doors for one another in places we would not be naturally allowed in. It is about creating the space needed to allow for those stories to be told and understand all ways of knowing.

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## Individual Self-Reflection Questions for Indigenous Worldview

At the beginning of the video Lewis talks about the meaning of “Indigenous” being “born from the land” Looking at your own family history, where are you Indigenous from and what are your family, religious or cultural origin stories? How have these stories shaped your worldview?

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How do you see yourself in connection with the ‘spirit’ and ‘life force’ as Lewis describes between 8:20 and 11:10? What are some ways you honour that through relationships and Ceremony?

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What are your strengths? How do you build on your own and other’s strengths in your work? How do you honour differences?

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What is your inner dialogue? Is it positive or negative, helpful or hurtful in finding solutions to your challenges? When are the times that you are aware of your inner dialogue?

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How do you have meaningful dialogue even when it becomes uncomfortable?

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How do you share power in your work?

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What was your most important take-away from this video?

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How will you use this knowledge of Indigenous worldview in your work going forward?

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# Staff Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for Indigenous Worldview

What are the relationships that you consider sacred? What does this mean for you?

How do we make space in our shelter for relationship building through Ceremonies? Between colleagues? Between staff and clients? For clients with themselves? For women and their children? generations, how should knowing this impact the way we make decisions?

How do we build on our own and other's strengths in our work? How do we honour differences?

What are your gifts? What gifts do you see in your colleagues? In the women and children your serve?

What is our organizational dialogue? Is it positive or negative, helpful or hurtful in finding solutions to challenges? How does the organizational dialogue impact your inner dialogue?

How can we have meaningful dialogue even when it becomes uncomfortable?

How do we share power within our organization?

How can we balance individual needs for staff and client safety while building connections and support from community?

What are some ways our organization can bring Elders and children together?

What was your most important take-away from this video?

How will you use this knowledge of Indigenous worldview in our work going forward?





# Women's Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for Indigenous Worldview

What are the relationships that you consider sacred? What does this mean for you?

How do you see yourself in connection with the life force as Lewis describes from 8:20 to 11:10.  
What are some ways you honour that through relationships and Ceremony?

What are your gifts? What the gifts you see in your children?

What is your inner dialogue? Is it positive or negative, helpful or hurtful in finding solutions to your challenges? When are the times that you are aware of your inner dialogue?

How can we have meaningful dialogue even when it becomes uncomfortable?

How would you like to reclaim your power? How do we balance individual needs for safety for yourself and your children while building connections and support with the community?

How can we build our children's sense of belonging?

How can we rebuild relationships with Indigenous people and the rest of Canada?





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## References

*Naamitapiikoan Blackfoot Influences on Abraham Maslow*, (2018. HeavyHead, Ryan, Norquest College Lecture) Run time: 2:47:44  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTO34FLv5a8>

Ryan Heavyhead presents the findings of his 3-year research project on the influences of Blackfoot knowledge and worldview on Abraham Maslow's seminal theories.

*Marginalization of Aboriginal women- A Brief History of the Marginalization of Aboriginal Women in Canada*. (2011. Hanson, Erin, First Nations Studies Program.)  
[https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/marginalization\\_of\\_aboriginal\\_women/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/marginalization_of_aboriginal_women/)

A short summary of systemic policies that have removed Indigenous women's rights and contributed to their increased rates of poverty, addiction, incarceration and as victims of violence.

*Maslow's Hierarchy Connected to Blackfoot Beliefs*, (2014. Lincoln Michel, Karen) <https://lincolnmichel.wordpress.com/2014/04/19/maslows-hierarchy-connected-to-blackfoot-beliefs/>

Blog post summarizing Cindy Blackstock presentation of Blackfoot influence on Maslow

*Multiple Ways of Knowing: Expanding How We Know* (2017 Perry, Elissa, Duncan, Aja; Non-Profit Quarterly)  
<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2017/04/27/multiple-ways-knowing-expanding-know/>

Article publication detailing different ways of knowing.

### Further Learning Materials:

*Indigenous Learning Part 1*, (2016 Norquest College, Government of Alberta, Community Learning Network) Run time: 10:01  
<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x71ayc2>

Vincent Steinhauer tell the story of Plains Cree worldview as taught to him. He discusses part of the Creation story and how we came to be on Turtle Island.

*Indigenous Learning Part 2*, (2016 Norquest College, Government of Alberta, Community Learning Network) Run time: 8:17  
<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x71ey4v>

Vincent Steinhauer talks about the Master Narrative and why Canada signed Treaties with the Indigenous people. He gives us a glimpse into Indigenous thought.

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