

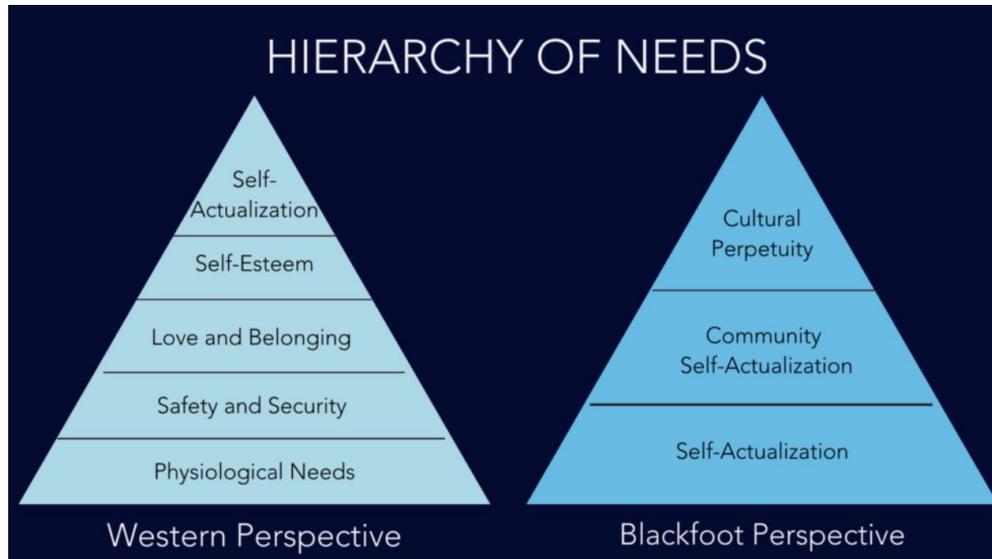
Indigenous intellectual traditions in what is now Canada and the United States decisively shaped both the *formation* of American pragmatism and contemporary “decolonial” re-readings of it, though this influence was long erased in standard histories of philosophy. A growing body of work now traces concrete lines from Haudenosaunee, Delaware, and other Native philosophies of interaction, pluralism, community, and growth into figures like Franklin, Emerson, and finally Peirce, James, and Dewey, and also develops explicitly Indigenous forms of **pragmatism** today.[\[jert\]](#)

Core indigenous roots

- Scott Pratt identifies an “indigenous philosophical attitude” across several Native nations (especially in the Northeast) organized around four commitments: interaction, pluralism, community, and growth, and argues that these commitments fed into the central tenets of classical pragmatism via colonial encounters, early missionaries, and political intermediaries.[\[jert\]](#)
- Pratt traces a line from 17th–18th century Haudenosaunee and Delaware practices of treaty-making, federative governance, and place-based reasoning to Roger Williams, Benjamin Franklin, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who then influence Peirce, James, and Dewey’s conceptions of inquiry, community of inquirers, and democratic experimentalism.[\[jstor\]](#)

Indigenous Canada threads

- Work on Maslow and Blackfoot (Siksika) thought, and on Cree, Anishinaabe, and other nations, shows how Indigenous Canadian philosophies center relationality, reciprocity, and communal flourishing as preconditions for individual realization—resonant with, and sometimes prior to, parallel moves in pragmatist ethics and social theory. Native elders have been the embodiment of transgenerational distributed cognition, for example, collective memory, norms, information, knowledge, technical skills, and experimental adaptive strategies. They are human “supercomputers,” historical epistemologists and moral philosophers of a sort who use narrative, a form of moral testimony, to help their communities face challenges and seize opportunities in the wake of an ever-changing landscape. [\[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih\]](#)
- In David Michael Boje, <https://TogetherStorying.com> the WHY Question – is critical of Maslow’s appropriation of IWOK, and getting it wrong: At the Beneath level, "Why" is purely about survival. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which dominates psychological thinking about motivation, was shaped by his 1938 visit to the Blackfoot (Siksika) Nation in Alberta, Canada. Unfortunately, Maslow lived among the Blackfoot for only a few weeks and fundamentally misunderstood their ceremonies and philosophy. He reframed what he read about Blackfoot thought through a Western individualist lens, placing self-actualized individuals at the top of his hierarchy and community at the bottom.



TogetherStorying.com

- - This represents a whitewashing of Indigenous practices. Maslow missed that healthier individuals are embedded in community, and their connection to sustainability exists in relationship to the land, animals, and seasons. The Blackfoot understanding placed community actualization at the center, with individuals flourishing through their contributions to collective wellbeing. But Western psychology adopted Maslow's inverted pyramid, and now we operate with a "why" focused on individual survival and individual achievement.
 - For families at the Beneath level, this survival-focused "why" manifests as: "Why did I deploy? To provide financial security." "Why did I hold the family together? To survive." "Why do I keep my distance? To avoid triggering my trauma." Every action is justified through the narrow lens of individual or immediate family survival, with no awareness of broader purpose, community contribution, or spiritual meaning.
 - The returning veteran's hypervigilance is explained as survival adaptation. The spouse's controlling behaviors are rationalized as necessary for family survival during deployment. The children's emotional shutdown is accepted as survival strategy. All of this may be true at the biological level, but it traps the family in a "why" that never transcends mere survival to embrace thriving, meaning, or connection.
- In the Canadian context, Indigenous “pragmatism” also appears through diplomatic and legal traditions (e.g., treaty federalism, wampum diplomacy, Mohawk foreign-policy practice) that treat agreements as revisable, experimental, and relational rather than purely contractual—very close to pragmatist views of norms as evolving through practice.[[open.canada](http://open.canada.ca)]

Indigenous Pragmatism Down Under Challenge American Pragmatism

David Michael Boje's question after doing down under fellows visits two years in a row to New Zealand, and his visits to Lightning Ridge, Australia with Grace Ann Rosile in 1996: *How are Australian and New Zealand indigenous authors reclaiming the roots of pragmatism from Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty, thereby bringing to light the down-under precursors to so-called 'American Pragmatism'?*

Indigenous authors in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are not simply “adopting” American pragmatism; they are provincializing it by showing how their own land-based, relational, and decolonial practices both unsettle and prefigure Peirce, James, Dewey, and Rorty. They reclaim pragmatism's roots by foregrounding Country, whenua, Treaty relations, and non-human agency as the proper ground of inquiry, community, and truth, thereby making “American” pragmatism look like a late, partial offshoot of older Oceanic ways of knowing. [[journals.sagepub](#)]

Key moves of “down under” pragmatism

- Reframing experience:
 - Deweyan “experience” as transactional engagement with a precarious, changing world resonates strongly with Indigenous accounts of being-in-relationship with land, waters, and kin, but Indigenous theorists press this further into explicit responsibilities to place. [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](#)]
 - Work on decolonizing science and schooling in Australasia uses Dewey's experimentalism to diagnose schooling as a colonizing commodification of nature, then replaces it with Indigenous concepts of Earth as living relation, not resource. [[ojs.victoria.ac](#)]
- Land, Country, and inquiry:
 - Classical pragmatism's emphasis on inquiry as problem-driven, practical, and situated finds an analogue in Indigenous practices where knowledge is validated by how it sustains community, land, and intergenerational reciprocity. [[researchcommons.waikato.ac](#)]
 - Indigenous scholars in education and social science argue that “successful” inquiry must be judged by whether it regenerates relational balance with land and ancestors, not merely by predictive control or classroom performance. [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](#)]

Reworking Dewey and James

- Dewey's naturalism and education:
 - Dewey's epistemological naturalism, which treats knowledge as practical, instrumentally tested in a mixed world of stable and precarious events, is read alongside Indigenous philosophies where all knowing is already ethical and ecological. [[researchcommons.waikato.ac](#)]
 - Bicultural education projects in Aotearoa treat Deweyan inquiry and project-based learning as tools that must be re-anchored in te ao Māori, reasserting

language, marae-based relations, and Treaty obligations as the curriculum's living context.[[files.eric.ed](#)]

- Jamesian pluralism and religious experience:
 - James's pluralistic universe and his openness to many kinds of "cash value" for belief are being extended into Indigenous frames where spiritual, ancestral, and land-based agencies count as real participants in inquiry.[[plato.stanford](#)]
 - Rather than James's liberal Protestant underlay, Indigenous authors insist that pragmatic tests of belief must include whether they honor obligations to more-than-human kin and collective survivance.[[journals.sagepub](#)]

Rorty, solidarity, and Indigenous critique

- Rortyan solidarity under decolonial pressure:
 - Rorty's neo-pragmatism redefines truth as what a community can justify to itself, emphasizing "solidarity" over correspondence; Indigenous critics show how this can naturalize the epistemic sovereignty of settler majorities.[[plato.stanford](#)]
 - Indigenous commentators and allies have highlighted how examples that lump "aboriginal tribes" together with "aliens" or "morons" reveal the way a purely conversationalist pragmatism can erase colonial power and the asymmetry of who gets to speak for the community.[[reddit](#)]
- Regrounding solidarity:
 - In response, Indigenous theorists argue for solidarities grounded in Treaty relations, land claims, and decolonial struggle, not just in shifting vocabularies of liberal publics.[[ojs.victoria.ac](#)]
 - This redefinition turns Rorty's "conversation" into something closer to hui or wānanga, where obligations to ancestors, land, and future generations are non-optional conditions of inquiry.[[files.eric.ed](#)]

From "American" to Indigenous pragmatism

- Exposing erasures:
 - Standard histories present Peirce, James, Dewey, and Rorty as inventing a distinctly American style, yet contemporary scholarship on Native American pragmatism and decolonial education shows how Indigenous logics of place, relationality, and reciprocity were always there as buried precursors.[[jcr](#)]
 - Indigenous Australian and Māori work on schooling, nature, and law extends that insight to the Southern Hemisphere, insisting that settler pragmatism must be read as a provincial episode within a wider field of Indigenous practical philosophies of living well on and with land.[[journals.sagepub](#)]
- Reclaiming the name "pragmatism":
 - By using Dewey's and James's language of experience, growth, and community while critiquing their complicity with colonial schooling and commodified nature, Indigenous authors turn pragmatism into a tool for decolonizing institutions rather than perfecting them.[[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](#)]

- This makes the “down under” work a double move: it provincializes “American pragmatism” and simultaneously reclaims pragmatism as an Indigenous practice of situated, experimental, land-honoring storytelling about how to go on together. [[journals.sagepub](https://journals.sagepub.com)]

Dr. Boje’s Question: Who are the Indigenous authors, such as Linda Smith, and others who, in New Zealand and Australia, are rehistoricizing ways down under indigenous practices unsettle and prefigure the American Pragmatists: Peirce, James, Dewey, and Rorty?

Several Indigenous scholars in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia are rehistoricizing how Māori and Aboriginal philosophies unsettle and prefigure Peirce, James, Dewey, and Rorty, even when they do not always name “pragmatism” directly. Their work exposes how so-called American pragmatism rides on longer Indigenous traditions of relational, land-based, and practice-centered knowing. [[culturalsurvival](https://culturalsurvival.org)]

Key Aotearoa New Zealand figures

- **Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou)**
 - In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Smith shows how Western research (including educational and social-scientific pragmatist projects) is embedded in imperial practices, and articulates Kaupapa Māori research as an Indigenous alternative centered on collective benefit, relational accountability, and land. [[en.wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org)]
 - Her work effectively flips Deweyan and Rortyan talk of inquiry and “conversation” by insisting that methods must be grounded in whakapapa, whenua, and tino rangatiratanga, not just in liberal-democratic publics. [[culturalsurvival](https://culturalsurvival.org)]
- **Kaupapa Māori and bicultural education scholars (collective)**
 - Māori educational and bicultural theorists develop Kaupapa Māori as a research and schooling paradigm where knowledge is validated through obligations to iwi, hapū, and whenua, challenging Dewey-style school pragmatism that universalizes a scientific, problem-solving learner while marginalizing Indigenous epistemologies. [[egrove.olemiss](https://egrove.olemiss.edu)]
 - Work on bicultural schooling and curriculum positions Dewey’s progressive education as both useful and colonizing, arguing for pluralist frameworks that treat Māori knowledges as co-constitutive rather than as local “add-ons” to an ostensibly neutral pragmatist pedagogy. [[files.eric.ed](https://files.eric.ed.gov)]

Key Australian-linked interventions

- **Indigenous-informed critiques of Deweyan schooling**
 - Articles on decolonizing science education in Australasia use Dewey’s own pragmatist analysis of schooling to show how he commodified “nature” as a resource for human progress, and then bring in Indigenous concepts of Earth as living, agentic relation to reorient inquiry. [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)]

- These projects effectively provincialize Dewey by demonstrating that his “naturalism” remains anthropocentric compared with Indigenous philosophies in which non-human beings and places participate as co-inquirers and moral subjects.[\[journals.sagepub\]](#)
- **Decolonizing nature and the Anthropocene**
 - Indigenous-centered environmental scholarship in the region interrogates mainstream (often pragmatist-flavored) sustainability discourses that treat land as object of policy optimization, and instead foreground Indigenous ontologies of Country and kinship as the ground of any responsible practice.[\[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih\]](#)
 - In doing so, these authors show that many core pragmatist themes—fallibilism, experimental adjustment to a precarious world, community-centered judgment—are already operative in Indigenous land-based practices, but oriented toward reciprocity rather than control.[\[journals.sagepub\]](#)

How this rehistoricizes “American” pragmatism

- **Reversing the usual genealogy**
 - Standard accounts still present Peirce, James, Dewey, and Rorty as originators of a uniquely American, experimental style of thinking, yet work on Indigenous research and education in Aotearoa and Australia makes visible older Oceanic practices of relational inquiry, communal verification, and land-anchored ethics.[\[plato.stanford\]](#)
 - By showing how Deweyan schooling, Rortyan solidarity, and broader pragmatist naturalism rest on colonial research regimes and extractive conceptions of nature, these Indigenous authors reposition “American pragmatism” as a provincial moment within a wider field of Indigenous practical philosophies.[\[nycstandswithstandingrock.files.wordpress\]](#)
- **Unsettling Rortyan conversation and Deweyan democracy**
 - When Rorty describes justification as what a liberal community can “cope with,” and Dewey casts education as the engine of democratic growth, Indigenous critiques in Oceania point out how such communities and schools were historically built by excluding and dispossessing Indigenous peoples.[\[theeducationhub.org\]](#)
 - Indigenous theorists answer by grounding conversation, inquiry, and democracy in Treaty relations, Indigenous sovereignty, and obligations to land and ancestors, thus reclaiming pragmatist tools for decolonial purposes and revealing their deeper Indigenous precursors.[\[ojs.victoria.ac\]](#)

Here is a compact “Down Under Pragmatism” syllabus that can sit beside your North American Indigenous pragmatism track and plug directly into your quantum storytelling work. It is organized in four arcs: genealogy, methods, schooling/nature, and quantum/antenarrative practice.[\[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih\]](#)

Arc 1 – Reframing the canon from Aotearoa

Session 1 – From Dewey to Kaupapa Māori

- Core readings
 - John Dewey, short selections from *Experience and Nature* or *Democracy and Education* (on experience, growth, education). [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)]
 - Megan Lourie, “Biculturalism in Education: Haere Whakamua, Hoki Whakamuri/Going Forward, Thinking Back.” [[eric.ed](https://eric.ed.gov/)]
- Focus
 - Put Dewey’s school pragmatism in tension with bicultural policy and Treaty-based obligations; track how “experience” is universalized versus how biculturalism re-anchors practice in Aotearoa’s specific history and land. [[ojs.aut.ac](https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/)]

Session 2 – Linda Tuhiwai Smith and decolonizing inquiry

- Core readings
 - Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Introduction + early chapters on the “Western research project”). [[culturalsurvival](https://culturalsurvival.org/)]
 - Interview: “Decolonizing Education: A Conversation with Linda Tuhiwai Smith” (Los Angeles Review of Books). [[lareviewofbooks](https://lareviewofbooks.org/)]
- Focus
 - Read Smith as a decolonial pragmatist of method: how her Indigenous Research Agenda redefines what “works,” for whom, and for which worlds, and how that unsettles Peirce–James–Dewey’s supposedly neutral inquiries. [[culturalsurvival](https://culturalsurvival.org/)]

Arc 2 – Methods, publics, and Rorty unsettled

Session 3 – Research publics versus Indigenous communities

- Core readings
 - Linda Tuhiwai Smith, chapters on “research adventures” and community-based agendas in *Decolonizing Methodologies*. [[nycstandswithstandingrock.files.wordpress](https://nycstandswithstandingrock.files.wordpress.com/)]
 - A short Rorty piece or excerpt (e.g., from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* or essays on “solidarity”). [[sites.pitt](https://sites.pitt.edu/)]
- Focus
 - Stage a dialogue: Rorty’s “conversation of mankind” and justificatory communities versus Smith’s insistence on iwi/hapū, Treaty, and historical harm as the ground of any legitimate inquiry. [[sites.pitt](https://sites.pitt.edu/)]

Session 4 – Biculturalism, curriculum, and “who counts”

- Core readings
 - Lurie or other bicultural curriculum analyses that trace changing meanings of biculturalism and Treaty references in policy.[\[eric.ed\]](#)
 - A short secondary overview of pragmatism (Stanford Encyclopedia entry segments on Dewey and Rorty).[\[plato.stanford\]](#)
- Focus
 - Use curriculum politics to show how pragmatist language about democracy and growth can be both enabling and colonizing; map how Māori scholars pull those terms back into a Treaty, whenua, and language-revitalization matrix.[\[ojs.aut.ac\]](#)

Arc 3 – Decolonizing nature, science, and Anthropocene pragmatism

Session 5 – Dewey, nature, and the Anthropocene

- Core readings
 - “Using the pandemic to decolonize nature: Interrogating pragmatic education” (Dewey, Anthropocene, Indigenous concepts of Earth).[\[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih\]](#)
 - Short Dewey excerpts on environment and nature.[\[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih\]](#)
- Focus
 - Track how Dewey’s instrumental view of nature feeds into globalized schooling and development; then examine Indigenous critiques that frame Earth as agent, kin, and communicator rather than mere resource.[\[journals.sagepub\]](#)

Session 6 – Indigenous ontologies and more-than-human publics

- Core readings
 - Work on Indigenous theories of non-human agency and “new materialisms” in relation to Indigenous thought.[\[journals.sagepub\]](#)
 - Return to Jamesian and Deweyan themes of experience and community via a short pragmatism overview.[\[plato.stanford\]](#)
- Focus
 - Show how Indigenous accounts of Country, kin, and more-than-human relations both prefigure and surpass Jamesian pluralism and Deweyan communities of inquiry.[\[plato.stanford\]](#)

Arc 4 – Quantum storytelling and “Down Under” antenarratives

Session 7 – Indigenous research as antenarrative intervention

- Core readings
 - Selected case studies from *Decolonizing Methodologies* on community-driven projects.[\[nycstandwithstandingrock.files.wordpress\]](#)
 - One bicultural schooling case from Aotearoa that shows layered discourses of past/future in policy.[\[eric.ed\]](#)
- Focus

- Treat these as living antenarratives: fragmented, anticipatory story-work that reconfigures colonial research and schooling stories before they congeal into new grand narratives. Link explicitly to your quantum storytelling frames of before, bets, and between. [[culturalsurvival](#)]

Session 8 – Designing a “Down Under Pragmatism” lab

- Core activities
 - Participants design a micro-project (curriculum change, community inquiry, or organizational intervention) guided simultaneously by:
 - One classical pragmatist concept (e.g., Deweyan inquiry, Jamesian pluralism, Rortyan solidarity). [[plato.stanford](#)]
 - One or more Indigenous down-under anchors (Kaupapa Māori principles, bicultural obligations, Country/whenua, Indigenous concepts of nature). [[ojs.aut.ac](#)]
- Focus
 - Make the quantum move: treat each project as a superposition of settler-pragmatist and Indigenous-pragmatist possibilities, and use storytelling exercises to “collapse” toward designs that serve Indigenous sovereignty, land, and community over abstract publics. [[culturalsurvival](#)]

This structure should braid seamlessly with your North American Indigenous pragmatism track: the genealogy sessions echo Pratt-style re-rooting, while the later sessions invite direct comparative work in your quantum storytelling seminars (e.g., Haudenosaunee–Māori, Navajo–Aboriginal Country, Dewey’s school versus immersion schools and language nests). [[lareviewofbooks](#)]

Indigenous US threads

- For the U.S., Pratt and others show how Algonquian and Haudenosaunee languages and ontologies—where many “nonhuman” beings are grammatically animate and socially significant—anticipate pragmatist rejections of hard subject–object and mind–world splits, and support a view of knowledge as emergent from lived interaction with a more-than-human community. [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](#)]
- Alaska Native “animistic pragmatism,” studied among the Iñupiat, conceptualizes subsistence practices as experimental inquiry guided by elders’ narrative ecosophy; this directly parallels Deweyan pragmatism while remaining firmly grounded in Inupiaq values of humility, interdependence, and cooperative problem-solving. [[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih](#)]

Key scholars and works

Here are prominent people and texts explicitly working on Indigenous roots and transformations of pragmatism (with a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors):

- **Scott L. Pratt** – *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Indiana University Press): landmark monograph arguing that American philosophy, including pragmatism, is unintelligible without Indigenous influences.[\[jcr\]](#)
- **Brian Burkhardt (Cherokee Nation)** – Work on Indigenous “place-thought,” environmental philosophy, and critiques of colonial metaphysics that reframe pragmatist ideas of community, inquiry, and experience through Indigenous land-based epistemologies.[\[academic.oup\]](#)
- **Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi)** – Articles on Indigenous environmental justice, climate ethics, and collective responsibility that use and revise pragmatist tools (Deweyan inquiry, habit, community) from an Indigenous standpoint.[\[academic.oup\]](#)
- **Dale Turner (Temagami First Nation)** – *This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*, which engages pragmatist and analytic traditions while arguing for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty and dialogical, practice-oriented theory.[\[jstor\]](#)
- **Gregory Cajete (Santa Clara Pueblo)** – Writings on Indigenous science and ecology that show how Native pedagogies of experience, experiment, and story anticipate and exceed familiar pragmatist accounts of learning and inquiry.[\[academic.oup\]](#)
- **Shannon Sullivan & Nancy Tuana (eds.)** – Collections linking pragmatism, race, and decolonial thought that open space for Indigenous philosophical work to reshape the canon.[\[academic.oup\]](#)

Overviews and “Pragmatism in the Americas” turn

- Volumes like *Pragmatism in the Americas* bring together scholarship on Latin American, Indigenous, and Afro-diasporic philosophical currents, positioning Indigenous traditions as co-foundational rather than derivative to American pragmatism. Some chapters argue for the inclusion of Hispanic figures in the history of pragmatism and therefore challenge the notion that pragmatism is an exclusively North American philosophy. Other chapters present pragmatism as a philosophy that can help address the present social, ethical, and political problems faced by Hispanics in and outside the United States. [\[academic.oup\]](#)
- Historical reconstructions such as *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy* emphasize that canonical American thinkers (Thoreau, Emerson, James, Dewey) still “smell the forest,” meaning they inherit, transform, and sometimes suppress Indigenous and land-based ways of knowing that predate and underwrite their so-called “modern” pragmatism.[\[jstor\]](#)

If you want, a next step could be a short reading path—for example, starting with Pratt, then moving to Burkhardt and Whyte, and finally looping back to re-read Dewey or James through these Indigenous lenses.