

Thriving

children • youth • families



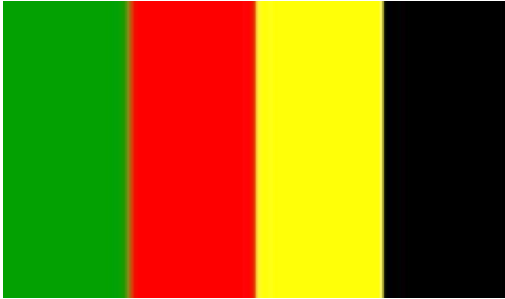
Learning online journal



How Indigenous People See the World

Martin Brokenleg

Traditional Indigenous people have defined ways of seeing space and life. The Lakota Nation often speaks of only four sacred colours but that is not the complete story. Lakota definitions of space include the six directions, each signified by one of the colours of red, yellow, back, white, blue, and green as illustrated in the following image.



The colours of these directions are signified at ceremonies as strips of fabric attached to a short staff as depicted in the image below:



In our book, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*, we used the four horizontal directions to speak about the major facts, which create resiliency. We now add the “above” direction and the “below” one with two additional resiliency factors. These six directions would easily be recognized by Lakota people as factors in the spiritual makeup of all people. They are also present in our Model of Leadership and Service, in which our work at CF Learning is grounded.

The east is signified by the colour red. The experience of **belonging** is foundational in any resilient person. Of primary importance is the

continual experience of being attached to a number of other persons including parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, and relatives. Every child born into this world already knows how to belong. Indigenous people also include the critical experiences of belonging to the worlds of plants, animals, and the earth as well as more abstract attachments to history, location, and communities of many kinds.



The colour yellow traditionally signifies south, the direction of **achievement**. A resilient person knows from experience what she or he can do. She does not have to do everything. She only needs to know what she is capable of doing. This constitutes the experience of mastery. The will to achieve is deep in every human being. The colour black signified the west and is it where we locate the need for **power**. Resiliency requires every person to know one’s own power within. This includes self-management, responsibility, and the desire to act in ones own best interests. External power may degrade into dominance. Interior power is momentum to continue living in a positive way.

White is the colour of the north. The fourth building block of resiliency is the need to know one’s deep inner goodness, to experience one’s own virtue. Ethical systems and religious teachings all guide a person toward a genuine **purpose** in life. The colour above is blue. This is the direction of **adventure**. Life is not just existence but rather includes the zeal of being fully alive. A resilient child finds work and play so exciting that time and purpose are lost in the sheer excitement of living.

Below us is the green earth, what Lakotapi call our grandmother, the positive and generative stability that gives us an experience of **safety**. More than being free from danger, this sense of safety develops when people and the events of life work as they should in respect of the dignity of every child and adult, what some would call “well being.” When life is experienced as it should happen, it can be loved fully by a resilient person.

Indigenous people understand these six directions of the human spirit as normative. We see them as the lessons of resiliency that can be learned only from living the six experiences. In Lakota teaching there is one more direction, the most important direction, the direction of the centre, the human heart. All of these resiliency factors teach the spirit of a person to be strong. They are kept in the heart

because it is the only safe place for something this important. The learned resiliency lessons are belonging, achievement, power, purpose, adventure, and safety. They are the spiritual forces that make a child resilient and an adult who can be fully alive.

All of these resiliency factors teach the spirit of a person to be strong. They are kept in the heart because it is the only safe place for something this important.

These spiritual forces, essential human drives, are embodied in our Model of Leadership and Service. Consistent with the beliefs of Indigenous people and informed by science, the model is the foundation and the guide to our work with young people and families.

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