

THE HUMAN BASED PRINCIPLES OF UBUNTU OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Milton Note:

One of the things that an Outdoor Educator shares with participants, alongside the practical physical skills, is to help different people work together in harmony for the common good and resolve potential disagreements. The legacy systems that the Outdoor Education industry relies upon are drawn mostly from dominant culture's 'kids camp' experience and pedagogy.

I would prefer to do something different; for the following reasons:

- That 'Kid Camp Culture' is fundamentally a kids camp on Indigenous land, of the same Indigenous people their forebears tried to annihilate, learning Indigenous knowledge; with absolutely no Indigeneity. I see the children of Dominant culture at Indigenous named camps, pretending to be Indigenous, dancing on the graves of Indigenous ancestors. A cursory Land Acknowledgement given at the start of events does little to hide the insincerity and hypocrisy of this position.*
- The aforementioned insincerity is not hidden from the people of the global majority. We see through it, even if we can't name it. The peoples who are the descendents of those who were colonized, are, and have been subjected to the same type of manufactured happiness and group cohesiveness. It is very difficult to get people of colour to buy into this and play along.*
- Further, I have experienced, seen, and heard complaints from participants of colour, who have experienced micro aggressions (sniping statements & behaviours, inadequate safety instruction), hidden within plausible deniable excuses, disdain or cultural ignorance. It creates conditions that people of colour are made to feel unwelcome and/or relegated to insignificance.*
- The necessity of having to 'Code-Switch' is exhausting. The people of the global majority have different levels of tolerance for it, as they might have to in order to learn a skill, enter an industry, and develop a profession. Adopting 'a posture of deference' hampers honest self expression.*
- The positionality of the global majority & Indigenous Culture here on Turtle Island is much the same. We share the same problem & have done so over the past 500 years. Dominant Culture remains our collective and perpetual security, safety, and developmental concern.*
[NOTE: None of the cultures that were colonized ever sought revenge. We simply wanted Dominant Culture to stop trying to destroy us.]
- Globally, there are many different holistic, empathic, and humane indigenous teachings, philosophies, and practices for cultivating harmonious group dynamics. These teachings are axiomatic, organic and grow in breadth, depth and importance the more one embodies them. They have survived over millenia and are authentic for us.*

- *Therefore; we are moving towards establishing an alternative pedagogy*

UKAMA:

Ukama is a simple & profound philosophy of living in the knowledge of the interdependence of all things, including humanity. I have added Ukama here briefly under the human(e) values of Ubuntu Outdoor Education because it is vital to me that we understand the fundamental oneness of all, rather than holding to the idea that humans are greater than nature, and that domination is humanities only way of interacting with nature and each other. It is illogical, and frankly speaking; ultimately self-destructive.

It is important that we appreciate oneness as the starting point of how we choose to treat ourselves & others.

(What follows is a Google search result for Ukama. I have shared it as I found it a good brief description of Ukama.)

Ukama is a Shona philosophy (from Zimbabwe) emphasizing that all existence—humans, ancestors, animals, and nature—is deeply interconnected, interdependent, and related. It extends beyond human-to-human relationships (Ubuntu) to include the non-human world, promoting environmental stewardship, relationality, harmony, and reciprocal respect.

Key principles and aspects of Ukama include:

- **Interdependence & Relationality:** The core belief that all things (people, animals, rivers, rocks) are interconnected and rely on each other for existence.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** A focus on the protection of the natural environment, advocating against tampering with air, soil, and water.
- **Harmony and Equilibrium:** The necessity of maintaining balance within the entire community of life (living and dead) to ensure survival and well-being.
- **Extended Kinship:** The concept that "everyone is my relative" (munhu wese ihama yangu), fostering a sense of belonging that extends beyond immediate family to the broader community.
- **Reciprocity and Respect:** The requirement to treat others—and nature—with respect, listening humbly, and nurturing, and protecting, as one would for themselves.

(Please go to our resources page for more information)

UBUNTU

“ A human is a human because of other humans.”
“I am because we are.”

UBUNTU PRINCIPLES:

- Interconnectedness
- Compassion
- Cooperation
- Humility
- Shared Humanity

COLLECTIVE FINGERS THEORY:

(A way of teaching the Five Core Values of Ubuntu identified by 'Mbigi')

- Survival
- Spirit of Solidarity
- Compassion
- Respect &
- Dignity

From the book: Facilitating Ubuntu: A Workbook. A beginners guide to facilitating workshops on the ancient African philosophy of Ubuntu.

By: B. W. Adamms

PROLOGUE - WHY UBUNTU?

When we think about the principles of Ubuntu; (Interconnectedness, Compassion, Cooperation, Humility, and Shared Humanity) and why the philosophy is not only significant but also pressing in our contemporary world, it's best to consider the backdrop against which we're reading *Ubuntu*. Let's begin by attempting to understand the language of *Ubuntu*:

The root word, 'Ntu' is one that occurs across Nguni dialects and has been translated in western philosophy as meaning 'human' and while this translation is a useful way to understand the philosophy in broad terms, there is something to be said about the specificity that oral history suggests. Ntu, in many oral historical accounts, is both symbolically and literally considered to be a person - more specifically the 'first' person. Abantu which is broadly translated to mean 'people' or 'humans' is better translated as 'descendants of Ntu' or 'children of Ntu'. This slight pivot in perspective might help us understand what is being invoked when Ubuntu (which has been translated as humanness) is called on as a baseline of relating. Yes, there is a call to observe the principles of humanity or humanness, but there is also an invocation of (and invitation to observe) a shared ancestry. Ubuntu which is more accurately translated as 'being human' is a call to [enact/embody] the principles of humanity as a means of remembering and acknowledging this shared ancestry. The poetry in observing a shared ancestry is that it requires pause, and in that pause the complexities of our connected histories and the possibilities of our enmeshed futures become rich resources in informing a deliberate present.

With this in mind, the phrase *Umntu ngumntu ngabantu* can then take on two slightly different but equally important interpretations: The first is that 'a human is a human because of other humans' which is a call to observe community and our place in it, and an important way of understanding connection, compassion and cooperation. While the second interpretation is that the first person (in this case Ntu), is humanised by a posterity that remembers and recognizes personhood. This second interpretation presents us the opportunity to understand humility and shared humanity: Humility because, indeed, the very notion and significance of a first person or core humanity can be nullified by the act of forgetting our own personhood and humanity. And shared humanity because it's in the action of remembering each other's personhood that we affirm our own.

So how and why is Ubuntu significant in the world today? Perhaps more than anything, Ubuntu gifts us a unique practice of agility in a fast paced and often dehumanising and petrifying contemporary reality. A philosophical practice that both grounds us in our humanity whilst driving us in our action is a generative antidote to the passive silos that have come to define the shared experience in our modern world.

Let's be honest, we have been through a lot. Global pandemics, rampant climate crises, and unspeakable violence streaming directly into the palms of our hands are only the most recent tints on the lenses through which we see each other. Add to these global histories of oppression, colonialism, racialized and gendered inequality, and poverty and many are left with the sense that it's better to not see each other at all. Yet Ubuntu, even in moments like these, insists that the power to restore what has been lost and the perspective to redress historical harm lies in the everyday practice of seeing the sacred humanity in each other. It's never too little and it's never too late to champion each other's humanity.

At its heart, Ubuntu is a philosophy that invites a collaborative mindset and fosters an impulse to reflect and evolve which makes it an appropriate and timely intervention in our modern world.

Ubuntu's Servant Leadership Model

When I first learned of Ubuntu's "Servant Leadership" model I immediately recognized it as perhaps the best way to describe what I've always wanted to teach about outdoor leadership. This Servant Leadership Model reflected the internal basis of my own interactions with participants. Always thinking far ahead of the things and contingencies that would serve the common good of the group. Even when it made my pack heavier.

Outdoor Leadership is in its simplest terms; caring for people & coordinating events. The terms 'power', 'leadership' have many negative connotations in today's world, where many seek only for themselves, an egoic concept of being above others. None of these are healthy perspectives of leadership.

Leadership is first and foremost about 'leading yourself'. Secondly, getting people to cooperate with you. Remember that, "compassion & inspiration result in willful cooperation."

Even during adverse circumstances, Ubuntu with its emphasis of working for the common good has been the root of social justice movements across Africa. Biko, Mandela, Tutu and Nzinga

and many others stood firmly in Ubuntu and saved their people from destruction. The same can be said for members of the African diaspora in North America: Tubman, King, Malcolm X, Newton and others acted from this same source.

NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC) PRINCIPLES:

Important Note: I have seen NVC facilitated many times before, and usually it focuses on the action phase (Observation, Feelings, Needs, Request) cycle. As important as this is, I have yet to see anyone share the foundational principles that these actions are rooted in.

I find it important that before one takes on an ideological & philosophical concept, one should have the opportunity to see whether or not it is something that resonates with them. Rather than just being told that this is what we are doing and practicing. (Invitation vs. imposition)

Assumptions:

1. *All human beings share the same needs*
2. *Our world offers sufficient resources for meeting everyone's basic needs.*
3. *All actions are attempts to meet needs*
4. *Feelings point to needs being met or unmet*
5. *All human beings have the capacity for compassion*
6. *Human beings enjoy giving*
7. *Human beings meet needs through interdependent relationships*
8. *Human beings change*
9. *Choice is internal*
10. *The most direct path to peace is through self-connection*

Intentions

- *Open-hearted living*
 1. *Self Compassion*
 2. *Expressing from the heart*
 3. *Receiving with compassion*
 4. *Prioritizing connection*
 5. *Moving beyond "right" and "wrong" to using needs-based assessments*
- *Choice, responsibility, peace*
 1. *Taking responsibility for our feelings*
 2. *Taking responsibility for our actions*
 3. *Living in peace with unmet needs*
 4. *Increasing capacity for meeting needs*
 5. *Increasing capacity for meeting the present moment*
- *Sharing Power (partnership)*
 1. *Caring equally for everyone's needs*
 2. *Using force minimally [only] to protect rather than to educate, punish, or get what we want without agreement.*

Communication that Blocks Compassion

Rosenberg says that certain ways of communicating tend to alienate people from the experience of compassion.

- **MORALISTIC JUDGMENTS**

Implying wrongness or badness on the part of people who don't act in harmony with our values. Blame, insults, put downs, labels, criticisms, comparisons and diagnoses are all said to be forms of judgment. (Moralistic Judgments are not to be confused with value judgments as to the qualities we value). The use of moralistic judgments is characterized as an impersonal way of expressing oneself that does not require one to reveal what is going on inside oneself. This way of speaking is said to have the result that "Our attention is focused on classifying, analyzing and determining levels of wrongness rather than on what we and others need and are not getting."

- **DEMANDS**

Demands that implicitly or explicitly threaten listeners with blame or punishment if they fail to comply.

- **DENIAL OF RESPONSIBILITY**

Denial of responsibility via language that obscures awareness of personal responsibility. It is said that we deny responsibility for our actions when we attribute their cause to; vague impersonal forces ("I had to"); our condition, diagnosis, personal or psychological history, the actions of others, the dictates of authority; group pressure, institutional policy, rules and regulations, gender roles, social roles, or age roles, or uncontrollable impulses.

- **MAKING COMPARISONS**

Making comparisons between people [yourself included]

- **A PREMISE OF DESERVING (ENTITLEMENT)**

A premise of deserving, that certain actions merit reward while others merit punishment.

(Personal NOTE: These forms of communication that block empathy were the first thing that really struck me from NVC. As I read them, I could see how people in my past had used these when speaking to me & how governmental leaders spoke (violently). The penny really dropped for me when I realized that I spoke to myself using the same dynamics. Not very "self-empathic". I recognized that I would need to change my psycholinguistic process [how I talk to myself] in order to cultivate empathy for myself.

(Psycholinguistics: how you use words to self conceptualize oneself internally. How you speak to yourself matters, alot.)

FOUR COMPONENTS

- **OBSERVATION**

The facts (what we are seeing, hearing or touching) are distinct from our evaluation of meaning and significance. NVC discourages static generalizations. It is said that “when we combine observation with evaluation, others are apt to hear criticism and resist what we are saying.” Instead a focus on observations specific to time and context is recommended.”

- **FEELINGS**

Emotions or sensations, free of thought and story.

These are to be distinguished from thoughts (e.g., “I feel I didn’t get a fair deal”) and from words colloquially used as feelings but which convey what we think we are (e.g., “inadequate”), how we think others are evaluating us (e.g., “unimportant”), or what we think others are doing to us (e.g., “misunderstood”, “ignored”). Feelings are said to reflect whether we are experiencing our needs as met or unmet. Identifying feelings is said to allow us to more easily connect with one another and “allowing ourselves to be vulnerable by expressing our feelings can help resolve conflicts.”

- **NEEDS**

Universal human needs, as distinct from particular strategies for meeting needs. It is posited that “Everything we do is in service of our needs.”

[NOTE: See “Human Scale Development”]

- **REQUEST**

Request for a specific action, free of demand. Requests are distinguished from demands in that one is open to hearing a response of “no” without this triggering an attempt to force the matter. If one makes a request and receives a “no” it is recommended not that one give up, but that one empathize with what is preventing the other person from saying “yes”, before deciding how to continue the conversation. It is recommended that requests use clear, positive, concrete action language.

MODES

There are three primary modes of the application of NVC:

- **SELF EMPATHY**

Involves compassionately connecting with what is going on inside us. This may involve, without blame, noticing the thoughts and judgments we are having, noticing our feelings, and most critically, connecting to the needs that are affecting us.

- **RECEIVING EMPATHICALLY**

Receiving empathically in NVC involves “connection with what’s alive in the other person and what would make life wonderful for them...It’s not an understanding of the head where we just mentally understand what another person says... Empathic connection is an understanding of the heart in which we see the beauty in the other person, the divine energy in the other person, the life that’s alive in them... It doesn’t mean we have to feel the same feelings as the other person. That’s sympathy when we feel sad that another person is upset. It doesn’t mean we have the same feelings; it means we are with the

other person. *If you are mentally trying to understand the other person, you're not present with them.*

Empathy involves "emptying the mind and listening with our whole being."

NVC suggests that however the other person expresses themselves, we focus on listening for the underlying observations, feelings, needs and requests. It is suggested that it can be useful to reflect a paraphrase of what another person has said, highlighting the NVC components implicit in their message, such as the feelings and needs you guess they may be expressing.

- **EXPRESSING HONESTLY**

Expressing honestly in NVC is likely to involve expressing an observation, feeling, need and request. An observation may be omitted if the context of the conversation is clear. A feeling might be omitted if there is sufficient connection already, or the context is one where naming a feeling isn't likely to contribute to connection. It is said that naming a need in addition to a feeling makes it less likely that people will think you are making them responsible for your feeling. Similarly, it is said that making a request in addition to naming a need makes it less likely that people will infer a vague demand that they address your need. The components are thought to work together synergistically. According to NVC Trainer Bob Wentworth; "an observation sets the context, feelings support connection and getting out of our heads, needs support connection and identify what is important, and a request clarifies what sort of response you might enjoy. Using these components together minimizes the chances of people getting lost in potentially disconnecting speculation about what you want from them and why.

AKINOMOOSHIN

The Annishnaabe principle for "learning by interacting with the land & language."

I remember the moment I first learned of Akinomooshin, and how profoundly it struck me. It happened in my Indigenous Knowledge class in College in 2018 while I was studying Outdoor Education. I could see that so much of my studies, profession & way of life was based entirely on this principle.

I had a later realization that virtually all Outdoor Education is INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE. Jiimaan & Abwi (Canoe & Paddle); yet Outdoor Education is taught in a way that appropriates Indigenous Knowledge without giving credit to the peoples who originated it. That is fraud.

Further; dominant culture; after having done everything that the Indigenous Peoples told them NOT to do with nature now teach; "Leave No Trace" principles. A poor substitute for Akinomooshin. I have taught young people Leave No Trace principles before; and the after effects can be negative to the experience. It has had the tendency of separating young people from nature. I found that it suppresses their natural curiosity and creates a situation where nature & people are mutually exclusive from each other. How can future generations care for the environment when they believe they're separate from it?

I would rather help people to interact with the natural environment better, through curiosity and life-long learning. I believe the situation requires an integral, holistic perspective.

I see examples of Akinomooshin not only on Turtle Island, but also across the global Boreal Forest peoples who have always lived holistically with the land. In Turtle Island snowshoes were the main means of winter travel, In Eurasia they used hunters skis. Both forests host many of the same flora & fauna (plants & animals) as we have here and show very similar human needs and activities.

I am not Indigenous to Turtle Island, nor do I pretend to be; however, I can recognize a profound truth and integrate it into my life. Akinomooshin resonates with the truth in my own heart, so that's what I practice.

My practice of Akinomooshin is a life-long learning process. It is my collective experiences & observations of nature, its great and small cycles & its many forms. In my practice of Akinomooshin, there is usually not a day that passes where I haven't learned something new from nature by watching, listening and being in it daily. It is my own personal relationship with nature. For me; it's not a hobby, it's a way of life.

As an Outdoor Educator I am in many ways an ambassador of the outdoors. I introduce people to nature through facilitation, instruction, stories, metaphor, inspiration and an open heart.

SLOYD

Sloyd is a word from Swedish culture meaning crafts or handcrafting. It is taught in Swedish schools from a young age and continued throughout. It is important to me as a way of getting young people to connect their minds with their hands. This is a mindset & practical skill sorely needed in the world today. The ability to create, build something and improvise solutions adds resilience to our young people.

Sloyd is taught using the pedagogy that follows:

Sloyd differed from other forms of manual training in its adherence to a set of distinct [pedagogical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sloyd) principles. These were: that instruction should move from the known to the unknown, from the easy to the more difficult, from the simple to the more complex, from the concrete to the abstract, and the products made in sloyd should be practical in nature and build the relationship between home and school. [SELF, OTHERS & NATURE]
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sloyd>

I plan to make use of the Sloyd teaching flow in my future work with others.