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The Ancestral Science Podcast explores scientific topics through conversations between Knowledge Keepers and Scientists, while *experiencing* the origins and depth of science on and with “the Land”. Join us as science COMES ALIVE when knowledges are shared alongside ancestor plants, rocks, animals, and rivers, creating connections between personal, Indigenous, and global science. The Ancestral Science podcast is a place for *everyone* to see themselves in science, to be inspired by the SCIENCE that is all around them and expand the definitions of both *ancestor* and *science*.

SEASON 4, Episode 01 with **Dr. GRANT Bruno** from Samson Cree Nation “Neurodiversity, Trickster Stories, & Relationality”

We were grateful to speak with [Dr. Grant Bruno](#) from Samson Cree Nation, who is an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Alberta about neurodiversity and autism as a gift and a strength not an illness, how humans can learn from ALL- from babies and kids, to stones and spirit, what is neuro-relationality and regulating *with* land, the importance of a diagnosis, and how tricker stories have been teaching humans about neurodiversity all along...

Grant wanted the donation from this episode to go to “[Maskwacis Mobile Mental Health](#),” an organization that provides mobile mental health to the people of Maskwacis. [Webpage](#), Call/text talkline: **780-362-2150**

Remember, you can support the pod and rock some unique Indigenous Science merch at www.relationalsciencecircle.com/shop, all proceeds go towards Knowledge Keeper honoraria, following protocols, and keeping the pod going.

Please like, share, follow, and rate the pod, it goes a long way to share this knowledge.

Thanks to Emil Starlight ([@mikadikadzi_redfoot](#)), the pod’s multimedia podcast producer of Limelight Multimedia.

Questions for the Pod? Email us at relational.science@gmail.com

SHOWNOTES:

-Appropriate and respectful language with speaking about neurodiversity, mental health, and different abilities:

-We need to reclaim our identities, and language helps us to that.

- Instead of making assumptions, it is best to speak with people of the community regarding preferred language. As well, continuing these conversations because language changes, which is both ok and healthy.
- There has been push back on medical language and processes of diagnosing “disease” or “abnormalities,” which centers illness and trying to “cure” instead of centering the human, their gifts, or relationality.
- use: I am __ (autistic) __
- do NOT use: I have __ (autism) __
 - it is a gift, that is a part of someone, not something that is “wrong” with someone.
- medical language focuses on deficits instead of strengths

-Neurodiversity Movement: started by Judy Singer

- “[Ms. Judy Singer- Neurodiversity: A word that CHANGED the World](#)” (youtube) – Neuro Chat with AG.
- about centering neurodiverse folks
- neurodiversity is a strength
- neurodivergence is broad and inclusive, from ADHD to Autism, OCD to Brain Injuries.

-Societal Structures are NOT made for neurodivergent people

- focus on capitalism and profit
 - eg. increased productivity- extend “productive hours” or restrict hours to specific times of the day (like 9-5).
- schools/education are built for the administration and teachers, not for learners
 - to teach TO students, to fill them with knowledge
- We have to actively try to address colonial processes
 - towards racism
 - towards ableism

-Indigenous Approached to Education/Pedagogy:

- everyone has something to teach and learn; therefore everyone has knowledge, you don’t start life at “nothing.” Even babies can teach us, about spirit as they are closest to the spirit world, or about patience and connectivity.
- we learn through all senses (beyond the standard 5), by listening, but also by doing, feeling, experiencing, and through methods that are outside of the objective – such as ceremony, visions, intuition, dreams, etc..

-Neuro-Relationality: is about connection to land, community, ancestors, food

- with Dr. Leona Makokis
- neuro-relationality and Indigenous ways of knowing focused on everyone’s gifts alongside cultural strengths and teachings.

“Reclaiming Neurodiversity: Indigenous Perspectives on Autism, Relationality, and Inclusion.” By Grant Bruno, Louis Busch, Will Landon, Leona Makokis. Wicazo Sa Review, Volume 41, Numbers 1 & 2, Spring & Fall 2026, pp. 206-230 (Article).

Published by University of Minnesota Press DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.2026.a992713>

-Land-Based Health Science Academy:

- based on “braiding sweetgrass” with Dr. [Francis Whiskeyjack](#)
- shares that within the sweetgrass there are many parts, along they are weak, but together they are strong. Like a community, each with its own gift/skill, together creates a strong community. Like a sweetgrass braid.

-Neurodivergent and 2Spirit Youth:

- face same systemic disruptions
- look further into these connections and relations

-Destigmatizing Mental Health & Neurodiversity. Advice for parents:

- Feel proud to be autistic, neurodiverse! You are unique, find your gifts!
- Grant Bruno: as a dad of an autistic child, advice for other parents- “you are not less than, as a parent”
- to parents, you are NOT at fault.
- get a diagnosis- opens up resources, understanding.
 - need information so we know numbers so everyone can access more resources and more are available/created.
- don’t focus on WHY, this doesn’t change the diagnosis
- testing is still based on standardized tests on white, privileged, boys. The more people asking for testing, across genders, across cultures and locations, the more accurate the numbers, understanding, testing can be.
- autism is an adventure, embrace it, be creative!

-Indigenous Perspectives of Neurodiversity:

- Leona Makokis:** Autistic people have more spirit, more connections to spirit.
- Indigenous people have always understood and identified neurodivergence
 - understood these people had gifts
 - always had kindness towards neurodivergent people
- “Trickster stories are neurodivergent stories”**
 - these are about **acceptance**, recognizing differing abilities and differing perspectives and differing ways of knowing.
- we all have different gifts
 - children *sense* things adults don’t
 - how do we/parents/humans DO or understand these feelings?
 - neurodiverse people often have a gift of strong emotional intelligence
- rocks & asinyi**
 - the connections between children and rocks
 - they still see and understand the teachings of these oldest teachers (rocks) (told to Kori by Sherri Chisan, President, Blue Quills University)
 - children can still learn from the rock ancestors through everyday senses, adults often need ceremony, external senses, to listen to the rock teachings.
- children are teachers**
 - common human industrial/capitalistic perspective of education- where children arrive to school as “empty vessels” to be taught TO, to fill their “empty bucket” with knowledge.
 - but children have an open spirit, can learn from broader senses without rationality.

- adults over-intellectualize and rationalize that disconnects
- we have to remove the hierarchy from education towards teachings within circle.

-Land and Neurodiversity:

- land is regulating
- but relationality and depth of understanding is underexplored, but we (Indigenous people) know this works.

-ADDITIONAL LINKS:

“[They are Sacred](#)” (Film) 2025- Directed by Kim O’Bomsawin

Following young Anders and his father, Dr. Grant Bruno, of the Samson Cree Nation, They Are Sacred gives viewers unique access to the world of an autistic child, and to follow his father’s journey to bring back traditional First Peoples’ perspectives in our contemporary world.

“[The Gift of being Different](#)” (film) 2023-

This short documentary follows Grant Bruno as he navigates the world of autism. Grant is a parent to Autistic children and a PhD researcher exploring autism in First Nations communities. Grant is a registered member of nipsihkipahk (Samson Cree Nation), one of the reserves that makes up Maskwacis, Alberta. Through the film we learn his community views autism as a gift.

“[Innovator Spotlight: Grant Bruno](#)” (article- University of Alberta)

“[ohpikinâwasowin](#)- Growing a Child: Implementing Indigenous Ways of Knowing with Indigenous Families” (Book) Leona Makosis, Ralph Bodor, Avery Calhoun, Stephanie Tayler (eds).

“[Ispimihk Awâsisak](#)” (Sky Children Program): Ispimihk Awâsisak, which means “sky children” in the nêhiyâwin (Plains Cree) language, was named in a ceremony with môsom Rick Lightning. This five-year initiative is currently based in Maskwacîs (encompassing the Louis Bull, Ermineskin Cree, Samson Cree, and Montana Nations) and will expand to include other communities in Treaty Six over time.

“[Indigenous Perspectives on Building Inclusive Autism Practices](#)” with Grant Bruno (webinar)

Czuy, K. (2020). **Awakening the Mind: Indigenizing mathematics through local story** (Doctoral thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada).
<https://ucalgary.scholaris.ca/items/ca589bd3-1fd7-4536-8805-db16e9979609>

Want more Indigenous Science Resources? Check out [Relational Science Circle](#).

Want to learn more about Indigenous Science, Indigenous Science/Mathematics Teacher PD sessions, or have an idea for a guest or topic for the Ancestral Science Podcast, email relational.science@gmail.com

Gratitude to the OG support from Juan-Carlos Chavez, ongoing teachings gifted from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, Ancestors of past and future, and all the science and knowings of Stones and Stars.

