

SAGE Research Methods Cases: Diversifying and Decolonizing Research

Using an Indigenous Research Methodology to Decolonize and Define Self-Determination and Indigenous Governance

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Abstract

An Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) is a relatively new methodology (appearing in the academic literature in the early 2000s in response to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminal 1999 text on Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples) that makes use of old (as in thousands of years old) Indigenous ways of knowing and being that have contemporary relevance. An IRM is a process that acknowledges the past in order to understand the present and therefore change the future. As IRM is grounded in Indigenous worldviews and theories, it is not a subcategory of Western quantitative or qualitative methodologies. IRM is its own methodology; it relies upon Indigenous sources and ways of knowing (epistemologies) in order to achieve an understanding of any given Indigenous topic or question. As noted by Smith (1999) Indigenous Peoples are among the most researched groups of people in the world and all too often in detrimental ways, so much so that research has become a "dirty" word. This has resulted in a state of crisis and requires a complete overhaul, a revolution, in how research is to be conducted with Indigenous peoples. This calls for necessary paradigm shifts at both an individual and societal level. This case study highlights the processes and necessary paradigm shifts required to move from a modified qualitative research process to an IRM in order to identify true Indigenous governing structures and principles, and experience self-determination even while living under a colonial regime.

Learning Outcomes

1. Identify Indigenous ways of knowing.
2. Explain benefits of using an Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM).
3. Discuss benefits to self and to community in using an IRM.
4. Identify barriers due to colonialism in ability to use an IRM.

Project Overview

I began my PhD program in 2005 and by 2007 I was still working on my Research Proposal. My research interests were in Indigenous Governance and ways in which we do or might give expression to Indigenous governing principles while living under a colonial regime that oppresses, subjugates, and often criminalizes Indigenous ways of being. At this time most research pertaining to Indigenous Peoples and/or issues used either a Quantitative or a Qualitative research method.

However, as a result of Linda Smith's (Māori) 1999 seminal book on Decolonizing Methodologies, beginning in the early 2000s a few publications (see, for example, Absolon & Willet, 2005; Grande, 2008; Kovach, 2005; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; and Wilson, 2008) were made available that were beginning to define and describe an Indigenous Research Methodology, not as a modified Qualitative method, but as a stand-alone method. This intrigued me, especially as this Indigenous method required that Indigenous research be grounded in Indigenous theories and ways of knowing. Rather than moving forward with trying to fit my Indigenous worldview within a Qualitative method, as originally planned, I decided to take a year of my program to learn more about this new Indigenous research method (IRM).

This year was probably the most important and beneficial year of my seven-year PhD journey. Before exploring an IRM, I was beginning to feel distant and alienated from my research, even questioning its usefulness and purpose. The spaces I was occupying were largely dominated by men and the discussions tended to center around the Indian Act, an act first appearing in 1857 titled The Gradual Civilization Act, and still in effect today. The Indian Act is now known to be one of Canada's most oppressive pieces of legislation. This was troubling for me, as when I began I was extremely passionate and excited about my research prospects and learning about Indigenous Governance and self-determination, as opposed to Indigenous Peoples who are in colonial governing positions. From Smith's 1999 work on Decolonizing Methodologies, I knew a paradigm shift was needed but didn't know how to make it. I knew I needed to draw my research back to me. It had become too objective and distant, which is okay for Western forms of research and even often required, but for me it was not working. I needed to find a way to personalize it even if this meant my credibility could be questioned.

In my year spent researching an IRM as a methodology, I learned that abiding by an IRM meant I had to “live” my research and ground my process in Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemologies) and Indigenous realities (ontologies). Although I was completely unsure how to go about doing this exactly, I immediately became reintrigued and reinterested. As I began to focus on Stó:lō (name of my Indigenous People) ways of knowing and being, my research took on a spirit and an energy that I could relate to and connect with. It also meant I had to let go and trust. In some ways it was like stepping out onto the edge of a cliff; learning old ways of knowing was completely new to me. It took me out of my comfort zone of books, writing, and academe, a world in which I felt comfortable, confident, and capable, into a world of spirit, relationships, ancestry, territory, and an entirely different worldview. A world in which I spent days and at times months in a state of “not knowing” and having to trust in order to keep moving forward.

It was during this year I came to experience an Indigenous research methodology and the importance of centering Stó:lō ways of knowing and being. It was also during this year I began the essential work of decolonizing in practical and real ways. Doing this consuming but imperative work to decolonize myself mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually meant I was not only able to identify Indigenous ways of knowing, but also and perhaps more importantly, I was able to learn from them in a manner that respected and promoted Indigenous ways of knowing and being. In so doing I was able to ensure my research findings on Indigenous governance were valid, reliable, and credible, as they stemmed entirely from Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Without decolonizing first I do not think I would have been able to identify, let alone learn, from Stó:lō ways of knowing. I came to find that decolonization on a personal level may be more challenging than decolonization at a national level.

At the time of making these paradigm shifts, being Indigenous was looked down upon, and racism and eurocentrism were rampant and ubiquitous. These shifts and my personal decolonization occurred before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report (<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>) came out, before thousands of unmarked graves of Indigenous children were found at various Residential Schools (euphemism for child labour camps at best and death camps at worst), and before the “Black Lives Matter” movement. This was a time when referring to Canada’s colonial policies as a

crime and a form of genocide meant one would be standing mostly alone. At this time, to learn from Stó:lō ways of knowing and being as part of a PhD program at a Western university seemed like academic suicide.

Section Summary

- To use an Indigenous research methodology requires time to learn how to “live” your research and make important paradigm shifts
- This paradigm shift requires the researcher to learn to “trust” the process as it moves into importance of relationships, spirit, and “not knowing.”
- This paradigm shift requires the researcher to undergo processes of decolonization—mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually

Research Process

In hindsight, I am fortunate I took the time and had the courage to shift back to Stó:lō ways of knowing. However, at the time it was often exhausting and extremely frustrating. First I had to define an Indigenous research methodology (IRM) that would suit my research interests and that would be based upon Indigenous theory and Indigenous ways of knowing and being. At the time the only Indigenous theory I was aware of was Taiaikke Alfred’s (1999) Indigenous theory of resurgence. This theory simultaneously spoke against processes of colonization and reasserted Indigenous sovereignty. This theory fit perfectly with IRM requirements that my research be grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing. It also fit with the following guidelines provided by Kovach (2005) and Weber-Pillwax (2001).

Kovach (2005) recommends several assertions to guide Indigenous research:

- Experience as a legitimate way of knowing
- Indigenous methods, such as storytelling, as a legitimate way of sharing knowledge
- Receptivity and relationship between researcher and participants as a natural part of the research “methodology”
- Collectivity as a way of knowing that assumes reciprocity to the community

And Weber-Pillwax (2001) suggests that Indigenous research:

- Is fluid
- Benefits the Indigenous community
- Leads to some change “out there”; i.e., it makes a difference
- Must incorporate trust; the researcher must have a deep sense of responsibility in order to uphold this trust
- Has the capability of breaking the silence and to “bring forth the powerful songs of long-imprisoned Indigenous voices using their own languages” (Weber-Pillwax 2001, p. 174)

Red Pedagogy as an Indigenous Research Methodology

Keeping these assertions and guidelines in mind I began making use of Sandy Grande’s (2008) Indigenous method of “red pedagogy.” This concept is about using ideas in motion and social engagement as part of how we come to know and understand. It’s about making ideas come alive through purposeful interactions and that during these interactions ideas will evolve, sometimes even transform. So every gathering, event, conference, ceremony, and experience I attended, I did so through the lens of Sto:lo ways of knowing in relation to being self-determining. Thus red pedagogy as a research methodology acknowledges and promotes Indigenous knowledge as being collective knowledge:

As I engage in this process ... and filter the gathered data through an indigenous [sic] perspective. When I say “indigenous perspective,” what I meant is my perspective as an indigenous [sic] scholar. And when I say “my perspective,” I mean from a consciousness shaped not only by my own experiences but also those of my peoples and ancestors. It is through this process that Red pedagogy—my indigenous [sic] methodology—emerged. (Grande, 2008)

As such, this methodology is available only to Indigenous scholars who are guided by our Indigenous ancestry and rooted within an Indigenous community.

Red pedagogy encourages a realism that by deconstructing colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism and rebuilding Indigenous sovereignty, identity, and ways of being we create spaces within which self-determining struggles over identity, land, resources, intellectual property,

rights, treaty, intertribal, and inter-Indigenous nation relationships can be adequately and fairly negotiated. These spaces are created mostly, but not solely, via dialogue, debate, and thought processes that are more than okay with being antidiscursive and based upon intuition, but also via contention, struggle, and transformation.

“Returning to Ourselves” as an Indigenous Research Methodology

I also came across Leanne Simpson’s (2011) Nishnaabeg concept of Biskaabiiyang, which means “returning to ourselves” as a research methodology:

Within Nishnaabeg theoretical foundations, Biskaabiiyang does not literally mean returning to the past, but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishing of the past to support the well-being of our contemporary citizens. It means reclaiming the fluidity around our traditions, not the rigidity of colonialism, it means encouraging the self-determination of individuals within our national and community-based contexts; and it means re-creating an artistic and intellectual renaissance within a larger political and cultural resurgence. (Simpson, 2011)

Simpson explains how the process of Biskaabiiyang is a way to ground resurgence and the necessary decolonization, acting as a reminder of the continual evaluation of colonialism both within communities and within individuals. According to Simpson, such an evaluation is constantly required given our occupied state and the ubiquity of colonial values, mentalities, and acts.

I came to realize it is not just how we conduct our research, it is also about how we live our lives. It is not just about conversations, it is about “creating” and “emergence.” It is not just about envisioning; it is about acting upon those visions to “create new and just realities in which our ways of being can flourish” (Simpson, 2011).

Through the use of red pedagogy and Biskaabiiyang (which I was later to learn in my own language of Halq’eméylem is Hakweles), I lived my research, meaning it came with me everywhere I went. It was not something I “conducted” on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The more passionate and personally engaged I became, the better. According to Absolon and Willett (2005), research conducted from a “neutral” or “objective” position is eurocentric. Rather they recommend Indigenous researchers re-claim personal space within research to counter

objectivity and neutrality with subjectivity, credibility, accountability, and humanity (Absolon & Willett 2005). This is in keeping with the Stó:lō tenet that if you have never personally experienced something you can never really know about it, no matter how many degrees one may have or how many books one has read. My next concern, therefore, was how I could come to know self-determination let alone Indigenous governance, if I had never personally experienced it.

Location of Self Within an IRM

”Start with self, Indigenous knowledges are reflective. Reflect on who you are and your place in the world, this is methodology.”(Patricia Monture, 2007)

Locating self within an IRM is not only an act of decolonization, it is also an act of self-determination. According to Absolon and Willet (2005), by claiming our location we transform our place within research from an “object” studied by others to “subjects” of our own knowledge creation. Locating self within one’s research paradigm becomes a crucial step and large part of an Indigenous methodology. It is through the location of self and the use of red pedagogy grounded in Stó:lō cultural teachings that I came to “live” my research and therefore experience self-determination and “feel” self-governing.

Locating myself within my research proved to be both an act of decolonization and an act of personal empowerment. It meant I discovered who I am and my ties and responsibilities to my people and my Stó:lō community. It gave me credence and authority to do the work I do; it gave my voice strength. Locating myself within my research afforded the opportunity to reconnect with my community, to remember my ancestry and teachings, to revise those parts that may have been misunderstood due to colonial gazes, to reclaim that which belonged to me (the Stó:lō), to rename by exploring my Indigenous language, Halq’eméylem, and bringing this back into memory and use, and to recover what I knew to be my historical truth.

As a result of locating myself within my research paradigm I found myself engaging in personal acts of decolonization: physically (through exercise and nutrition by eating ancestral foods rich in nutrients and avoiding colonial processed foods, including bannock made with white flour and deep-fried), spiritually (through Milha, a sacred Stó:lō ceremony), emotionally (learning about colonial trauma and trauma responses), and mentally by making that all-

important paradigm shift and immersing myself in Sto:lo ways of knowing and being. These processes of decolonization along with re-connecting and re-memembering myself to my ancestry, my territory, and my community made it possible for me to authentically identify and learn how to learn from Stó:lō ways of knowing.

Section Summary

- An Indigenous research methodology is based in Indigenous “theory” and Indigenous ways of knowing.
- Indigenous research methodology benefits the Indigenous community and leads to change.
- Indigenous research methodology means the researcher is putting ideas in motion through interactions with community and as a means to remember who we are as Indigenous Peoples.
- Indigenous research methods require that the researcher locate self within their work.

Method in Action: Weaving My Swóqw’elh and Identifying Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Weaving is a coveted skill among the Stó:lō. Those who know how are held in high regard. I personally do not know how to weave, yet. Contemplating this I felt badly that I had not taken the time to learn to weave. Up to this point my time had been invested in academia and learning skills such as writing, not weaving. While writing will never replace weaving, I have found that writing has done for me what weaving does for weavers. Writing, like weaving is a form of artistic expression; it, too, is a form of healing and therapy; it, too, can connect past, present, and future; it, too, can tell the most beautiful story; it, too, requires a certain level of calmness and serenity; and it, too, can tell family history and be passed from generation to generation. While the final products are different (one is a weaving, the other a written paper), the process, for me, in terms of the time, thought, and feeling that go into making the final product, is the same.

Thinking of my PhD dissertation in terms of weaving a swóqw’elh for my family made it personal and ensured I remained connected to my research; it could no longer remain as something “out there.” Once I began to think of my research within the framework of

swóqw'elh, my whole journey changed; my energy was revitalized. My relationship with my research project changed. First it made it personal and therefore connected to me; this increased the level of responsibility I felt toward it and the sincerity I put into my work. Second, it kept me mindful that my swóqw'elh is collectively owned and it will connect past, present, and future ancestors. It acknowledges reality, especially in terms of colonial impacts. For example, if my family had not endured colonization, in all likelihood I would not only be speaking my own language, I would also be sitting here weaving right now with wool, not with English words and a computer. Lastly, it reified transformation in the taking of ideas, thoughts, experiences, and weaving them all together to tell a story that can assist, guide, learn, and teach.

A swóqw'elh is a handwoven blanket designed with the family crest. It is a symbol of status and tells the history of the person wearing it; it is equally a personal possession as much as a collective one. The story within the swóqw'elh places the wearer within Stó:lō society; it tells the family story, family history, and/or family origin. Thus the family must have not only retained this information from generation to generation since time immemorial, they also have taken the time to have the story woven in order to own a swóqw'elh. It is therefore a symbol of prestige and status.

Aside from prestige and status, to me, a swóqw'elh also represents warmth, comfort, security and safety. I attribute these exact same qualities to good governance, and the fact that swóqw'elh are often worn by family leaders and the connection to my research became clear. If swóqw'elh tell a story, connect past ancestors with present family and future generations, tie family together and remind us what is important, then so, too, should my dissertation.

Figure 1: Wenona's son Alexis wearing his family swóqw'elh

Wool Gathering

Deciding where to gather my information was guided by the map provided by adhering to an Indigenous methodology. I knew that: (1) my gathering process must be tied to community and have the ability to contribute to change in a positive way for Indigenous people; (2) that I must be personally involved in the gathering process to ensure subjectivity, accountability, credibility, and humanity are integral qualities; (3) that my process incorporate the techniques, methods, traditions, and ways of knowing from the Stó:lō people; (4) that receptivity, reciprocity, collectivity, and relationship building be incorporated into this process; and finally (5) that the decolonizing work I accomplish through this process be used to transform and empower Indigenous/Settler relations.



Guided by Red Pedagogy and Biskaabiiyang (or in Halq'eméylem Hakweles), I actively pursued information from four specific areas: (1) my personal experiences in coming to understand self-determination for myself and my family; this included meeting with people, attending events, gatherings, ceremonies, dance, and songs that I engaged with in purposeful dialogue and experience regarding self-determination; (2) sxwóxwiyám (ancient stories) of Xexá:ls (our Transformers) and other oral teachings and traditions from the Stó:lō regarding the transformers and/or Indigenous governance; (3) Si:yá:m (respected ones), Sí:yólexwe (Old People), and Siyolexwálh (ancestors); and (4) Solh Téméxw (our world/land) including Halq'eméylem (our language).

I gathered my wool in a variety of different ways:

- I tape-recorded and transcribed my sessions with the Stó:lō Sí:yá:m I met with, whom I have come to refer to as my dissertation teachers: Ovide Mercredi, June Quip (Siyolia), Corky Douglas, Margaret Commodore, Otis Jasper, Dave Schaepe, Ken Malloway, Joe Hall, Tom Sampson (t'esalaq), and Patricia E. Kelly (Kw'i:tsetl Tatel).

- I kept a log of all the activities I participated in from the beginning of my PhD studies until the summer of 2011.
- I took handwritten notes at meetings and gatherings when I did not have my tape recorder with me or was unable to record.
- When able I tape-recorded and transcribed meeting notes where appropriate.
- I kept a fishing journal in which I wrote about my own fishing experiences and time on the river as well as my experiences and reflections during the court process and fish trial #47476 Kwitsel Tatel (Patricia Kelly vs. Regina).
- I kept a journal of my experiences and reflections which were related to issues of self-governance and/or self-determination.
- Lastly, I poured over material that had already been gathered that was related to my topic area and the Stó:lō. This included five PhD dissertations related to or on the Stó:lō: Ethel Gardner (2001) on language; David Schaepe (2009) on pit houses and social organization, Brian Thom (1995) on Hul'qumi'num connection to territory; David Angelbeck (2010) on warfare among the Coast Salish, and, most recently, Qwul'sih'yah'maht (2011) and the role of Indigenous women in community and governance. As well as two published dissertations, one written by Dr. Jo-Anne Archibald (2008) on Indigenous storywork and the other by Dr. Keith Carlson (2010) on Stó:lō identities and landscape; and one anthology edited by Dr. Bruce Miller (2007) with 10 different authors. I also used older information that had been gathered by early ethnographers such as Wilson Duff (1972), Diamond Jenness (1955), Wayne Suttles (1955) and Oliver Wells (1987).

Guided by the teachings from Grande (Red pedagogy) and Simpson (Biskaabiiyang) I did not do a “data analysis” of all that I learned and experienced; instead, I wove a story. My final dissertation is my family’s swóqw’elh in written form.

Section Summary

- Indigenous researchers working within confines of Western academia will often use metaphors to bridge gaps and worldview differences.

- Indigenous researchers gather their “data” from Indigenous sources and Indigenous ways of knowing.
- Indigenous researchers do not conduct “data analysis”; instead they tell a story as a legitimate way of knowing.

Research Challenges

“If this is your land, where are your stories?”
(Gitksan Knowledge Keeper)

Through Red Pedagogy, I filtered all of my gathered learnings and teachings through a Stó:lō worldview and came to realize the importance of *sxwōxwiyám* (ancient stories). *Sxwōxwiyám* acted as a glue and a way of ensuring validity and reliability. *Sxwōxwiyám* are a form of Stó:lō oral tradition that date back to the beginning of time. *Sxwōxwiyám* are just as much an art form as they are a history book, “the” archaeological dig of a career; *sxwōxwiyám* also encapsulate Stó:lō laws and justice, that is they speak to Stó:lō legal traditions and provide guidance on how to live together in a good way.

They also speak to place and boundaries that are fluid, flexible yet predictable. They validate Stó:lō rights and title to S’ólh Téméxw and our responsibilities to *sxexo:mes* (our sacred gifts). As noted by Brian Thom (1995) “senses of place such as those described in this study are the foundations of Aboriginal [sic] customary laws and practices which give rise to the existence of Aboriginal [sic] title.” Therefore in terms of Stó:lō governance and our right to self-determination *sxwōxwiyám* are vital, but only if we as Stó:lō people re-center them as legitimate and valid ways of knowing.

The use of *sxwōxwiyám* absolutely requires that they be used and viewed as they were intended and from within the importance of Stó:lō ways of knowing. I want to say that they are more than “just” stories, but that does not seem right because they are stories. What I prefer is that we come to see the importance of “stories” and “storytelling” as vital ways of coming to understand and make sense of our world (see, for example, Archibald, 2008; Qwul’sih’yah’maht, 2005; Simpson, 2011). It thus becomes important that they not be categorized or relegated to certain types of knowledge—for example, thinking that they apply only when providing moral guidance to children or that they be categorized as a single subject that stands alone. *Sxwōxwiyám* apply and are relevant to all subjects and disciplines.

That is, *swōxwiyám* are equally scientific as they are ethical, historical, political, economical, legal, and social. In fact there would be much more Stó:lō knowledge recorded and therefore preserved if early “amateur” ethnographers had understood the importance of “stories” not only to Stó:lō ontology but to Stó:lō epistemology as well. You can understand the frustration felt by contemporary Stó:lō researchers who, like me, often look to early recordings to fill in puzzle pieces only to find the recorder failed to record the “important stuff.” This frustration is clearly expressed in the following words from one of our contemporary Master Storytellers, Naxaxalhts’i (Sonny McHalsie):

... the other example is amateur ethnographer Oliver Wells. I just get so frustrated reading his transcripts because he was only interested in the language. So every single time he writes in his book, “oh, okay. That’s very ... that’s very nice! I’ll come back and talk to you about that.” Every time, you know the elder’s just going to tell him something, wants to tell him something that’s just *so important!* And then Wells cuts him off and says, “What’s the word for this?” That’s all he was collecting, the language. He didn’t realize that what these elders were trying to do was to provide him with a context that would enable him to understand.... If he had of been more interested in those stories and realized their importance he would have said “Yeah! Tell me that story....” But quite often you go through those interviews and you come to where he says “Oh that’s a nice story, I’ll come back to you” and of course he never does. (2007)

Reclaiming Territory Through Language

Another challenge as a direct result of the colonial process is the suppression of Indigenous languages and the current colonial habit of replacing Indigenous languages, even when available, with English ones. Early in my research program I was advised by my committee member Patricia Monture, “If you really want to understand something, learn about it in your own language.” It became important for me to use, and where not back in use yet, to research and find the proper names for important places, concepts, and people of S’ólh Téméxw. This is an extremely challenging and time-consuming undertaking by any stretch of the imagination. The marginalization, eradication, and devaluation of our Indigenous languages have taken their toll. Being an English-speaking Stó:lō person trying to research Stó:lō languages with only a

rudimentary understanding of linguistics was difficult. The complexities and differences in dialects added to the challenge.

Issues of Translation

The translation of Halq'eméylem concepts into English is another research challenge, not only because these two languages couldn't be more different, but also because Indigenous languages were to be eradicated via the colonial process and have been strongly influenced by Western worldviews. In terms of difference, Leroy Littlebear (2000) and Danny Moonhawk Alford share at least four ways in which Indigenous languages differ from the English language. Indigenous languages are verb-driven and extremely descriptive, that is Indigenous languages are focused on the “dancing” and not so much the “dancer.” English is noun driven. Indigenous languages are relational and reflect the ontological believe that everything is constantly in motion and animate. Indigenous languages are more about the sounds and activities of an experience than about a person, place or thing.

Within Indigenous worldviews and therefore our languages almost everything is considered to be alive and with spirit, that is animate, whereas English languages are more influenced by the inanimate. Indigenous languages tend not to distinguish between gender and tend not to use pronouns such as “he” and “she.” And lastly Indigenous languages differ in terms of use of tense, as Indigenous worldviews experience “time” differently than Europeans. A simple example would be when referring to deceased relatives. In English they would be referred to in past tense, as in my parents “were” whereas for the Stó:lō it is acceptable to still use present tense, as in my parents “are,” even though they have passed. Another example is that if time is experienced as cyclical as opposed to linear, this would be reflected in our verbal expressions of our experiences. What we would now express as the past would be seen as the future and even vice versa, making the use of past and future tense something much more than a grammatical representation (Alford, n.d.).

It isn't just differences in how we express our reality and our position in “time” or rather the ways in which we express our relation to time, if that is even something our language requires of us. Indigenous languages also have suffered due to the lack of understanding of linguists and ethnographers, who often missed important knowledge on and about the language under study due to Western worldview training and limitations.

For example, the Upriver Halkomelem dictionary compiled by linguist Brent Galloway (2009) translates *sxwōxwiyám* as “child’s fable, story, fairy tale, child’s story” which would be like defining Canada’s Constitution as “a neat little children’s story.” The Halq’eméylem concept “*sxwōxwiyám*” cannot be explained in English with a single line; it would take an entire book of English to fully explain this one Halq’eméylem concept.

Limitations of a Trader’s Language

I liken the English language, or at least my grasp of the English language, to the Chinook Jargon. The original Chinook language is spoken by the First Nations people living at the mouth of the Columbia River on the Washington state coast but a “jargon” of this language was developed to facilitate trade with other language speakers. The Chinook speakers did not want to teach others their Chinook language and so developed a “jargon” of it that could be shared among traders. The fact that the Chinook speakers did not want to share their language is very telling and an important part of how Indigenous languages are viewed among Indigenous peoples, who see their language as a part of their culture, as something that belongs to them, a gift.

The Chinook jargon is a rather crude language that is easy to learn, comprised mostly of words needed to exchange goods. Like English it is not specific to anyone’s territory (the original Chinook language was, of course, but the jargon was taught to anyone and everyone) does not tell you anything about the person speaking it, and is an entirely human-made language. The “English” language belongs to no one, and anyone can teach it to anyone else around the world.

Information pertaining to one’s relationships with territory and resources is perhaps one of the most important elements of Indigenous languages, which tend to be extremely descriptive, fluid, in constant motion, *and* tied to the territory from which they come. The Indigenous language therefore becomes integral to our ability to relate to and live with our environment in a harmonious, balanced, and sustainable way. As *ƚesalaq* (Tom Sampson, one of my dissertation teachers) explains:

It was once said when creator gave us our homeland at the beginning of time the creator also gave us our language so we would be able to relate with all other creations of life, like the land and all that is in it. The creator gave us a word to

relate to all, the water, ocean, lakes, rivers and also sacred air we breathe. The sacred belief of our people is every creation must be treated very sacred so it will always remain here on mother earth for our use. (2011)

In this sense language is seen as a “gift” from the creator, as part of *s̱e̱x̱o:mes*. Indigenous languages are therefore to be protected, carefully preserved, and respected.

Section Summary

- Indigenous ways of knowing such as *sxwōxwiyám* (ancient stories) need to be recentered and validated as legitimate ways of knowing and coming to make sense of our world even (especially) during colonial times.
- Indigenous ways of knowing require we reclaim our Indigenous languages.
- Indigenous ways of knowing are inextricably tied to our land and our Indigenous languages that describe and prove this intimate relationship.

Concluding Remarks

The benefits of using an Indigenous research methodology (IRM) by far outweigh the challenges, especially when the challenges are the direct result of colonial processes. As IRMs are designed to include processes of decolonization, I am confident challenges inherent to IRMs will eventually shift. From this case study it is evident that using an IRM when done properly can ensure research related to Indigenous Peoples and/or issues is valid, reliable and credible as it is grounded in Indigenous theory(s) and based upon Indigenous worldviews (ontologies) and ways of knowing (epistemologies).

While this case study purposely does not include my research findings, it is abiding by the IRM covenant that the “process” be more important than the “product.” My IRM process guided me in my personal journey of decolonization, it led me back to myself, it gave me an opportunity to re-centre and re-learn from Indigenous (*Stó:lō*) ways of knowing, and showed me what it “feels” like to experience self-determination and Indigenous governance even while living under a colonial regime.

Discussion Questions:

1. An Indigenous research methodology (IRM) requires that the researcher personally experience what is being researched, develop close relationships with knowledge keepers, and give back to the community; as such, IRM is based upon “subjective” knowledge as opposed to “objective” knowledge. Discuss the pros and cons of this methodology.
2. Identify four colonial impacts that may hinder Indigenous research methodologies.
3. What are some reasons Wenona might say “Using an Indigenous research methodology brought me back to myself, yet made me feel so lost”?
4. Since Wenona’s research concluded in 2012, important changes have happened, such as the conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2015 and, in 2021, the discovery of 215 children buried in unmarked graves at the Kamloops Residential school. How might these changes have helped or hindered Wenona’s research process?

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of the following is not an Indigenous way of knowing
 - a. Dreams
 - b. Ancestors
 - c. Bannock-making
2. Which of the following is an Indigenous theory?
 - a. Indigenous theory of Reconciliation
 - b. Indigenous theory of Resurgence
 - c. Indigenous theory of Red Pedagogy
3. Indigenous research is not
 - a. Rigid.
 - b. Based on territory.
 - c. Based upon relationships.
4. Red Pedagogy as a research method requires that the researcher
 - a. Walk the Red Road.
 - b. Filter information through an Indigenous perspective.

- c. Observe and only listen.
5. Indigenous languages are:
- a. Extinct.
 - b. Include past, present, and future tense.
 - c. Complex and complicated.

Further Reading

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