

5 Memory Comes Before Knowledge: Research May Improve if Researchers Remember Their Motives

Eber Hampton

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I am going to discuss my personal experiences with research, but first I wish to acknowledge that there are people here who are older, wiser, and more experienced than myself. I have to recognize that there are people who are younger and smarter than me too!

My name is Eber Lafayette Hampton, Jr. There is a history to my name. Each of the words that make up my name has meaning that is part of the history of the Chickasaw Nation. None of these words is Chickasaw, yet they all have a little of the history of our nation in them. In speaking today I have a narrow platform, however, because I do not speak for my nation. I speak for myself and so my platform is narrow. Despite this, my hope is that it will go at least most of the way around the room, and maybe all the way around the room. This is because I am going to talk about some things that I am trying to understand as another human being as I sit here in this

room with other humans, particularly people who have an identity, a nation to relate to, a culture and traditions to work within, and who remember these things and pay attention to them. All of this reminds me that I will try to talk to you from my narrow platform about myself regarding things that maybe are human things. Sometimes I may think I am talking about Chickasaw things or about First Nations things, but I do not know where these things end and when the discussion becomes one about human things.

My topic is research. I was a little torn by this topic, because I wanted to make a couple of general comments about the project and idea of a First Nations graduate program. Some of the things that I want to say about this are about hopes and fears, that is, what I would hope for a First Nations graduate program and what I would fear. The other speakers have done a good job talking about many of the hopes and fears, and I strongly agree with what has been said. I will not repeat them except to say we must underline the importance of language, spirituality, culture, and of a First Nations graduate program being a First Nations graduate program. I want to stress these points strongly.

As I was thinking about my topic, in the back of my mind I was asking, What do I have as a human being to contribute to this topic? I remembered one of my professors in graduate school who said, "Humans only have three things: time, space, and energy, and they want it." Because he happened to be a Black professor, I had an idea of who he meant by *they*. He went on to stress that all we really have is time, space, and energy. Me being me, I could never stop with just what the professor said. I always had to add something or subtract something from whatever was said, so I added to time, space, and energy the idea of spirit. Maybe this covers it: We've got time, space, energy, and spirit. For some reason I wanted to add one more thing, and this is something like feeling or emotion, that is, the feeling of being alive and the emotions that we feel every day. A long time ago one of my students told me that every classroom is an ocean of emotion, and it stuck in my head. In part this is because of the many times and many classrooms I've been in where, yes, there was an ocean of emotion under the surface. Because most of the teacher's time is spent trying to keep emotion under the surface in classrooms, I wanted to add emotion.

Thinking about a First Nations graduate program, what I will say comes from me as a Chickasaw person, but also as an administrator of a First Nations institution, as President of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College where we have 1,338 students this semester, about 400 of whom are in Saskatoon, another 400 in 11 different communities, and the rest in Regina. We have a particular kind of institution there, with people doing certificates and bachelor's degrees in 12 different academic areas. There is much to be said about the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), but that is not why I'm here today. What I have to say is

related to my being an administrator of a First Nations institution that exists because of the action of First Nations people, that is, governed by the First Nations government of Saskatchewan. The SIFC Act that establishes the college is an Act of the Legislative Assembly of Chiefs of Saskatchewan. The voting members of our board of governors include two students and 10 tribal council representatives appointed by their tribal councils. As a First Nations university/college SIFC is a full member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. This means that we have met the standards of the Eurocentric university system in Canada.

We have proved—and I have to say we have proved over and over again—that we can meet those standards. The problem that I have as a First Nations person, First Nations father, First Nations brother, First Nations grandfather, First Nations administrator, and First Nations educator is that those standards are too low. Eurocentric standards give us teachers who can't teach, social workers who contribute to the social problems, and the list goes on. The standards of non-First Nations university education are so low they do not serve the needs of our communities. The difficult—for me at times overwhelming—challenge becomes to articulate First Nations standards, to work toward meeting those standards, and to articulate First Nations standards for university education.

A friend of mine said, "I know a good word for Indians." I said, "What?" He said, "Relentless." We laughed, but there is a strong element of truth in this statement. If we were interested in the easy thing to do, we would not be at this conference. If I were interested in the easy thing to do, I would still be a drunk on the street; this would have been the easiest way to end my life. We have taken on a tremendous challenge, and we offer a tremendous challenge to all our students and to all our children. This is because we say to them, We want you to know everything that the non-First Nations university has to teach you, and we want you to be top notch at this. We also want you to know what you need to know to be a First Nations person of your nation and of your people. One language is not good enough for First Nations people; we have to know at least two. We expect high standards of ourselves, our children, our educators, and our students.

In thinking about research I am reminded that my friend Lionel told me that memory comes before knowledge. I spent a long time with him listening and talking about how memory comes before knowledge. When I remember my own experience with research—and research is central to graduate education—I remember that research is about learning. Some people say it is about the creation of knowledge; I'm not quite that arrogant. I have to say that for me research is about learning and so is a way of finding out things. To follow what Lionel told me and to start with memory, I am saying that memory comes before knowledge. When I think about my own research, my mind immediately jumps to a piece of research I did at the University of California in the late 1960s. The research

was the first draft of my dissertation on the psychology of human learning. I never wrote the second draft. The title was *A Computer Simulation of the Random Reinforcement Effect on Two Category Concept Identification*. This is my first major research memory and I can even say it fast! I also know what it means to about 10 people in the world besides myself. The computer simulation of the random reinforcement effect on two category concept identification was what I lived, ate, slept, and drank for about three or four years of my life. Why?

I had human beings spending about an hour sorting things into two categories. I knew which category they were supposed to go in. I lied to the human beings doing the sorting because I wanted to find out how humans dealt with lies. I didn't know that at the time. At the time I would have said that humans are efficient at learning under noisy conditions. Also, humans are good at learning and dealing with large amounts of misinformation, but computers are not. At that time if you put one little check in the wrong column on a computer program the whole computer crashed. Computers are a little better now. Computers and the existing theories of human learning at that time—that is, the late 1960s—predicted that a little misinformation would throw everything off.

Existing theories of learning at that time said, in two category concepts—mathematical theories of learning, the precise, unmessy theories of learning, stochastic models of learning—humans did not have a hope of learning anything because of too much misinformation. But then, experiments in the laboratory, even under tightly controlled, artificial conditions, showed that humans handle misinformation and handle it well. Misinformation has little effect on human learning. Give them some correct information and some misinformation, and they will learn the correct information.

I set out to correct the existing mathematical theories of learning. When the mathematics became intractable I turned to a computer simulation. I wrote a computer program that could handle misinformation and come up with the right answer. This is my story about why I was doing that research. But a more important question is why I was interested in how humans handle misinformation. Of a million different things in the world, when I chose a nice safe research topic so I could get my dissertation with no muss, no fuss, and no bother because all I had to do was run it through the computer and test a few people and write it up, why was I interested in how humans deal with misinformation? I wonder if you can guess.

Twenty-five years later, when I asked myself that question, I had already been through enough in my life that I figured out that safe, sterile, unmessy things were not that interesting. I preferred life. I had found that the cut-and-dried, rigid, cold, hard, precise facts are dead. What is alive is messy, and growing, and flexible, and soft, and warm, and often fuzzy. I preferred life to death. Why was I so fascinated by how people deal with misinformation? In the intervening years I had experienced ceremonies

with the Elders and sitting alone until an answer came; being willing to hear that answer, even if it is sometimes painful, or ugly. When the answer came it was in the form of a 6-year-old little Indian boy by the name of Eber, sitting at a desk in a classroom looking at a picture of an Indian on a page in a textbook. That is why I have had a lifelong interest in how humans deal with misinformation.

If I had known why, when I was a graduate student at the University of California, I would have written a very different dissertation. I probably would have finished it, and it would have been useful to me and to other people. Instead, I wrote a first draft that sat on a shelf. Every once in a while I would look at it, think about it, and think, Jeez, I'm a terrible person because I never finished that dissertation. Memory comes before knowledge. I had to find the memory of a 6-year-old little Indian boy named Eber before I knew.

The title of the talk I wanted to give today is "Motive and Method in First Nations Research." What started me on that topic was the observation and the experience of sitting for hours and hours and then some more in meetings in California, Minnesota, Boston, Alaska, and all over the world almost, except that I have never been out of North America. I think about all the meetings in the world and sitting in these meetings where non-Indian people discussed Indian education. Often—I think as a result of my upbringing and maybe a little bit of my culture—I would sit silently in a room full of non-Indian people talking about Indian education. Many times some interesting conversation emerged, sometimes useful conversation and sometimes even caring, occasionally, rarely, but, thank God, loving talk about Indian education.

I started scratching my head—I could say I lost my hair as a result—because I began to think of all the meetings I had sat in with other First Nations people, Indian people, Indigenous people, whatever we could call ourselves; sitting in all those other meetings and we never talked about white education. Don't we care what happens to our white brothers and sisters? They have put all this time and energy and effort into working on our education; what did we ever do about their education? I scratched my head over that for a long time, and I began to think about the motives. Why? By the time I thought about this I began to say, OK, when I start asking *why* about somebody else's behavior, I should ask *why* about my own. Never mind why they are doing it; they have their reasons; that is their problem. But the fact is that it slops over onto my kids' lives and has had a destructive effect on most First Nations lives. Most First Nations peoples' education, as defined by white people, has been destructive.

I have to solve my own problems. What is my motive? I am interested in other people's motives. I care about them, but first I have to find out what my own motive is. When I was on the Faculty at the University of Alaska, graduate students came to me with their research projects and I started asking them why: "Why are you interested in that?" I did not yet

know why I was interested in the random reinforcement effect on two-category concepts. I was still trying to figure out the answer to that, but I asked them in the hope that I might learn something.

A young white man told me he wanted to do a research project on the effect of group counseling on Indian students' self-esteem. He wanted to do his master's thesis on this topic, and I asked, "Why?" I said it nicely and told him that I was trying to figure out how I became interested in some of my own research topics and was thus curious to understand how others became interested in theirs. We talked and went round and round talking about the problems of the assessment for self-esteem, problems of what self-esteem means in the Eurocentric, psychological theory, and what self-esteem might mean in a traditional society. We talked about all kinds of things, and finally one day he said, "Well, the reason is I teach at this school over there, and I've got a whole bunch of Native students, and they keep getting sent to detention, and in detention all they do is sit there. And I think that if we could get some group counselors in, we would at least give them something to do while they are in detention, instead of detention. And maybe that will be better." I said, "That makes sense to me. How come you're interested in that?" We talked some more and he told of a memory. He said he was sent to detention all the time when he was in school; and he said it hurt. He did not say it exactly this way at first, but he eventually said, "It hurts my heart when I see those kids go down to detention and sit there." We talked some more and I tried to give him plenty of room, because he was talking about things that are not to be interfered with. I listened.

He had had his pretest-posttest experimental group and control group in place since day one. A few weeks after we had started talking, he asked me if it was all right to talk to the children about what he was doing. I said, "Yes, that may be a good thing to do." He wondered if it would contaminate his results. I asked whether he put human priority ahead of results, and he said Yes. A few weeks later he came back and said his students were writing about their experience and wanted to know if he could use some of their writing in his research, if he could quote them. I replied that he would have to get their permission and ask if they wanted their names included or not. His research was of benefit to those students, directly and immediately. Never mind writing a journal and then getting your research applied 10 years down the line if somebody reads it! That student's research became of immediate, direct benefit to those students because they ceased to be research objects; they became research participants.

The researcher learned that the research was of direct benefit to him as well. If research is about finding out about things, and if it is about learning, the researcher learns really useful information. The student wrote a good report, and his research changed because he stopped to think

about how and why he was interested in that topic. He found a memory that gave him knowledge.

I have many stories like this one.

One thing I want to say about research is that there is a motive. I believe the reason is emotional because we feel. We feel because we are hungry, cold, afraid, brave, loving, or hateful. We do what we do for reasons, emotional reasons. That is the engine that drives us. That is the gift of the Creator of life. Life feels. We do our research, as abstract and intellectual as it may be—whether it is a computer simulation of the random reinforcement effect on two-category concept identification or not—we do what we do for emotional reasons. Feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise, and suppress that feeling at our peril and at the peril of those around us. Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual, academic research is a goddamn lie, it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans—feeling, living, breathing, thinking humans—do research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to people around us.

I noticed the sign on the women's restroom door in the hallway. I thought about the man who mutilated that sign, and I thought about graduate education. The violence directed at women in this society that comes from fear is not my topic today. It affects my topic only because it made me think about the violence that is directed toward human beings in graduate school. I like the analogy of Cinderella's slipper because we are not Cinderellas: the slipper doesn't fit. The mutilation of human beings in graduate school is a continuation of the mutilation that starts in kindergarten.

Havighurst (1981) said that in this century there have been two goals for Indian education. These are assimilation and self-determination. I have written about different definitions of Indian education. I used the word *assimilation* as in *education for assimilation*, and it dawned on me what I was saying when I remembered talking about a college course in psychology of human motivation to my grandpa. We were studying the experiences of prisoners of war, concentration camps, and brainwashing and the effects of these on human motivation. Grandfather said that we were *prisoners of peace*. Some years later, I began to put it together and suddenly it clicked into place. This is what my education has been, brainwashing. It is not education—and as educators we need to know the difference between education and brainwashing. It is brainwashing when education is used to wipe out identity, language, culture, philosophy, and substitute something else for these. And we need to know that every educational act we do is either brainwashing or education that I am doing now.

Then I read the Cariboo Tribal's Council's (1991) paper on the residential schools experience; they did a useful, simple thing. They took the United Nations definition of genocide and discovered that 95% of what we

experience as education is genocide. What we experience fits the definition. One definition of genocide is killing people because they are members of a group, but there are three others, according to the United Nations definition. Here I am, a Chickasaw, an educated Chickasaw. It means I survived the brainwashing to some extent; I survived the genocide, physically. Now I am a qualified brainwasher. I can do to my students what was done to me. Memory comes before knowledge. Every person's life contains experiences and memories of these experiences. The way it works for me is that I forget those things until I unwrap them, until I actually roll out the sacred medicine bundle of my life and look for those memories. I pick them up and touch them and feel them. And each memory gives me knowledge.

When it came time to write the analytic paper that was required to get my doctorate from Harvard, I remembered *relentless is a good word for Indians*. I didn't get my doctorate at the University of California, so 10 years later I was at Harvard University starting again: *persistent*, though I went to Harvard for rest and relaxation. I had been working in Indian education for a while and needed a vacation. When it was time to write my dissertation I had a terrible writing block. I knew what had happened to me in grade 3 because I had located a memory of how my teacher had tried to kill my potential love for writing. I am sure it was not done consciously; she was just trying to teach me to write properly. In the process she almost killed my potential but, fortunately, relentless as Indian life is, she did not succeed. Once I found that memory, I could begin to write, mostly grant proposals. Motivated Indian writers write grant proposals. As I was trying to finish my doctorate at Harvard, there was a writing test I could not write. Several nights I tried praying, first standing up, then lying down, then sitting down, and finally on my knees. I did not like to kneel because I did not know if the Creator liked to see me on my knees. I thought the Creator might like to see me standing up, feeling like the Creator. You know, if it's my kid I don't want to see him on his knees. I want to see him proud of being a human being and feeling good about himself. But I didn't know how the Creator wanted to see me. I didn't care at that point; I would do anything, because whatever it was that wanted me to write that paper would not let go of me. I prayed to know what to do and to have what it takes to do it. I have been praying for that for years, ever since I stopped drinking. It seemed that I was meant to write this paper and I couldn't and wouldn't quit. So I got down on my knees a couple of times and said, "If you want me to do this, I've got to have some help."

A lot of different things happened, but I did find out that it was a memory that gave me the knowledge that gave me the power to finish that paper. The memory was of the first writing I ever had published. I took it to my Dad's place and handed it to him. It was the last time I ever saw my father alive, so in my crazy mixed up mind four or five years later, I connected writing to my father's death. I also felt I might be betraying my

people by getting a stamp of the beast from Harvard University. Perhaps I was selling out by getting an education, because the kind of education I was getting was so different from the kind that I got from Elders. As I went through all this cultural conflict over getting an education, it became clear I had a lot of support for getting a degree. When I was trying to write the Harvard paper, I discovered there was a little twist in my mind. *The last time I saw my Dad alive was when I had handed him that little book with my article in it.* When I found that memory, unwrapped it, and remembered how I had felt, I remembered how proud my Dad was and how he took it in his hand and said, "Wait here, I'm gonna go show Ed." He got up and went to the next house to show his buddy what I had done. So I had to do my emotional work. I had to feel what I really felt about my father. I had to honor those feelings and respect them, not try to change them or try to stuff them down. I had to be not somebody different than how the Creator made me, not feel something different than what the Creator made me to feel. I had to feel what the Creator gave me to feel. Remembering these feelings gave me the knowledge and power to finish writing that paper.

When I say memory comes before knowledge, I know I have been to many places and have not always had the luxury of feeling. I had to survive, and thank God I did. But if I want the full value of all those experiences I have lived through, then I have to unwrap the bundle. And I have to pick up the memory and feel what I really felt. A friend of mine who had been two years sober said she found out what she had when she did not have alcohol. I said, "What?" She said, "My true feelings." She went on to say, "I don't like them, but they're mine." So it goes on. And there are many of things that we could say to each other. I don't want to leave anything out, which is why I may talk all day just in the hope that I will not leave anything out. I do respect that there is a time and a place for everything, though. I appreciate the opportunity to talk today about things that are important to me. As far as I know, most of us feel and care. We do things for reasons, and those reasons are connected to how we feel. I know that, for me, the more I know about reality, the more on target I am. And part of reality is emotion.

Reference

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