

Editorial: Sharing Aboriginal Knowledge and Aboriginal Ways of Knowing

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The Canadian Journal of Native Education theme edition “Sharing Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal ways of knowing” is dedicated to two dear Elders of the First Nations House of Learning who passed to the Spirit World not too long: Elders Tsimilano, Dr. Vincent Stogan (June 2000) of the Musqueam Nation and Khot-La-Cha, Chief Dr. Simon Baker (May 2001) of the Squamish Nation. Tsimilano and Khot-La-Cha gave exemplary Elder leadership to students, faculty, and staff of the University of British Columbia and countless others outside the university. They each had learned a wealth of traditional cultural knowledge from their Elders, and through their life experiences they learned how to transform this knowledge into wisdom. When I think about the question “What is Aboriginal knowledge and what are Aboriginal ways of knowing?” I think about how these two Elders “lived” this question. In their Elder years, they took on the responsibility of teaching others through example, through their interactions with individuals, leading ceremonies and cultural events, giving public talks, and guiding many community organizations. I was fortunate to spend invaluable time with these two wonderful individuals. They both taught me about the importance of understanding and living the cultural values of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence. Through example, they also taught me about the importance of developing and using ritual,¹ repetition, and relationships in order to know and live these values and to appreciate Aboriginal knowledge.

In my many talks with Chief Khot-La-Cha, he reinforced the importance of seeking out Elders who had acquired traditional knowledge, especially traditional ecological knowledge, and those who took on the important responsibility of teaching the younger generations. Special connections to the land—to “Mother Earth”—help in strengthening our cultural identities. It is important to recognize the spiritual power of particular places and the healing nature (physical and emotional) of the environment. I also learned to appreciate how stories engage us as listeners and learners to think deeply and to reflect on our actions and reactions. Simon told many of his life experience stories using this method, which is pedagogy. I called this pedagogy *storywork*² because the engagement of story, storyteller, and listener created a synergy for making meaning through the story and making one *work* to obtain meaning and understanding. Humor was another important dimension of quality learn-

ing. Simon often set an atmosphere where participants laughed, had some fun, while engaging in important forms of discussion. He used story, song, and humor as part of his cultural ritual in creating a conducive listening and learning environment.

Tsimilano was a much-respected spiritual teacher and mentor. He was given spiritual healing gifts and also learned the spiritual practices of the Salish people. Vincent opened many gatherings with deeply felt prayer in order to establish a respectful, reverent learning atmosphere. I learned the importance of a prayerful way of being through watching Tsimilano and having many "good talks" with him over the years. His love for people and for the cultural ways was evident in his actions and words. He was sought by many who needed spiritual guidance and support. His lifelong partner Edna, or "Mum" as we call her, worked along with him. He often said, "There is always room for one more to come into the circle" of learning and sharing. Even though he was always on the go because he was asked to help many individuals, their families, and various organizations, he always made time to visit at the UBC First Nations Longhouse because he cared for those who worked there. He demonstrated the value of developing and maintaining respectful relationships: people mattered, and taking time to talk to, listen, and work along with others was another form of pedagogy.

Khot-La-Cha and Tsimilano exuded love for Aboriginal culture and for people. Describing their pedagogy for teaching others about Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing about culture does not adequately portray the richness of their teachings. As I reflect, I can only say now that they used cultural ritual that included aspects of prayer, ceremony, story, and song. Repetition of these rituals created a learning atmosphere where participants came to appreciate the significance of their ritual. They developed mentoring relationships with those who wished to learn about Aboriginal culture. Ritual, repetition, and relationship was their pedagogical framework for helping others understand Aboriginal knowledge. They lived the values of cultural respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence, and these values became a part of the learning framework.

I offer what I have learned from these Coast Salish Elders. As educators, we need to continue sharing our experiences, reflections, and perspectives about cultural frameworks that facilitate a process of learning about and then appreciating Aboriginal knowledge or epistemology. This theme edition is a humble beginning for delving into the important topic of Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal ways of knowing. A call for research papers on this topic resulted in the articles contained in this edition. The authors share their research experiences, reflections, and understandings regarding the theme.

Fyre Jean Graveline, Metis academic, shares her life experience reflections about the challenges of using traditional knowledge and practice,

such as the spiritual cleansing of Smudge in the university classes that she has taught. Her narrative is autoethnographic, wholistic, and poetic in nature. She shares the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual lessons that can occur from the use of the Smudge. Graveline raises critical questions about academic freedom, cultural freedom, inclusivity, and diversity in relation to using an important cultural practice in a university context. She highlights the teachings of Elders and other academics who gave guidance on these matters. Graveline's piece is not only meant to challenge thought and practice, but to fully engage the reader in her pedagogical philosophy. Her story follows the Elder storytellers' process of making us search deep within our beliefs and to courageously journey to find the answers to the question of how to implement Aboriginal traditional knowledge and practice respectfully in various learning institutions.

Charles Menzies, an Indigenous anthropologist, reflects on the challenges and possibilities that his discipline presents to Indigenous people. He identifies personal, political, and institutional problems that have plagued research in relation to Indigenous people. His reflections see anthropology, and particularly the role of anthropologists, as offering three approaches that may be respectful to Indigenous people: (a) anthropologist as objective ombudsman; (b) anthropologist as insider; and (c) anthropologist as activist. Menzies also shares a process framework that he has used to create and maintain respectful research relationships with First Nations in British Columbia. Most important, Menzies calls for ensuring that decolonization is addressed in the research process. Anthropology has often left a legacy of mistrust among many Indigenous communities, and we must work past this legacy to find an Indigenous anthropology that is respectful and academically rigorous. Serious reflections and examinations such as Menzies' serve us well in working toward an Indigenous anthropology.

Carl Johnson provides a dual interpretation of European scholars and members of the Nlha7kapmx Nation regarding an important traditional story of the "Three Bears." He is an academic trained in the European tradition and is of Nlha7kapmx ancestry. Johnson shows the limitations of the European interpretations, which focus on explanations of the physical world that make the First Nations seem as if they had a "simplistic" science. Johnson demonstrates the power of the story by focusing on the connection, relatedness, and relationship of land to people. Early ethnographers such as Teit, Boas, and Hill-Tout provided valuable documentation of the oral traditions of the Nlha7kapmx people. Elder storytellers show that the "Three Bears" story is still a vibrant part of their oral tradition today. Collectively, the documented work of the ethnographers, the memories and accounts of the Elders give the current generation opportunity to learn and to explore the Nlha7kapmx meanings of the stories that help develop their cultural identity and connection to the land.

Carl Johnson provides a fine example of Aboriginal story pedagogy that educators can build on.

Delores van der Wey shares her teaching and research experiences of conducting a cultural study with her grade 4/5 classroom about Secwepemc/Shuswap people of the central interior of British Columbia and a novel study about residential school experiences from a child's remembrances (Seepeetza, Sterling, 1992). She beautifully weaves together the themes of cultural identity, history of the residential school era, and the pedagogical value of quality experiential learning. Delores van der Wey also shows how her roles and identities of being a graduate student, a teacher, and a person of Coast Salish and Haida ancestry influenced her pedagogy and research. Her work is important because it shows how understanding the residential school through a novel study, talking to the author, and actually visiting the former residential school site occur. She presents important pedagogical considerations for conducting such experiential learning. Parental involvement during the novel study and on the field trip is important so that they can see First Nations curriculum in action and witness how children develop critical thinking skills about such a sensitive topic as the residential school effects. The poignant reflections of the students demonstrate the benefit of journal-writing as part of the critical thinking process.

Linda Goulet presents parts of two teachers' (one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal) stories about their teaching approaches that they believed were successful with Aboriginal children they taught. Goulet sought out teachers whom others recognized as being effective teachers and learned from their stories and perspectives, which is an important Aboriginal way of learning. Goulet demonstrates an effective use of research literature that emphasizes the importance of culture and relationships with community and addresses colonization and power relations as a framework for the teachers' pedagogy. Theory and practice are brought together in meaningful ways so that as educators we are exposed to real teaching experiences that work for the First Nations contexts of the teachers, their students, and the community. Goulet's work also shows how non-Aboriginal teachers can become successful with First Nations learners. It is refreshing to read about teaching that is successful, despite the mantle of colonization effects. It is not ignored, but dealt with in culturally relevant ways. We need more studies that show Aboriginal success in pedagogy, curriculum, and policy.

Reviews of two books that present Aboriginal knowledge from Huron-Wendat and Cree perspectives conclude this edition. Ken Schramm reviews *Huron-Wendat: The Heritage of the Circle* by Georges E. Sioui. Rosalyn Ing reviews *ah-ayitaw isi e-ki-kiskeyihtahkik maskihkiy. They Knew Both Sides of Medicine: Cree Tales of Curing And Cursing told by Alice Ahenakew* by H.C. Wolfart and Freda Ahenakew. The reviewers conclude that these books would be beneficial for learning about Aboriginal specific

history, language, and philosophy. The scholarly authors are to be commended for bringing us into their cultural worlds in respectful and engaging ways.

I end this editorial by sharing some teachings from Khot-La-Cha and Tsimilano that have helped me create a beginning understanding about the nature of Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal ways of knowing.

Khot-La-Cha often said, "Sit down and listen, that's the thing our Ancestors used to say." He learned to listen to his Elder relatives. For him this listening included showing respect to Elders, spending time with them on the land, and learning cultural values, philosophy, and practices. In Khot-La-Cha's Elder years, he talked about "coming full circle" in his life cycle and that he was willing to share his knowledge as long as he kept his TB under control: "too much bannock." He loved to hear people laugh, and then he would begin his story.

Tsimilano taught us at the UBC First Nations Longhouse to join hands in prayer. In joining hands he asked us to extend our left palm upward to symbolize reaching back to receive the teachings (knowledge) of the Ancestors and then to extend our right palm downward to signify giving these teachings to others, especially the younger generations. In this way of joining hands we connect to the Creator, to each other, to those yet to come, and to the knowledge of our Ancestors. In joining our hands together in a circle, we make strong the circle of learning, sharing, and caring.

All my relations. Ho!

Notes

¹The term *ritual* in this context means a cultural pattern of activity used to establish an environment conducive to listening and learning. Tsimilano and Khot-La-Cha each had a distinctive cultural ritual.

²See Archibald (1997). The storywork pedagogy is a process-oriented approach where the learner engages in the story to find answers and meaning. The subjective meaning is often not evident until the learner engages in and works through the story process.

References

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