

# ***Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi':*** **My Journey to a Tahltan Research Paradigm**

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*As a First Nations student, educator, and researcher, I articulate my journey that has taken me from a Western academic perspective to a Tahltan world view. This article is based on the process I went through while writing the methodology paper for my doctoral candidacy exams. The Tahltan research paradigm that I have developed—grounded in Tahltan epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy—is based on the connection that Tahltan people have with our Ancestors, our traditional territory, and our language. It involves receiving the teachings of our Ancestors, learning and knowing these teachings, and sharing these teachings with our people. By using a Tahltan research process, I hope that my research will be transformative and positive, respectful and honorable, and will be relevant and useful not only for my people, but for the larger Indigenous community as well.*

## *Introduction*

My Tahltan name is *Edosdi*, which means “someone who raises up children and pets.” I am a member of the Tahltan Nation and my people are from Telegraph Creek and Iskut. I am a member of the Crow clan, our territory is Tlabonotine, and the Frog is our crest. As a Tahltan educator, I take my role as a teacher seriously; “raising up” our children to be proud of who they are as Aboriginal people is not only important to me, it is my responsibility. The Tahltan research paradigm that I have developed—grounded in Tahltan epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy—is based on the connection the Tahltan people have with our Ancestors, our traditional territory, and our language. It involves receiving the teachings of our Ancestors, learning and knowing these teachings, and sharing these teachings with our people. Who I am has been influenced by what I have learned from my Elders and has helped me to see the world through my Ancestors’ eyes, a view I did not have growing up. This paradigm shift has helped me to understand who I am as a Tahltan and how the teachings of my Elders and Ancestors can be used to carry out respectful and useful research in my roles as student, educator, and researcher. My journey involves moving from the Western academic perspective that I have grown up with to the Tahltan world view I am coming to know and that feels right to me—*Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi'*. In order to articulate this paradigm shift, I need to locate myself in the research to articulate why I feel the need to do such work and how I have come to be on this journey, and to show how such research will be relevant and useful to my people. It is vital that I not only tell of my research journey, but that I also honor all

my teachers—Ancestors, Elders, family members, friends, university professors, and fellow graduate students—who have helped me and given me gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and support along the way.

### *Research Terminology and Definitions*

Before I outline my journey, I need to articulate how I make sense of the concept of paradigm, as well as other research terminology and definitions. I grew up on the coast of British Columbia playing in rainforests, so I visualize diverse clearings or openings between majestic cedars as diverse viewpoints or perspectives. If I move to another clearing, I can see the world from another perspective or world view. Using this analogy for research, I may be able to see diverse methodologies from diverse clearings (paradigms), or I may be able to see similar methodologies with diverse names from the diverse clearings (paradigms). I can use methods from other paradigms as long as I understand my own epistemology and have a solid foundation in it. Only then can I say that I am using an Indigenous research paradigm as opposed to just doing research from an Indigenous perspective, but within a Western research framework.

A research paradigm is a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that go together to guide your actions as to how you're going to go about doing your research. (Wilson, 2001, p. 175)

Cree scholar Shawn Wilson succinctly lays out what is involved in a research paradigm and then goes on to list four aspects that make up such a paradigm: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. Ontology can be defined simply as "what knowledge is" (Creswell, 2003, p. 6) or "assumptions about the nature of reality" (Rigney, 1997, p. 109), or a way of being (Wilson). Basically, it involves what people believe to be real in their world. From there an epistemology would encompass how people think or how they think about their reality), or simply as "how we know knowledge" (Creswell, p. 6). Wilson then goes on to define methodology as a process that allows your ways of thinking, or your epistemology, to learn more about your reality. Creswell defines methodology as "the process for studying knowledge" (p. 6). What seems to set diverse research paradigms apart is their axiology (Wilson). An axiology is "a set of morals or a set of ethics" (p. 175), and ethically defining and deciding what research is worthy of carrying out differs depending on the research paradigm. For example, the axiology of an Indigenous research paradigm would involve the research being useful for its people:

An Indigenous methodology means talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship? The axiology or morals need to be an integral part of the methodology so that

when I am gaining knowledge, I am not just gaining in some abstract pursuit; I am gaining knowledge in order to fulfill my end of the research relationship. This becomes my methodology, an Indigenous methodology, by looking at relational accountability or being accountable to *all my relations*. (p. 177)

In my master's thesis, I wrote about validity and how it can be seen as a strength of qualitative research when it is used to establish whether the results are accurate from the perspective of the individuals involved such as the researcher, the participant, or the reader of such a study (Creswell, 2003). However, as Wilson (2001) states above, more important to our people than terms such as *validity* and *reliability* is answering to our people, our Elders, our Ancestors.

Indigenous people need to do Indigenous research because we have the lifelong learning and relationship that goes with it. You are not just gaining information from people; you are sharing your information. You are analyzing and you are building ideas and relationships as well. Research is not just something that's out there: it's something that you are building for yourself and for your community. (p. 179)

### *From a Western to an Indigenous Research Paradigm*

This shift in research paradigms has become apparent in the literature of Indigenous scholars. For example, Steinhauer (2002) writes,

It is exciting to know that finally our voices are being heard and that Indigenous scholars are now talking about and using Indigenous knowledge in their research. I think it is through such dialogue and discussion that Indigenous research methodologies will one day become common practice, for it is time to give voice to and legitimize the knowledge of our people. (p. 70)

From my reading of the research journeys of other Indigenous scholars, there appears to be a continuum that moves between Western paradigms and Indigenous paradigms in regard to research being done for, with, and by Indigenous peoples. It is important to point out that this continuum is not based on time, that is, Indigenous researchers do not necessarily start out at one end and move to the other end, and that Indigenous researchers are still carrying out research at all points along this continuum. It is important to highlight the varied ways that research can be embarked on that can be transformative and make a positive difference in the lives of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous scholars have pushed the boundaries of research in the academy in order to give our people the opportunity to choose a research methodology along that continuum that is respectful and useful. In the past, most research that involved Indigenous people was usually carried out by non-Aboriginal academics. This began to change once Indigenous people began to enter the academy. Indigenous researchers were now doing research, but were using Western methodologies and the tools of the academy, the only tools then available to them. A shift in this continuum has had Indigenous researchers using Western methodologies, but they often frame them in Indigenous perspectives (Smith, 1999). Many Western methodologies are seen to be more in

line with the world view of First Nations peoples. For example, methodologies such as participatory action research or community action research involve the participants and/or the community in most aspects of the research. These Western methodologies arose after years of Western academics not doing collaborative work with people whom they researched. Many Indigenous scholars have looked to critical and feminist methodologies as a way to carry out relevant and useful research because these strategies of inquiry parallel our journey of wanting voice, wanting change, and wanting to empower our people (Archibald, 1997; Menzies, 2001; Rigney, 1997). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, writes about the importance of Indigenous researchers looking at both critical and feminist approaches to research, and she points to Harding's (1987) work and the feminist perspective on research. In her doctoral dissertation *Coyote Learns to Make a Storybasket: The Place of First Nations Stories in Education*, Sto:lo scholar Jo-ann Archibald (1997) writes about her struggle to pick a methodology that she felt would be respectful of First Nations people and be of use to her people. Archibald states, "I was challenged to bring together a First Nations epistemology and academic research methodology" (p. 14), so she chose to use critical ethnography. Scholars such as Linda Tuhiwahi Smith and Jo-ann Archibald have paved the way for Indigenous researchers following them to feel free to broaden the horizons of research to bring in methodologies that come from our world view. Shifts in this continuum have been necessary in order for us to be part of the research process in a way that respects who we are and our ways of knowing. However, Anishnabe doctoral student Kathy Absolon talks about this continuum and how in the end no matter how Western methodologies seem to support our Indigenous methodologies, they do not come from our world view.

I believe that if we look at some of the methodologies along the continuum that are less oppressive, they might be supportive of Indigenous methodologies or they might even be in alliance with Indigenous methodologies, but they are still not Indigenous methodologies. They happen to come from their paradigm, and their reference point and while they might fit they are not based in Indigenous thinking. They are not based in spirit and where spirit comes from. (cited in Kovach, 2004, p. 125)

Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2001) has stated how important it is to move from an Indigenous research perspective to an Indigenous paradigm:

We need to go beyond this Indigenous perspective to a full Indigenous paradigm. Our ontology, epistemology, axiology, and our methodology are fundamentally different.... Indigenous research needs to reflect Indigenous contexts and world views: that is, they must come from an Indigenous paradigm rather than an Indigenous perspective. (p. 176)

Instead of looking for a methodology from a Western research perspective that seems to fit into an Indigenous perspective (such as participatory action research, community action research, critical ethnography, phe-

nomenology, or narrative inquiry) or examining what Aboriginal cultural protocols are in regard to research and then trying to match this with a Western academic methodology, I need to look at my people's world view, cultural protocols, language, and relationships and then name that methodology.

*And Then to a Tahltan Research Paradigm*

In regard to coming up with a Tahltan research paradigm, it began with my Master of Science thesis (Thompson, 2004), which was based on my work with the Gitga'at community of Hartley Bay that made connections between Tsimshian children and their Elders through a research project on traditional plant knowledge. This project helped me to refine my understanding of my role as a First Nations educator. As a student I want to learn as much as possible about my people's ways of knowing, our culture, our language. As a teacher I want to ensure that this knowledge and wisdom are passed on to the younger generations, which is part of my doctoral research. As a researcher I want to ensure that I carry out research that encompasses my duties and responsibilities as a teacher and student and that is useful to my people. In terms of this research journey that I have embarked on, I have come to realize that being a researcher in Western academia can be different from being involved in research in an Aboriginal context. From a Western research perspective, the gathering of knowledge is often a quest for knowledge for knowledge's sake, and such a pursuit is often at an individual level. However, from an Aboriginal perspective, research involves participating, sharing, and using the knowledge and wisdom that is learned for the betterment and empowerment of a community (Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, & MacKay, 1998). The intergenerational transmission of knowledge and wisdom can also be considered a part of Aboriginal research, as are the Aboriginal people's relationships with their own people, other people, and the environment.

One major difference between the dominant paradigms and an Indigenous paradigm is that the dominant paradigms build on the fundamental belief that knowledge is an individual entity: the researcher is an individual in search of knowledge, knowledge is something that is gained, and therefore knowledge may be owned by an individual. An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. (Wilson, 2001, pp. 176-177)

Although Indigenous peoples share similar world views, each Indigenous group or Nation is unique in its own ways, so it is important to set Indigenous research paradigms in specific cultures and/or Nations. In her dissertation *Searching for Arrowheads: An Inquiry Into Approaches to Indigenous Research Using a Tribal Methodology With a Nêhiyaw Kiskêiyhtamowin Worldview*, Cree scholar Maggie Kovach (2006) interviewed Maori scholar Graham Smith about emerging Indigenous research paradigms. He states,



I have been trying to encourage various indigenous Canadians to develop indigenous theorizing that is particular and located in their own landscapes. In other words, to develop the confidence [to] put their own tribal nuances around it. That is, to begin to name our own world in our own cultural terms. (p. 160)

As a Tahltan researcher, I have come to know how vital it is to use a methodology that originates not only from an Indigenous perspective, but more specifically from a Tahltan world view. *Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi'* is a Tahltan term that one of my Elders used in regard to my first visit to Tahltan territory. Peggy Campbell, a fluent Tahltan speaker, said that it described how I felt at home in the traditional territory of my grandparents and mother, even though it was the first time I had been there. Peggy said that the literal meaning is, "their roots are from that Tahltan village" (literally: *kehe'*—village; *hede kehe'*—it's their village; *hotzi'*—from: *kahidi'*—roots.) *Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi'* explains how people are connected to their territory; that their roots are there, and their ancestors are in them. Peggy describes it as the relationship of a person with his or her traditional territory and people. After reading articles on research and methodology by such Indigenous scholars as Hanonono (1999), Absolon and Willett (2004), Wilson (2001), Atleo (2004), Bastien (1999), and Smith (1997), it came to me that *Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi'* could be seen as a Tahltan research paradigm, and in particular an epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy. From a *Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi'* paradigm, epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy are all intertwined and connected like threads in a blanket. This Tahltan research paradigm involves the teachings of our Ancestors, learning and knowing these teachings, and sharing these teachings with our people.

Over the last two decades I have begun to understand, really to know what it means to be connected to my Ancestors. A few years ago I received a wonderful gift from one of my Elders, Rosie Dennis. Rosie was one of my first Tahltan teachers; she taught me how to dance traditionally, and she taught me about our language through songs and stories. In summer 2005 Rosie told my grandmother, her childhood friend, about a dream in which her father had given her a song and instructed her to give it to a Crow. Rosie had decided to give it to me because she said I knew a lot about our Tahltan ways. She sang the song in both Tahltan and English and explained why she chose to give the song to me rather than other people in the Crow clan who also wanted this song.

Our people, you're going to hear about it. They tell me, "Give me that song." No, I wouldn't. Cause I want she ... she be well educated of Tahltan, her. I hear so much of her, about her, you know. She can talk Tahltan.

[Rosie gives an introduction to song in Tahltan and then in English]:

My dad, I dreamed this song, my dad sing it to me. Bunch of people coming behind me and he tell me, "My little girl, Kishegwet, you give it away, this song. But don't give it to Wolf, you give it to Crow, like me, this song. So I'm gonna sing it to you. I hope you understand what all I say." "Okay, Dad," I said. And he starts singing. So I give it to Mrs. Callbreath's granddaughter, that's who I give it to. Judy. Okay, I'm going to sing it ...

[Rosie sings song in Tahltan and then in English]:

My youngest brother's comin'. My youngest brother's comin'. Where's my oldest sister?  
Where's my oldest sister?

That the way this song go. That's how we call it, dream song. And I give it to my little niece, my husband Freddy's niece, own this song. So I hope everybody enjoy it when she sing it in a party or whatever.

This song is a great honor, and I am still humbled by such a gift. What makes this song even more sacred is that Rosie passed away 10 days after bestowing such an honor on me. It is from this experience and many other Tahltan learning experiences that has led to the development of a Tahltan research paradigm that honors my Ancestors and our connection to the land and our language.

With this Tahltan methodology I will not only be learning from my Elders, but I hope to use their knowledge and wisdom to carry the research in new directions. The methodology will be experiential in that it will involve intergenerational learning experiences such as picking berries, fishing, working in a smokehouse, or tanning a moosehide. This Tahltan methodology is often iterative such that I will learn from my Elders, then work with our young people, bringing what I have learned to this setting/situation (e.g., Tahltan summer science camp, working with school classes during school year). I would also provide opportunities for the two generations to work together. Much of what I have learned over the last two decades would also be brought into what I do with the youth. I need always to go back to the Elders to ensure that I am on the right path in regard not only to giving voice to my Tahltan Ancestors, but also to ensure that strong connections are being built and/or maintained between our Elders and youth, which includes learning about the land through language and oral traditions. In his article "Aboriginal Epistemology," Cree scholar Willie Ermine (1999) writes: "Our Aboriginal languages and culture contain the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors" (p. 104). Ermine goes on eloquently to state:

We need to experience the life force from which creativity flows, and our Aboriginal resources such as language and culture are our touchstones for achieving this. It is imperative that our children take up the cause of our languages and cultures because therein lies Aboriginal epistemology, which speaks of holism. (p. 110)

Maori scholar Graham Smith has said that Indigenous research needs to be transformative and positive (personal communication, April 28, 2007), and Indigenous Australian scholar Lester Rigney (1997) states, "Indigenous people now want research and its designs to contribute to the self determination and liberation struggles as defined and controlled by their communities" (p. 109). An Indigenous research process would involve our people (Elders, community members, children) at all stages; it would be respectful; it would involve the teachings of our knowledge and wisdom; and it would involve giving a voice to our Ancestors and our land (Kenny, 2000). In my research I seek a Tahltan voice, a voice that

would not only allow for the transmission of cultural knowledge between generations, but that would also help our people to adapt to complex changes in our social, environmental, and educational worlds.

Stevenson (2000), in her doctoral dissertation, speaks to the teachings she received from community members going beyond that of just research.

The framework and foundations of Chapter five is based on *nēhiyawiwīhtamawākana*, Cree teachings, which come from many sources—family, friends, teachers, recorded oral history collections, and a handful of Cree writings. Each posed unique methodological challenges in the context of writing of this dissertation. The lessons from family, friends, and teachers, along with my own experientially-gained insights, began long ago before this dissertation was imagined. According to Cree teachings, because they were given, this cumulative knowledge-bundle is now mine to use and transmit in a manner that respects its integrity and protocols. (p. 14)

In regard to my doctoral research, using all the interviews, transcripts, audiotapes, and videotapes of my Elders sharing their knowledge and wisdom with me from the last two decades, I felt that there might be concerns in terms of meeting the standards of ethics outlined by the university about research involving human participants. How would I bring in this valuable knowledge and wisdom while adhering to the University of Victoria's research guidelines? As well, one of my Elders had offered to teach me Tahltan, and my committee wondered if I could even begin to embark on this research process before I had received permission from the university. However, as Stevenson has stated, the knowledge and wisdom I have been given are a gift from my people and so is much more than just research data. Having Peggy Campbell offer to teach me Tahltan is a gift of honor, not just a process that I want to document for research purposes. This transmission of knowledge and wisdom that my Elders have imparted to me for the past two decades is all part of being a Tahltan learner. The research that I will be doing specifically for my doctoral program will involve interviews with Elders in which I will ask them specific questions about the transmission of knowledge and learning about our ways of knowing through our language, which will involve gaining approval from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Committee. However, from a Tahltan research world view, this is just a small part of the whole process. My research began in 1991 when I began my true education with my Elders, and it will continue long after I complete my doctoral degree. As a Tahltan, I need to ensure that I honor the gifts given to me by my Elders and Ancestors, which involves letting people know who my teachers are and what they have taught me when passing on these valuable gifts of knowledge and wisdom to other generations. This song came to me by way of a dream from one of my Crow Ancestors. For a Tahltan, there is no higher ethics review committee than that.



*Learning Who I am as a Tahltan*

It is important to outline how I have come to this point in my journey. In the years before I became aware of my Ancestors, I was raised in mainstream Canadian society where I excelled academically, athletically, and socially. Although I felt accepted by my peers and society, when I look back I can now see that there was an underlying current of racism. Many incidents in my formative years made me aware that I was First Nations, but they were often accompanied by a latent sense of shame. These instances usually just highlighted that I was Aboriginal, but gave me no answers to what that really meant or to who I was. If I did not know who I was as a First Nations person, then there was no way that I could be connected to my Ancestors.

My first inkling that I was First Nations came in summer 1970 when I was 5 years old. I was wearing my long brown hair in braids, I was tall and skinny, and my skin was brown. I was playing with my sisters when a girl new to the neighborhood came up to me and asked me, "Are you an Indian?" I honestly did not know because I did not know what an Indian was. Now why did I not know that I was a Tahltan, or for that matter an "Indian"? We did not learn about this at school, and we certainly did not discuss it at home. The only times I recall learning about First Nations people in any depth was in grades 4 and 10. In the grade 4 social studies curriculum, we learned about the Plains or Prairie Indians, mainly because they were seen to be the stereotypical *Indians* with their horses, feather headdresses, tomahawks, and peace pipes. We did not learn about the Tsimshian, the First Nation on whose territory my school was situated.

In high school, the grade 10 social studies curriculum included a unit on the fur trade. One of the assignments involved writing a paragraph on the interdependency between the fur traders and the Natives. Similar to the earlier curricular example, the fur trade focused on a part of Canada far removed from coastal British Columbia. I diligently wrote my paragraph outlining all the points listed in the textbook that "proved" that both the fur traders and the Natives depended on each other for their survival. I am sure that in 1980 such a perspective taken by the mainstream education system about Aboriginal peoples was seen to be both progressive and positive. However, a friend of mine looked at it from another perspective. He wrote a paragraph where he stated that there was no interdependency between the two groups and that if it were not for the Native people, the fur traders would not have survived. I was so amazed with this idea—not so much with the idea that the Natives did not need the fur traders to survive, but that he had come up with that idea outside what was in the textbook had. I remember thinking, "Why didn't I think of that?" especially because I was First Nations and my friend was not. This is a perfect example of what a well-trained student I was in this Western academic school environment in regard to ingesting whatever I read from the text-

books and what my teachers told me in order to get the A. I knew how to jump through the hoops, and I definitely stayed within the confines of this box, unlike my friend.

When I was a young adult in university, a friend asked me about my ethnicity. I recall listing all the various Caucasian bloods and then ending it with "and Native." I still remember how my voiced trailed off quietly when ending that sentence. I felt ashamed that I was First Nations, but did not really know why. As well, although I now knew that I was Native, I still did not know who my people were or where they were from.

After 1985, when the Indian Act was amended and Bill C31 was added, my maternal grandparents and parents began looking into getting their Indian status reinstated. During this bureaucratic process, I noticed that my grandparents began to share more and more about their Tahltan heritage. Their willingness to share their culture sparked my desire to learn about who I was as a Tahltan person, and it was then that my true education began.

By 1991 my siblings, myself, and my parents and grandparents were officially considered Status Indians. This was also the year when I first visited Tahltan territory with my grandparents. Around that same time I was reading Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*. Amy Tan was born and raised in the United States to parents who had come from China. I recall reading about her background where Tan wrote about taking a trip with her mother to China for the first time in 1987. The part that struck me and that has stayed with me was that although she had never been to China before, when she finally visited the homeland of her parents she felt as if she was home. I had the same feeling when I took my first trip to Telegraph Creek in 1991. However, unlike in Tan's experience, I did not have to travel to another country. My maternal grandparents and paternal grandmother were not immigrants; their people and their Ancestors before them had been living in Tahltan and Gitksan territories from time immemorial.

In 1992 I was accepted into Simon Fraser University's First Nations Language Teacher Education program, and I began to learn my Tahltan language in an academic setting that honored my culture and people's ways of knowing. I once again took my grandparents back to Telegraph Creek that summer, and later that year in my Granny and Grandpa's kitchen, Peggy Campbell used the term *Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi'* to describe my experience. In 1994 I completed my Bachelor of Science degree and professional teaching certificate. I began teaching adult education at a First Nations private postsecondary institute where I really began to examine and understand what traditional ecological knowledge was and attempted to find ways of accommodating it in the science courses I was teaching. Over the last decade I have taught courses in math, science, and First Nations studies at Northwest Community College while completing

a Master of Science in environmental studies and currently working on a doctoral program in interdisciplinary studies at the University of Victoria.

### *The Disconnect Between Generations*

Although these stories provide snapshots of my journey to *becoming* a Tahltan, I need to place this in a larger context: that of my parents' and grandparents' experiences of growing up during the first half of the 20th century. Their collective experiences have given me answers to why I did not know I was Tahltan until I was an adult and why we did not learn our Aboriginal languages or feel proud of being First Nations. In regard to my maternal grandparents, my grandmother's mother was Tahltan and her father was Irish-American. My grandfather's mother was Tahltan and his father was of Scottish and Cherokee descent. As to my father's parents, my grandmother's mother was Gitksan and her father was Scottish and Irish. My father's father was of Norwegian descent.

Due to the effects of colonization and assimilation such as those of residential schools and the ban on potlaches, several generations of Aboriginal peoples do not know their language or the details of many aspects of their culture. This is also true of Aboriginal peoples who did not attend residential schools. Due to the patriarchal system in place in Canada, and because all the fathers of my grandparents were considered to be Caucasian (even my maternal grandfather's father whose mother was of Cherokee descent), my maternal grandparents and paternal grandmother were seen to be white and so did not have to attend residential schools. My maternal grandmother's father did not want her mother teaching their children Tahltan. This was also the case in my paternal grandmother's home. My Tahltan grandmother learned much of her Tahltan language because her mother spoke the language to her and her older sister only when their father was at work. However, the remaining eight children did not gain fluency in the language. My Gitksan grandmother was fluent in her language, but spoke it only with certain individuals.

Why would these men of European descent not want their children to learn their mother's first language? Because they were brought up in a society that saw English as a superior language, as well as their religion and all other aspects of Westernized culture as above all others, they probably believed that it was better for their children to be seen as white so that they could fit more seamlessly into mainstream Canadian society. Aboriginal languages were not seen to be as *educated* as the English language, so speaking an Aboriginal language was often seen as inferior and primitive. It was not only the Caucasian fathers who held this opinion; First Nations parents wanted their children to do well in the world, and many felt that learning their language might put them at a disadvantage compared with non-Aboriginal Canadians. This form of colonialism and assimilation was more insidious, but often had the same result: Aboriginal

people not learning about their culture or language and feeling ashamed of being First Nations.

If it had not been for government intervention and the insidious nature of colonialism and racism, our people would have continued learning our languages, and our Elders would have continued to pass on knowledge and wisdom through our languages. We would have known our world view, and there would have been no need for us to articulate our epistemology in a Western academic framework. But because so many of us were not given the chance to learn about who we were as Aboriginal people in our formative years, many of us use Western academia not only to make room for our ways of knowing in the academy, but also to research who we are and to reconnect with our languages, people, land, and Ancestors. This tear or disconnect in the transmission of knowledge and wisdom through our languages has created the need for so many of us not only to learn what was taken from us, but also to try to mend this tear for future generations.

### *My Journey to an Indigenous Methodology*

My role as an academic researcher began during my Master of Science degree, so I felt that it was important to go back to the methodology chapter in my thesis. I chose a Western methodology that I felt had characteristics and methods in common with how our people sought and taught knowledge. I chose to use community action research in an Indigenous context as the overarching methodology, with a case study approach as the more specific design. At that time I believed that it was important for me as a First Nations educator and researcher to ensure that my research was framed in an Indigenous context. I wanted to do the same for my doctoral research, but using another methodology. An important part of my doctoral research journey involved taking a qualitative research methodology course in narrative inquiry. I felt that using narrative inquiry as a methodology could work for my research because I was attempting to locate narrative in an Indigenous perspective. However, I began to feel that something was missing, but I could not quite put my finger on what it was. I did know that not only did I want to hear the stories of the people whom I interviewed, but also to include the transmission of knowledge between myself as a Tahltan student and my Tahltan Elders, which would involve my learning my Tahltan language. I thought about using ethnographic narrative, a newer methodology combining ethnography and narrative inquiry, or autoethnographic narrative, which would allow me to be part of this process. However, I was troubled by the thought of using ethnography, a research methodology historically used by anthropologists that has not honored our people in the past (Archibald, 1997; Menzies, 2001). For some reason, in regard to how I was approaching my research, I found that the word *inquiry* just did not encompass all that I was trying to do. While I sought knowledge and wisdom about our

language and our connection between land and language by asking questions, I was also trying to find myself and place myself in a context with my people.

I have been learning about Tahltan ways of knowing for almost two decades. As a Tahltan student I have employed various methods to learn my Tahltan culture and language respectfully. Asking questions and inquiring about our ways of knowing is just a small part of this. I have listened and observed when my Elders have met formally such as at feasts, music festivals, or council meetings, or informally, which mainly involves bringing my grandparents home or to communities where old friends or relatives live so that they can visit. This also includes when I drive Peggy Campbell to and from my grandparents' home several times a month so that they can visit and talk Tahltan. I see my role in facilitating these visits between Tahltan Elders as an offering, a gift, to my Elders as a way to show my respect and gratitude for their teachings. I have also been learning songs, learning how to dance, participating in feasts. I have been involved as a teacher in Tahltan science camps. These observation, social, and relationship skills are important ways of showing respect to my teachers. They have been valuable educational tools and also play a key role in carrying out research respectfully.

In regard to my methodological quandary, things began to fall into place just days after a meeting in November 2006 with my doctoral committee. While I was in Victoria, Patricia Vickers, a Tsimshian doctoral student, left me a voicemail message asking to borrow a copy of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The night before I was traveling home, I dreamed that I finally met with her and was able to lend her Paulo Freire's (2000) book. Early the next morning I ran into Patricia, who was also waiting to board the flight to Prince Rupert. We agreed to meet later that day, and during our meeting I told her that I was going to use narrative inquiry as the methodology for my research, but that I was struggling with the idea. It was then that she suggested that I use a Tahltan methodology. When I heard her speak these words, it felt so right. I did not know exactly what this was or what it would look like, but I knew that I had to explore the possibility.

Soon after, another incident made it feel as if everything was falling into place. Earlier in the year I had heard about SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement), a program that is attempting to have 250 doctoral Aboriginal and Indigenous graduates in British Columbia by the year 2010. Maori scholar Graham Smith, a visiting distinguished professor at the University of British Columbia, started the SAGE program, which is modeled after a similar successful program in New Zealand. I added my name to the SAGE listserv, and sometime in November 2006 an e-mail arrived inviting all SAGE members to attend the dissertation defense of Maggie Kovach, a Cree doctoral student at the University



of Victoria. I had taken a graduate course with Maggie in summer 2003, so I e-mailed her to wish her luck on the defense of her dissertation. I heard back from her the day after her defense, and we corresponded back and forth, with my asking her many questions about her research, the writing of her dissertation, and how long it had taken her to complete her doctoral program. I also asked her if I could read her dissertation. Her research involved interviewing Indigenous scholars about Indigenous methodological approaches, the challenges faced when using Indigenous methodologies, and how Indigenous knowledges have affected their approaches to research. When I read her dissertation, it felt as if the methodological clouds had begun to lift. With the gifts that I received from Patricia and Maggie, and after reading more about research from other Indigenous researchers, it became clear to me that I needed to look at research from an Indigenous paradigm, not just having an Indigenous perspective housed in a Western research framework.

*Applications: Research that is Relevant and Useful*

My ultimate goal as a First Nations educator is to facilitate and strengthen the connection of First Nations youth to their land, language, and culture through their Elders. Kirkness (1992) states,

Give voice to our ancestors by learning from our Elders as they pass on to us the teachings of their ancestors. They are the keepers and teachers of our cultures. It is our responsibility in this generation to ensure that the ties between the Elders and the youth are firmly entrenched so that the youth of today can continue the process of mending the Sacred Hoop for the benefit of future generations. (p. 146)

It is important for First Nations children to learn about their people's ways of knowing, their stories, their songs, their language, and their relationship with the land. Due to colonization and assimilation, and now globalization, several generations of First Nations people do not know their languages, their people's world view and ways of knowing, or their traditional knowledge. I want my research to assist in connecting our children to their Elders through the land and language. As to formal education, I would like my research to lead to the development of curricula that bring our people's knowledge and wisdom about our relationship with the land and our languages into the main stream, providing not only First Nations children, but all children, with the opportunity to learn about our country's First Peoples and their ways of acquiring and transmitting knowledge and wisdom. As to research, it has been stated that critical components of an Indigenous methodology are that it is relational and involves community. Cree scholar Winona Stephenson (2000) makes the same claims about to education:

In Cree terms education is understood as a lifelong process that emphasizes the whole person by striving for spiritual, mental, and physical balance and emotional wellbeing within the context of family and community. Unlike the Western pedagogical model, Cree education is relational.... in Cree terms education does not come in compartmentalized,

institutional stages. Education in Cree is Kiskinohamatowin which refers to a reciprocal and interactive teaching relationship between student and teacher, a "community activity." (p. 241)

I would like my research to contribute to existing educational theories on learning and culturally sensitive ways of learning, to provide the basis for an expanded program of research involving other First Nations communities in Canada and Indigenous groups internationally, and to contribute to the growing body of work on Indigenous methodologies. I am at a point in my education where I want to continue to be successful in Western academy, but in a markedly different way than I have done in the past. I now see success not so much as getting high grades or jumping through the academic hoops, but making room for my people's knowledge and wisdom and also maintaining my Tahltan identity. I have realized that on this journey I need not only to find my voice as a First Nations student/educator/researcher, but also to find how to honor and give voice to my Ancestors. As an Indigenous graduate student, Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2001) asked, "How is it possible for us to live in two worlds, and what is the thinking behind what makes it possible?" (p. 175). He then went on to state that this line of thinking sets the stage for an Indigenous epistemology, which is connected to an Indigenous methodology. As editors of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Stan Wilson and Peggy Wilson (2003) have noted,

No longer is Western academic discourse the only option that Indigenous students have if they wish to succeed in the academic world. They are gradually teaching the Western world that there are ancient, time-honored, and thoroughly tested research methodologies, writing styles, and patterns of discourse that are equally stringent and certainly much more culturally appropriate than what has been used by academe in the past when writing about or research with and between Indigenous peoples. (p. 143)

### Conclusion

When I began learning about my Tahltan culture in the early 1990s, it was as if the shame of being Indian had began to lift, and my grandparents and parents began sharing things with me about their Tahltan and Gitksan cultures. I originally thought that I was learning about my people's world view, ways of knowing, and language so that I could first understand who I was as a Tahltan person, but second so that I could live up to my Tahltan name and pass on this valuable knowledge and wisdom to the younger generations. However, on a trip to Whitehorse, my grandparents and my mother made me realize that it was more than this. We were driving through inland Tlingit territory and decided to visit the museum in Teslin where the work of my cousin Tahltan-Tlingit Master Carver Dempsey Bob was being exhibited. My mom teased her mother by saying, "Why are you so interested in all of this Indian stuff now? When we were growing up, you never taught us anything!" My granny turned toward her and said, "Ever since my granddaughter Judy has made me feel proud to be

Tahltan!" I remember feeling a lump in my throat and tears welling up in my eyes. I have realized that it is not only important to raise up our children, but also to raise up our Elders and show them how important they are and to honor them. By raising up our Elders, we honor our Ancestors.

My grandfather is proud that he remembers the Tahltan word for *doctor—dinlen*—and most times when he sees me he asks, "When you going to be *Dinlen Edosdi*?" Although I could become Dr. Judith Thompson by completing a doctoral program, I could never dream of becoming *Dinlen Edosdi* without my people. I see the dream song as a gift from my Ancestors that states that I am treating our Elders and their gifts of knowledge and wisdom in a honorable and respectful manner. I need to carry out research from a Tahltan world view that is useful and relevant: that raises up our children and our Elders by connecting them through the land and language, ensuring that we are rooted in our territory and that our Ancestors are in us—*Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi'*.

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