An Exploration of Indigenousness in the Western University Institution

Caroline M. VanEvery-Albert
Trent University

This article explores Indigenousness in the Western university from the author's perspective. This narrative piece begins with the author's story about learning the Mohawk language. Through this learning experience she explores Indigenous epistemology, differences between Western education and Indigenous traditional education, and issues surrounding Indigenous scholarship. The exploration ends with her thoughts and experiences in negotiating her identity in the academy.

Introduction

Being an Indigenous person presents many challenges, but being an Indigenous person in the Western university institution adds to these challenges. As an Indigenous person who has studied in the university for many years, I am familiar with the frustrations, the misrepresentation, the loneliness, the struggles and hardships both spiritual and moral that many Indigenous students experience. The big question is: How do we remain true to our Indigeneity when we are in an environment that does not fit our cultural paradigms?

As an Indigenous university student I have struggled with this question for many years. I am not convinced that there is an answer. The best answer I can give is to explore my own experiences and share them with you the reader. To share my experiences with you I need to take you to a time of my self-discovery, a time when I really learned about my own identity, a time when I began learning my language. My language-learning experience helped me to understand and to be comfortable and confident about who I am. Furthermore, it enabled me to remain grounded when I was surrounded by something or someone that was foreign to me.

Throughout this article I use examples from my language, the Kanyen'kehaka or Mohawk language, to illustrate my points with respect to Indigenous epistemology and the differences between Western education and Indigenous education. In addition, my exploration of Indigenous scholarship is shaped by my experiences with the language and the grounding that the language has provided for me. It is my hope that the article will give the reader an opportunity to see how I deal with my own Indigenousness in the Western university institution.

Enkwakaratón:hahse: I will tell you a story

It has been my experience that Indigenous languages carry with them the richness of a culture and world view that differs from English. Benjamin

Whorf, as quoted by Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson (2000), asserts, "that worldviews grow out of the structures of language, and that long and deeply held ideas are frozen into ways of thinking and speaking" (p. 73). One's world view evolves from one's language and is manifested in one's way of thinking and speaking. Language and world view are inextricably linked. One's thoughts and how one expresses these thoughts in speech and behavior are shaped by one's language and world view. Thinking critically about what is said, how it is said, and why something is said in a particular matter will help one realize this connection.

I make this statement about the connection between language and world view because I have experienced it and have begun to understand this difference, but I am still learning. However, I recognize the difference between Rotinonhsyón:ni and Western world view.[1] From the language I have learned the "deeply held ideas" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 73) that Whorf discusses. I cannot say that I fully understand it yet because I am not a fluent Mohawk speaker and most of my thinking is done in English. To understand my position on this subject fully, I share my story. It is a journey of language-learning and realization that began in 2004.

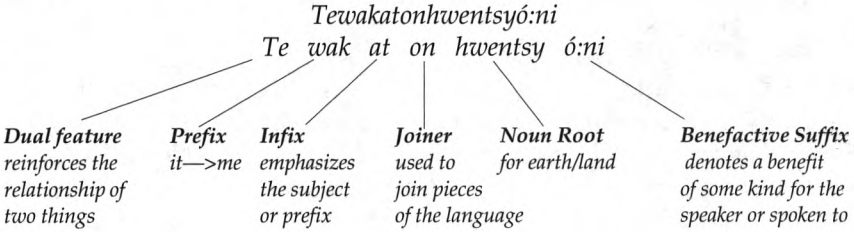
I am an educator by profession. In September 2004 I was to teach grade 1. It was August; I was preparing for my teaching year and I realized that I was not happy about my appointment. Because my heart was not in it and I knew that I would not do the kind of job I wanted to, I decided to enroll in the adult Mohawk immersion program called Onkwawén:na (our language), in my home community of Six Nations. In my community, three of the six Rotinonhsyón:ni languages are still spoken. However, as with other First Nations, our languages are in jeopardy. Fortunately, various revitalization efforts are taking place in the community. Each of the three language groups that are represented offer adult immersion programs. Two of the languages offer elementary immersion programs, and various night classes are available. At Six Nations we are fortunate to have community members who are passionate about the language and continue their revitalization efforts.

Onkwawén:na, the Mohawk adult immersion program, is in its 10th year of operation. The program runs five days a week for 7.5 hours a day. At the end of the first year, the students have 1,100 hours of language instruction time. Instruction time includes grammar lessons, oral drills, and activities in the language such as cooking and preparing lunch. Onkwawén:na's program gives students a good grounding in the language that can be built to achieve fluency. Learning the language is not an easy task. It takes passion, commitment, and stamina, something that I was prepared for.

I had always wanted to take the Mohawk immersion program because both my great-grandparents were Mohawk speakers. For reasons that are unclear, they did not pass the language on to the next generation. This could have been because of my great-grandfather's experiences at residential school or his belief in giving his children the tools to be successful in the world. As a result, I am the first person in

my family to be able to converse in the language in three generations. I was nervous about learning the language because I did not have any background in the language when I started the program. I went to elementary school off the reserve; therefore, I did not have any knowledge of the language, not even as a second-language class, but I was excited to begin.

The Onkwawén:na classes were grammar-based, reinforced with oral exercises. The difference between this class and other language classes that I had taken (French and Italian) was that the grammatical elements of the Kanyen'kehaka language helped me to understand and create language rather than memorizing specific words or phrases. I share some examples. The Mohawk language is polysynthetic. This means that it is made up of small grammatical elements each of which has a specific meaning. These grammatical pieces are linked together to create words, which are equal to an entire sentence in English. Another interesting element of the language is that it is verb-based and nouns are incorporated. Below is an example of the complexity and beauty of the Mohawk language. This word, which when translated into English means I want or need something, literally means the earth will provide for me or give me benefit. The difference in world view is demonstrated in this simple word.



As I began learning, I remember thinking about words and the grammatical elements and thinking about the relationship between language and philosophy. I was amazed by the relationship between the Mohawk language and Rotinonhsyón:ni world view. The notion that our philosophy and world view are embedded in the language made me think critically about my people and the importance of the language.

In learning the language I had an epiphany. I started to realize how vital our language really is and more specifically what learning the language meant to my life. Before learning the language my thinking was driven by Western philosophies because it was done in English and had been developed through my Catholic education in Western institutions. While learning the language, my thinking changed and was shaped by my knowledge and understanding of the language. Furthermore, my own philosophies and world views became deeply rooted in the philosophies and world views of my people. I began to understand why I thought a certain way or why I believed in certain things. I have often heard the language described as medicine; I fully believe this because it helped me to heal, grow, and become a stronger person.

Willie Ermine (Battiste & Barman, 1995) identifies the importance of language when he states, "The language of the people provides another valuable indication of an inner space" (p. 107). It was the power of the language that helped me with my inner space, my spirit. On reflecting on my life and how it had changed after learning the language, I learned that the language had provided me with a spiritual renewal. I felt different inside. I felt a sense of balance that I had not felt before. More important, it grounded me, it helped me to remember, to think and to reflect on what I was learning or had learned in the past. It helped me to think more like a Rotinonhsyón:ni person rather than allowing my Western mind to prevail. For example, I began to understand the meaning of the phrase "Have a good mind." I had heard this phrase since I was a child, but I did not know where it came from or what it really meant until I started learning the language.

While I continued to study the language, I wondered why Shonkwaya'tison (The Creator) had shown me this path. I remembered something that Leon Shenandoah had said, "You pick the path that's yours and the Creator will show you your mission" (Wall, 2001, p. 1). I contemplated how I could use my knowledge and understanding of the language. I did not feel that I was ready to teach the language, but I knew that I wanted to do something that could tie together my language and my teaching. I was accepted into the Master's of Education program at Brock in fall 2005.

Once at Brock, I began to realize just how much my thinking had changed, more important my thinking about education. As an indicator of how my thinking had shifted, I sat down and wrote out my philosophy of education. When I had finished I pulled out a copy of my philosophy of education that I had done during my BEd course work. I was not surprised by the differences. Although I am able to function quite well in a normal academic setting, my personal thoughts about the notion of education have changed. I no longer thought of education in relation to the building, but I thought of education in relation to the world, meaning educating ourselves through our relationship to the world, to the land, to the environment, to the plants and animals. Education was not only about learning information, but learning skills to survive in this world as Kanyen'kehaka people. Furthermore, education included a spiritual aspect as our language and ceremonies, the spiritual elements to our lives are connected to the world around us, and so should be our education. This spiritual aspect is something that cannot be ignored when our language is used, and so the spirit should be fed through learning. It is this feeding of the spirit that evolved; it was missing from my earlier philosophy of education, and it is now something that I believe to be crucial in education.

So how do my language-learning story and experiences relate to my doctoral work? More specifically, how has this helped me to reflect on my experiences as a graduate student and what are my responsibilities to my community?

In attempting to answer this question, it is necessary to look at three things. First, one must investigate Indigenous epistemology, in particular

Rotinonhsyón:ni thought. Second, one must look at the differences between Western education and traditional education. Identifying these differences in education is an important element in trying to understand how Indigenous students deal with these philosophical differences in the academic setting. Finally, one must look at current literature about Indigenous scholarship to identify what the responsibilities of Indigenous scholars are and how to negotiate these responsibilities.

Indigenous Epistemology

To understand the concepts and philosophical values of Indigenous epistemology, it is easiest to use examples from the language. Many authors would assert that one's language, philosophy, and world view cannot be separated. Benjamin Lee Whorf (Carol, 1956) states,

> We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or can in some way can be calibrated. (p. v)

This is certainly arguable with respect to Rotinonhsyón:ni languages. Although the languages are different, they have the same grammatical structure and share the same worldview.[2]

Some pieces of the language are fundamental to understanding our difference of world view. For example, Meyer (2001) states, "The autonomous I is a new invention. It is not an Indigenous idea to view ourselves separate from all things, nature and each other. We are all parts of a whole" (p. 195). This concept holds true with the Mohawk language, which has three groups of pronominal prefixes. Pronominal prefixes represent the subject of the sentence (I, you, he, she, etc.). These groups or pronominal prefixes do not separate the subject from the natural world. For example, one set of pronominal prefixes represent it—>me/I, another I/me—>it, and the third set represents the relationship between people. Thus a metaphysical and physical relationship exists, the autonomous I as described by Meyer is nonexistent.

In the Mohawk language one might explain this metaphysical relationship by the following: *teyonkwatewénryes,* which means that we travel about together. Bearing this metaphysical relationship in mind, it makes sense that our Indigenous languages would be primarily verb-based. Things that in English we would describe using nouns are actually verbs and are named by their use. For example, a cup is translated as something that holds water or liquid. Nouns are not seen as simply items, but are thought of in terms of their uses, thus reiterating the importance of relationships.

The nouns that do exist in the Mohawk language are mostly environmental, meaning nouns such as river, lake, sky, and so forth. These nouns are incorporated into verbs, which give them life. For example, take*nont*aráthen means I climbed (ascended) the mountain. The *-nont-* is

the root word for mountain and is embedded in the word. The noun is not referred to on its own, but in relation to the subject and the action.

These seemingly simple grammatical elements of the language, give way to an entirely different way of thinking and world view. In the Mohawk language world view is expressed using the word *tsi niyonkwarihó:tens*. This is translated as our beliefs or how we do business. It is also understood as our traditions.

The idea of relationships is paramount in the Mohawk language. A speaker cannot eliminate the concept of relationships from speech at any time. Consider this: in English one would say, "We should go for a walk." In this statement the speaker is speaking to one or more people about the act of walking to an unknown destination. There is no relationship between the road and pathway the subjects will take. In Mohawk, we would say, "E'thótsi taetewathahahkwà:na." This statement tells us that the speaker is speaking to three or more people and including himself or herself in the group. Furthermore, the verb for *walk* literally means to pick up the road or path for some purpose. In Mohawk there is a relationship between the act of walking and the path the subjects will take.

Another important element to Mohawk world view is with respect to spirit. In English we talk about our spirit as something separate from our mind. In Mohawk the word for spirit, o'nikòn:ra, means something like mind, spirit, and sense. When this noun root is incorporated into words, it refers to all three concepts. For example, the word wake'*nikonh*ráksen, which means I am sad, refers to having negative thoughts, thus affecting the spirit negatively. The idea that we all possess a spirit and that we cannot separate ourselves from it is a fundamental difference in thinking. It is our spirit that connects us to the world around us. Willie Ermine (1999) describes the connection between language and spirit in his article "Aboriginal Epistemology": "Our languages suggest inwardness, where real power lies. It is in this space within the individual, that for the Aboriginal, has become the last great frontier and the most challenging one of all" (p. 108). Here Ermine metaphorically describes the struggle to maintain our spirits as Aboriginal people, and he attributes to our languages with this strength of spirit. Does this mean that you do not have a strong spirit if you do not speak your language? No, it does not.

Taking from Whorf's notions of language and world view, one can argue that our ancestors who were speakers of the language have passed down certain world views that are rooted in our languages whether or not they are communicated in the language. Above I speak about the phrase "Have a good mind"; after learning the language, I understood what this phrase really meant. I understood where it came from, what it meant, and the contexts in which it could be used. However, this is not to say that I did not understand the philosophical principles before learning the language. I understood that it meant that I was to have a good attitude, to behave

appropriately, and to be open-minded. However, after learning the language I understood what it really means and when it is used and how it is used in speech.

Both learning the language and learning about the language can be powerful. Like Ermine (1999) I can speak to the power of the language and the strength it can provide for one's spirit. It can rejuvenate your spirit and give a strength that you may need. It makes you feel happy. It makes you feel an inner strength that only one who has his or her language can fully understand.

Western Education versus Indigenous Education

The word *education* is generally synonymous with the concept of Western education. However, education in the traditional Indigenous sense is quite different. In Mohawk we have three words that are associated with education or teaching and learning. The first word, *kheweyensthá:nis,* refers to teaching or learning a particular skill. Another word, *kherihennyén:nis,* means to teach or learn a matter or subject such as history or politics. Finally, *khe'nikonhratokénhse,* means to inform the mind or spirit or that the mind or spirit will experience something. Education is not an all-encompassing term, but refers to how knowledge will be passed on or acquired. Two of the three words end in *-nis,* which is a benefactive suffix that implies that there will be a benefit to the learner. Instead, education to Indigenous people meant learning by observing and doing for individual and community benefit. The third word, *khe'nikonhratokénhse,* refers to an intellectual or spiritual truth that the learner will seek.

Best practices in Western teaching and learning encourage teachers to use Bloom's Taxonomy and critical thinking in their classrooms. A comparison of the elements of Bloom's Taxonomy in relation to the three *Kanyen'kehaka* words for education reveals some stark contrasts. For example, each of the components of Bloom's Taxonomy deals with skills through the learning verbs. Subject matter is dealt with through the content, and the mind or spirit being informed or experiencing something can be seen through the application of knowledge or the thinking process, which in turn affects one's emotions or spirit.

This leads me to the conclusion that with respect to *Kanyen'kehaka* teaching we can use Bloom's Taxonomy to shape our questions to encourage critical thinking. However, with respect to learning, we do not approach learning in the same linear way as is done in Bloom's Taxonomy. Instead, in each of the components of Bloom's Taxonomy the elements of *Kheweyenstha:nis, Kherihennyen:nis,* and *Khe'nikonhratokenhse* are represented. In all the components of Bloom's, through the learning process a skill is learned or practiced; this is evident in the use of learning verbs. This coincides with the *Kanyen'kehaka* concept of *Kheweyenstha:nis.* Each of the components of Bloom's cannot be learned or practiced without some kind of content or subject matter, which is represented by the *Kanyen'kehaka*

term *Kherihennyen:nis.* Furthermore, all learning informs the mind or spirit and allows the student to learn or experience something, which is representative of the *Kanyen'kehaka* term *Khe'nikonhratokenhse.* So *Kanyen'kehaka* teaching and learning, although it can and does incorporate the elements of Bloom's Taxonomy, is more holistic and interconnected than Bloom's Taxonomy alone. For example, evaluation cannot be done without representing all the *Kanyen'kehaka* elements of *Kheweyenstha:nis, Kherihennyen:nis,* and *Khe'nikonhratokenhse.* This reiterates the importance of spiritual growth in education and the inclusion of *Khe'nikonhratokenhse.*

In communities education has come to mean education in the Western sense, which means that we have deviated from our original concepts of education. We have moved away from the inclusion of a spiritual element in education. Instead, students sit at desks in a classroom and are generally taught by the teacher. Students are taught the information, practice the information, and apply the information on their own. Consequently, students are evaluated on their application of the knowledge. In a more traditional educational setting, students would be actively involved in their learning through observation and imitation learned from family and community members. Students would be learning skills that are relevant to their lives and the lives of their communities, and in the process they would be developing relationships and their own identity in the community.

The difficulty with communities adopting a Western style of education and using the Ontario curriculum is that it is misleading. The Ontario curriculum does not teach students the skills they need to enter into a specialized occupation, but is responsible for teaching students the knowledge and skills that are beneficial to their lives. If one were to examine the current Ontario curriculum, which is that used in most schools across the province, one would begin to see the contrast between Indigenous education and Western education. For example, the Ontario Social Studies Curriculum (2004) states,

> Students graduating from Ontario schools require the knowledge and skills gained from social studies and the study of history and geography in order to function as informed citizens in a culturally diverse and interdependent world and to participate and compete in a global economy. (p. 2)

This identifies the Ministry of Education's commitment to teaching students skills to live in the global world, but does not concentrate on building community, which is something that is fundamental to Indigenous thought. Furthermore, the concepts of cultural diversity and interdependence are not explicitly taught or discussed. In most cases the teaching is at the discretion of the teacher and may or may not be covered well.

Although the current Ontario curriculum is skills-based, faculties of education in their teacher education programs have not yet mastered the delivery of communicating this emphasis on skills to their preservice

candidates. Instead, preservice candidates are made to write lesson plans, usually in only one subject area, and are not usually focused on the skills, but on rather on the content in the curriculum. Drake and Burns (2004) state, "Yet the advent of standards-based education with its emphasis on disciplines has largely displaced integrated curriculum" (p. 2). By this statement the authors are reiterating their concerns that teachers teach the standards in a specific discipline and do not integrate subject areas and group skills. In turn this approach means that new teachers continue to focus on content rather than skills, which contrasts with the interconnected relationship between content and skills as is evident in the *Kanyen'kehaka* descriptions of education.

To illustrate this point, here are two examples of learning expectations from the Ontario Social Studies Curriculum (2004): one is content-based, the other skill-based.

Content: examine various theories about the origins of First Nation and Inuit peoples in North America (e.g., that they crossed the Bering land bridge, had always been indigenous to North America, traveled by water from South America). (p. 31)
Skill: formulate questions with a statement of purpose to develop research plans (e.g., Why did Cartier kidnap Donnacona and his sons? What was the role of First Nation women in the fur trade?) (p. 32)

By learning, practicing, and developing skills, students are better problem-solvers and critical thinkers. Furthermore, by pairing skills and content and practicing skills for mastery, our students would be better prepared for the real world, and this would ensure their survival in the community and in the work force.

However, to achieve *khe'nikonhratokénhse* a teacher must put the learning into a new context, a community context. In many respects this contextual approach is missing in First Nations education. Students are not connecting their learning with the community. Instead, the learning is restricted to the classroom with the occasional field trip and guest speaker. However, even field trips and guest speakers fail to connect learning with the community, as they are only a glimpse of a real-world context and are hardly ever revisited, nor is the relationship maintained. Battiste and Barman (1995) state,

For Aboriginal people, first languages and culture are crucial components in the transformative learning process. The three specific orientations of the transformation are: skills that promote personal and social transformation; a vision of social change that leads to harmony with rather than control over the environment; and the attribution of a spiritual dimension to the environment. (p. 102)

Instead, teachers and school boards need to realize that students need to learn about their communities, their environment, and the skills needed to survive in their communities before they can learn to become global citizens.

Another fundamental difference between Western education and Indigenous education is in regard to individuality. Western education focuses on individual learning and individual success. Students are in continual competition with one another to achieve the highest mark. Furthermore, the emphasis on competition results in less collaborative and cooperative learning in schools. As cooperative learning guru Robert Slavin (1995) states, "One of the most important reasons that cooperative learning methods were developed is that educators and social scientists have long known about the detrimental effects of competition as it is usually used in the classroom" (p. 3). This concept of cooperative learning is not new to Indigenous peoples as it is a fundamental element to communities and traditionally to survival. To align Western education with Indigenous education, the use of cooperative learning would be a good place to begin.

Students in the above-mentioned elementary and secondary education system are prepared for the philosophies of education in postsecondary institutions. Although postsecondary institutions are somewhat different in their approaches to pedagogy and andragogy, the underlying philosophies are the same. The nature of individualism is reinforced, and the connection to community is virtually nonexistent. This lack of community and individualism is something that is difficult for Indigenous students to negotiate. In the 1999-2000 academic years 27,500 First Nations students were attending universities across Canada (www.firstpeoplescanada.com). Each year Indigenous students enter postsecondary institutions and are met with a number of barriers. The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has recognized these barriers on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in their *Sixth Report*, which states,

> Reports identify a number of barriers encountered by Aboriginal learners at the post-secondary level. They include historical distrust of mainstream education systems or lack of familiarity with them, whether owing to the legacy of the residential school system and assimilationist policies, or to other cultural factors; economic hardship for First Nations learners due to insufficient funding ...; inadequate academic preparation to meet post-secondary institutions' admission requirements; cultural isolation owing to under-representation of Aboriginal perspectives and values in post-secondary institutions and programs; geographical dislocation resulting from the need to relocate from more remote areas to urban centres; social barriers related to factors such as discrimination, poverty and family responsibilities; and personal factors such as poor self-esteem or poor health. (http://cmte.parl.gc.ca)

Although these barriers are identified for Indigenous students, it is erroneous to suggest that all Indigenous students are affected by all the barriers listed. Many Indigenous students are successful in their postsecondary studies and are able to overcome many barriers that they may face. However, if there were more support mechanisms, pedagogical approaches, and programming for Indigenous students, perhaps more

students would be successful in undergraduate studies, and perhaps more would pursue graduate programs. This leads to the following section about Indigenous scholarship.

Indigenous Scholarship

Those Indigenous students who pursue postsecondary education become Indigenous scholars in their own ways, whether they become scholars in their own communities or join the ranks of Indigenous scholars like Vine Deloria Jr., John C. Mohawk, or Gregory Cajete. Indigenous scholars are faced with a huge responsibility, which is described by Taiaiake Alfred (2004),

> As Indigenous scholars and teachers, we have a crucial role to serve. We have a serious responsibility to do what we can to resist the escapist temptations of the standard academic life and the material rewards of assimilation. Instead, we must stand and contend with the sick vision of the future that is guiding our leaders today and embedded within our modern institutions. We must do what we can to change the places we live and work from sites of imperialism into spaces of resistance, or regeneration, and of human freedom. (p. 99)

Taiaiake reiterates the imperialistic nature that surrounds us as Indigenous people. Furthermore, he brings to light what must be done to make positive change.

Deloria (2004) asks some serious questions about Indigenous scholarship. He asks,

> Why are there no responses to some of the nonsense that the anti-Indian scholars are offering? How many young scholars are known to reservation people so that instead of hiring non-Indians to do their historical research they can hire an Indian scholar? (p. 29)

Vine Deloria Jr. challenges Indigenous scholars, more specifically young Indigenous scholars, to be outspoken and to maintain a connection with their communities. This community relationship has always been an issue with Indigenous communities. The argument is that community people go to school, get a job off the reserve, and never return. The issue again carries with it the dichotomy between working off the reserve and still working for the community. This is certainly done well by some individuals, but is a factor that needs to be further explored as more Indigenous people enter the academy and receive graduate degrees. Perhaps Indigenous people are outgrowing their community, meaning that they are overqualified for the positions available in communities and must seek employment outside. However, communities should consider the skills and qualifications of their postsecondary graduates and use those skills to their benefit in the community.

The world of Indigenous scholarship is marked by various decolonization efforts. Long have Indigenous students studied Indigenous people and long have Indigenous people been studied. With the growth of Indigenous scholarship, new research is being done by Indigenous scholars and for Indigenous people. Indigenous scholars have opened the door for

other Indigenous scholars by asking critical questions and making critical statements about the histories and portrayals of Indigenous people. Devon Mihesuah (2004) writes,

> Indigenous intellectuals are also becoming increasingly vocal in their objections to the way their ancestors have been portrayed or ignored in works of history and how those images and absences in stories about this country's past translate in the present. (p. 144)

Furthermore, Indigenous scholars have begun to write histories of, and from perspectives of, Indigenous people. This contrast has offered the world a more accurate depiction of the Indigenous person and the Indigenous collective.

The role of Indigenous knowledge in the academy has become an important issue for Indigenous scholars. The issue of what can and should be researched and shared has caused some controversy. Angela Cavender Wilson (2004) responds by saying, "Therefore, each of us must distinguish what kind of knowledge can be respectfully researched, documented and analyzed in the academy while aiding the long-term goals of our communities" (p. 74). Each community and nation has differing opinions about what Indigenous knowledge can and should be shared, and this needs to be considered by Indigenous scholars. For example, something as simple as the word *feast* can have two meanings. In my community the word *feast* is not necessarily associated with a gathering and food, but is associated with a ceremony for an individual or small group and is not to be discussed. Therefore, this is something that is not likely to be shared by Rotinonhsyón:ni people.

Too often Indigenous graduate students leave graduate programs because they do not feel that the programs are, or allow them to be, representative of who they are and where they come from. This is evident through the required readings and the concentration of the written word, which is often written by non-Indigenous academics or Indigenous academics who have little or no connection to their communities. As an Indigenous academic and a speaker/learner of the *Kanyen'kehaka* language, this is something that I face regularly in my studies. I find it difficult to "play the academic game" because my beliefs about learning and how it is done differ from those of the academy. If I wanted to learn about Indigenous knowledge, I would go to my community, to a speaker, to a clan mother (*yakoyaner*), chief (*royaner*), or faithkeeper. It is these people who are chosen by their clans because they exhibit the good mind; they are the holders of knowledge. It is people like these whom we as Indigenous scholars and students of Indigenous studies should look to for guidance and scholarship, not the words printed in a book, for if we have questions, how will they be answered? How will our thoughts be clarified?

The world of Indigenous scholarship is fairly new and will take time to shape itself in the academic world. Even in the academies that embrace

Indigenous studies, certain barriers need to be slowly disassembled. Perhaps it is not that the academy does not want to accept Indigenous studies and Indigenous knowledge as a valid program of study, but perhaps they do not understand it or do not want to understand it. John Mohawk (1999) wrote, "I believe that philosophy was used by Western civilization to obscure the act of plunder by cloaking it in fancier terms" (p. 4). Conceivably, the academy is so enmeshed in Western philosophy that they unintentionally plunder Indigenous programs. As Indigenous scholars we are charged with forging ahead and staying strong and true to our own philosophies.

Conclusion

So how do all these issues relate to my language-learning? And how is this discussion related to my PhD studies? Language is Indigenous knowledge, and by learning my language I continue to gain an understanding of what it means to be a Rotinonhsyón:ni person. In turn my study of the language has helped me to develop my spirit, my skills, and my perspectives as a Rotinonhsyón:ni teacher and student. I do things differently than most teachers. I try not to approach education from a Western perspective. It is not that I teach about being Rotinonhsyón:ni or that I teach about Rotinonhsyón:ni people, but that I approach teaching from a Rotinonhsyón:ni perspective. I model behaviors and attitudes for my students that are reflective of Rotinonhsyón:ni world view, I use cooperative learning, and create a community in my classroom. I have a loud classroom: I like discussion, critical thinking, and storytelling. I want my students to feel that they are an important part of a community, and I want them to realize that they have an opinion and that it matters.

This translates to my PhD studies, as this is what I want to do for my dissertation. I want to research the differences in educational philosophies and approaches. I want to research the theoretical base for creating a school based on Rotinonhsyón:ni language, ethics, values, and teachings. However, in order to do this, I must start in the academy.

This is how my story relates to Indigenous scholarship. As an Indigenous scholar, I have to be a warrior scholar. The role of an Indigenous scholar is tough. I must deal with the Western academy, yet remain true to who I am and where I come from. The Two-Row Wampum of the Rotinonhsyón:ni talks about the relationship between Europeans and the Rotinonhsyón:ni. It metaphorically symbolizes two vessels traveling down the river. One boat carries the Europeans, their principles and world view. The other vessel symbolizes the Rotinonhsyón:ni canoe, which carries their principles and world view. The vessels are to travel side by side along the river, never to cross paths.

As an Indigenous person, scholar, and researcher in the Western academy, I continually have a foot in each canoe. I continually have to balance between two worlds, but remain true to being Rotinonhsyón:ni.

Sometimes this is challenging, and there is no right or wrong way to do it. Most often I think about what my community would think or say. I also think of how concepts would be translated into the Mohawk language and what the literal translation would be. I have to accept the challenges that I may face. I have to be willing to take risks and not be afraid to lose my balance and fall. The language will balance me, ground me, and provide me with the strength that I will need to continue on the path that *Shonkwaya'tison* has set before me. This is where the Rotinonhsyón:ni epistemological principles of a *good mind* will come into play. No matter what stumbling blocks I may face, I will have a good mind and the strength to overcome. It is not an easy road, but it is the path that the Creator has shown me and I accept it.

Notes

[1]This term is the traditional name for the Iroquoian or Rotinonhsyón:ni people. This is the Mohawk spelling and means People of the Longhouse.

[2]All Rotinonhsyón:ni languages have the same grammatical elements and structure. Verbs are similar, as are nouns. Therefore, because the grammar of the language is the same and the fundamental teachings are the same, the world view is the same.

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