

Ethical Space in the Intellectual Terrain: A Cultural Perspective

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As a Master's of Education student I became more pressed with the reality that mainstream and Indigenous prerogatives about knowledge in the academic terrain are beset with separate cultural intentions that hinder negotiations in intellectual terrains. I was challenged with the idea that this phenomenon needs to be understood and that understandings are possible as Aboriginal people take the lead in research initiatives. This article presents components of ethical space in academia with a personal examination of story, family and community, and Elders.

Aboriginal peoples and mainstream perspectives operate from two ideological perceptions about education: its purpose and how it is to be delivered. My personal perspective is that of an Aboriginal person with cultural values and beliefs that embrace a world view about relationships and establishing partnerships in education. My journey into higher education began through distance learning and on-line studies that I found difficult without the face-to-face contact of peers and professors. These modes of delivery were sensible given the circumstances I faced concerning location and financial issues while raising three children. I found my on-campus university experience more fulfilling, with greater opportunity to test and align my cultural training.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and Ethical Space

I connect the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996) to the advancement of student aspirations in colonial academia. The RCAP has established references to the Indigenous knowledge base across Canada. The contents of the document are available on the Internet.

Aboriginal nations brought a long history of national and international accords to their negotiations with colonial powers. Differences in world view, culture, and language between Aboriginal and colonial parties to those accords have contributed to misunderstandings and discord in relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In the Commission's view, creating more harmonious relations must start with fuller information about cultures, where they diverge and where they share common values.

A study of Ermine's (2005) work reveals clues as to the design of ethical space for "more harmonious relations" between knowledge systems. Indigenous peoples worldwide struggle to create better relations. My sur-

mountable challenge is to address what I know and assess what I am told on how to be accepted with what I know. I sought to create ethical space by maintaining and nurturing my cultural beliefs and responsibilities and discerning colonial expectations of my work through negotiation and critical reasoning. It was a time-consuming process to present the results of my thoughts and research in an acceptable written paper.

Ethical space is acknowledging two different systems and that space between them. This is the space where everybody works together to see how knowledge works. No party becomes dominant and it is a matter of equal relationship. (Ermine, 2005, p. 19)

I reflected on the conundrums when Indigenous peoples who hold sacred knowledge enter higher education. Experiences and training handed down by Indigenous Elders, mentors, and teachers have traditional rules and protocols about sharing knowledge. Colonial academia is generally not aware of or is reluctant to participate in unfamiliar activity when Aboriginal peoples take the lead. This is obvious through the low attendance of non-Aboriginal academics when Aboriginal presentations on research involving Aboriginal peoples are arranged.

I have endured the references to my way of life as “philosophical” or “romantic”: a spurious resolve to live in a state of wisdom. I devised a personal strategy to beat new paths through the academic institution I chose to attend. This institution lacked Aboriginal professors. My personal resolve was to succeed despite the challenge from the following statement.

An education that does not critique the connections or lack of connections in knowledge is not education but indoctrination. Indigenous peoples must participate in educational decision-making; they must be allowed to transform the existing crisis. (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p. 15)

I was determined to understand how I needed to participate, to understand transformational realities, and what aspects of crisis needed to be addressed.

I searched to find common Indigenous universal epistemic realities from the written, referenced, and researched words of written English. It is easier to confirm Indigenous knowledge through the oral tradition of elite Aboriginal traditionalists and faith-keepers. I found my greatest challenges were personal inner battles to find the middle ground between my own knowledge, the expectations of Aboriginal peoples among whom I live, and those of my academic guides who follow guidelines developed with the needs of colonial dreams and aspirations. My stumbling journey traverses a maze of paths to understand hierarchal academic protocols. If it were not for the directives of another Indigenous traveler at the university, my journey would have ended early.

I relied on the advice of Indigenous Elders, mentors, and teachers when they determined that it was time to begin my full-time journey into the academic world of Euro-western disciplines. Previously I took one course at a time as tentative steps to merge two separate disciplines of study.

Time became a central issue as my Elders, mentors, and teachers began to pass into the spirit world. I grieve for their words of wisdom and guidance. The words I seek to express are like indelible ghosts of successive training and testing of a merged mind, body, and heart. My current resolve is to continue teaching traditional knowledge with the vision of transforming the Euro-educational system to understand the wisdom of Indigenous peoples. The idea of having knowledge is not the problem; what the goals are for knowledge and how it is to be delivered in the education system seem to be the conflict. George E. Burns (2001) describes a paradigm of how knowledge is treated in academia. Knowledge is dissected to meet the expectations of particular professions bent on protecting commodified recognition of their hierarchal orders "of certification, streaming, segmentation by particular scholarly fields, and so on" (p. 3) so that there is an exchange "for currency in the form of jobs or licences" and "includes/excludes who may engage in formal practice" (p. 3). The focus is on individualism that is guided by "social institutionalization and regulations, and other forming of time, space and quality of valued knowledge" (p. 3).

As an Indigenous academic, I am tested in the colonial world to submit written responses in pyramid fashion: building arguments with the English dialect of words that assumes understanding of specific vocabulary, references, and structure. In seminar presentations I sought to demonstrate and lead with Indigenous ways that flow and bend to accommodate, relate, and acknowledge the seen and unseen relational and universal dimensions of the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical of a natural world order that is obvious to me and concerns the seen, felt, and heard. This order concerns relational aspects that vibrate outward from myself, with cautious sensitivity to understanding who I am and my effect on family, community, my nation, and others in the universe that include: other cultures; other relations; other living beings of land, air, water, and sky. I learned a sacred manner of approach from Indigenous sages that includes preparation with the gift of tobacco, smudging with sage, and smoking before sharing knowledge. In the Indigenous ways of knowing, the student is tested to establish inter- and intrarelations through demonstrations that acknowledge understanding and address the need for balance and harmony while practicing the necessary protocols. Trust is central in the teacher-student relationship. Clare Brant's research determined traditional methods as "teaching by modelling rather than shaping (direct instruction)" (RCAP, 1996, p. 1). The element of trust in colonial academia is not a negotiated affair.

I continually wrestle with myself about the foreign encumbrances of the printed page that require technical dexterity to operate computer equipment and presentation tools. My epistemic reality knows that Indigenous protocols for sharing knowledge with non-Indigenous peoples

are missing in my academic experiences. I realize now that I hesitated to share the deeper reflections of meaning that could have eased the tensions across the cultural divide and could have helped create the ethical space required for successful negotiation of knowledge exchange. However, I doubted that my contributions would be accepted without critical scrutiny. Vocabulary is an issue. Elder teachers ostracize students for changing their written documented words to meet grammatical expectations of the academic elite. I understand the amount of time it takes to change oral tradition to written documents. I understand why Elders are reluctant and suspicious of intents to record their words. Elders consider the ability of the listener to absorb the wisdom of their words and restrain particular teachings accordingly. Thus dissemination of Elders' words in academic papers is a dilemma when measured with Euro-Western concepts of "time, space, and quality of valued knowledge" (Burns, 2001, p. 3). Davis (2004) explains how the public sphere is often hostile terrain with its own design for security.

The public sphere is a realm of debate, critique, and challenge. Truths and ideas form different knowledge sources come together using a variety of ideological lenses ... Consistent with the idea of public debate, the university promotes the idea that academics have a responsibility to publish and have their work read and debated by peers. (p. 9)

I am accountable to my Elder teachers, my clan, and my community for the words I use to express the knowledge they give to me. Thus I am in conflict with my beliefs and responsibility during class presentations. There is no line in academic rubrics for transformation of knowledge between Aboriginal and colonial mindsets. I still struggle to demonstrate a command of English vocabulary and grammar to reconcile Aboriginal meaning to words. Thus the idea of the Medicine Wheel, Elder with a capital E, leadership, roles, responsibility, time, and order needed to be interpreted and explained in ensuing dialogue. It was on these ideas that I was most often questioned by academia.

I rebelled against the loneliness of my physical sittings in front of a computer screen. My goal was to print transformative academic arguments of my experienced realities onto white pages. I was afraid of how I might react to being misinterpreted and misunderstood by non-Aboriginal readers. My greatest challenge was to master the English words as defined by colonial academic society. I was reluctant to share my deeper insights. I longed for more time to confer with knowledgeable Elders to validate the words I chose to present in academia. I met with my non-Indigenous professors many times to instill understanding about my attempts to cross the cultural divide between Indigenous and colonial understandings. What is significantly known and understood in the world of Indigenous peoples is mostly foreign to colonial mindsets. I support oral traditions that are enjoyed by Indigenous cultures and agree that the

written word is appreciated mainly by colonial cultures. RCAP (1996) Commissioners expressed their appreciation of oral tradition.

We experienced the vitality and power of the oral tradition, communicated by people like Mary Lou Iahtail, a Cree educator in Moose Factory, Ontario, who said, "I have no written speech. Everything that I have said I have been carrying in my heart, because I have seen it. I have experienced it." (p. 15)

The professors expected references to the oral knowledge I carried. I became acutely aware of word limitations and increasingly careful in my attempts to translate the known and unknown. Euro-scholarly expectations include references with hypothetical arguments that are mired with colonial approval and based on limiting word counts. I was often cautioned about time. The focus on time led me to understand that it was the essence for successful completion of my studies. My journey into higher education in the classroom setting was among non-Aboriginal professors and peers. There were few Aboriginal students. I was determined to find a transforming bridge between me and others in this setting. I still find it difficult to adhere to academic protocols. I find they conflict with fundamental values of noninterference: "related to the core ethic of non-interference were the ethics of non-competitiveness, emotional restraint and sharing" (RCAP, 1996, p. 1).

Indigenous practice and reality have no time boundaries and include a complex series of steps that are interactive with the truth of the known and unknown. Clare Brant (1990), the Mohawk psychiatrist, determined time as a concept rather than a clocked division of time. Time in the Indigenous world is about doing things "when the time is right." Determining when the time is right includes being aware with mind, body, and heart in balance and harmony with all relations. It could be as simple as waiting to hear a robin's song after a prayer before speaking to share knowledge. These simple things must be explained in academia. The ensuing reaction is polite disbelief because it involves understanding the unknown and accepting the idea of relations with other than human beings.

I appreciate the guidance of the Euro-Western academic world to produce an acceptable deluge of words. The Indigenous lore of mind, body, and emotion are rigorously trained to entwine like a braid of sweetgrass for balance, strength, and sweetness of harmony. I long for the riddling conversations and dialogues that reminded and taught me about the universal world views that teach responsible and critical processes of the mind, body, and emotion. In the academic world the exercise is to produce a document that is acceptable in colonial terms, with a chosen smattering of statements to be rigorously proven with lines of words that demonstrate authority and expert handling of a specific vocabulary. I am afraid that the braid will become weak with this way of proving my place in academia. I believe that the value of Indigenous ways of sharing knowledge must become more visible. Many times I have felt the doubts of my

ability to succeed in promoting the ideas expected of me from my Aboriginal support system. Aboriginal ways are connected to identity and self-esteem.

Merle Beedie, an Elder who lived through successive placements in four residential schools, confirmed from her own experience that reclaiming traditions was a source of self-confidence and self esteem. "Some of us are beginning to realize what good people we are. I'm becoming a better person because I'm following some of our traditional values. As we learn more and more of these things we become stronger and stronger" (RCAP, paras. 14, 15).

Story

The RCAP (1996) documents confirm the importance of Indigenous knowledge sets found in the telling of stories. Gathering stories from Indigenous peoples and reconstituting inherent intentions can be reckless and destructive with far-reaching consequences for seven generations to come. Researchers, whether they are from Indigenous culture or not and not trained in the discipline of protecting knowledge, can do much harm to the advancement of Indigenous research.

It is not well known that among Aboriginal [people] is a matter of mind, that the stories that teach Aboriginal people how to live with each other and with creation—how to be fully human—are loaded with symbols that transcend time and the particular circumstances in which they originated. (RCAP, 1996, p. 11).

Indigenous stories are oral narratives that link personal relationships to the rhythm of the land and the multitude of ancestors from which stories begin. The stories are often long in their unraveling and pensive in raveling. Indigenous stories provide the connections of past and present to suggest the future. Without the written proof that such stories exist, Indigenous experiences are termed philosophical or romantic. Many stories are latent teachings. Many stories are understood in the literal sense. There are no defined qualifications to apply to determine who can translate these understandings with the accuracy of their original tellers. I found my classes lacking in direction on how to protect Indigenous knowledge that uses story in research despite the current suggestions available through the works of such Indigenous academics as Battiste and Youngblood-Henderson (2000); Brant (1990); Bishop (1998); Brant-Castellano (2004); Ermine (2000, 2005); Hampton (1998); Kaplan, Myrth, and Smylie (2006); Kenny (2004); Porsanger (1996); Smith (1999); and the guidelines of Tri-Council Policy Section 6—Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples (IPHRC, 2004) and Indigenous People's Health Research (ISRE, 2005). Written stories connect Indigenous peoples with their common themes, but often fail in addressing the geographical issues. A common error of the colonial research community is the assumption that all Indigenous peoples can be treated with broad guidelines that do not address the rich accumulated knowledge of individual communities. Indigenous stories add detail and

clues for esoteric understanding of relational issues that significantly affect daily and future initiatives. The RCAP (1996) document affirms the importance of story to understanding Aboriginal community.

Just as individuals in a community exercised personal autonomy within the framework of community ethics, communities exercised considerable autonomy within the larger networks of what were termed tribes or nations in the vocabulary of colonial society. Nations were demarcated on the basis of language, or dialect, and territory. Relationships within the nation were usually knit together by clan membership, which went beyond immediate ties of blood and marriage. Clan members were linked by common origins affirmed by stories stretching into the mythical past and reinforced by legends of the exploits of remembered forebears. (p. 9)

The reality of Indigenous peoples is that they have been treated as pawns between government and political parties in their own land.

Dialogue between Aboriginal peoples and Euro-western peoples tend to be convoluted. Broken treaties and subsequent interpretations and translations have left a series of begrudging relationships of both private and political groups in Canada that have attracted the attention of international summits. (Longboat, 2008)

The history of ethical policy issues did not appear to apply to Aboriginal people's rights and their rights as human beings. Aboriginal peoples are targeted as a viable market by colonial-minded educators and researchers. A colonial government systematically applied legislation to assimilate and control the original peoples based on indiscriminate data. Evidence of Aboriginal rights is found in such documents as Battiste and Youngblood-Henderson (2000); Johnny (2005); Smith (1999); and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2000). How data is interpreted and stories appropriated can have dire and long-term consequences. The presentation of data accumulated by McNaughton and Rock (2003) implicated the need for reflective and personal understanding about epistemic realities between Indigenous and colonial knowledge systems. The question of whether two knowledge systems could create equal partnerships in research began to take hold. Academic communities that have Indigenous scholars have yet to create a story to understand their current state of ethical space. I am concerned about the reconciling steps and use of time to reach understanding of Aboriginal knowledge over the cultural divide. There are documented offers by Aboriginal peoples such as Shingwauk (Miller, 1996), National Indian Brotherhood (1972), RCAP (1997), and many others to create an education that meets Aboriginal needs and intents. The Aboriginal Education Office (2007) First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework did not direct scholars to examine, acknowledge, rectify, reconcile, and collaborate on epistemological understandings in ethical space across the cultural divide, nor did it reference Aboriginal peoples' situational context regarding anti-racism and equity to the extent found in an earlier document by the Ministry of Education and Training (1993). Terms of negotiation must be based on knowledge, needs, and intents to determine terms of equality for Aboriginal scholarly

empowerment and the ownership and protection of their cultural and intellectual property with boundary protections, but not in colonial paradigms. The shift in research approaches *by* and *with* Aboriginal peoples rather than *for* them signals the necessity for new research designs and approaches in knowledge generation by and with Aboriginal peoples (McNaughton & Rock, 2003). Intercultural skills appear to be a requirement for success in both teaching and research for satisfactory conclusions when two cultures meet (Bishop, 1998; Marshall & Batten, 2003; Piquemal, 2004; Longboat, 2008).

The research community needs to confer with Indigenous peoples before they gather data from Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal councils consisting of sincere and knowledgeable individuals with varying perspectives can offer cautions about ethics in research. Ethical space in research needs to be designed by established Aboriginal councils involved in academic research. The university I attended is now assessing the contributions of a fledgling Aboriginal Research Ethics Advising Committee. The arguments to encourage this direction were compiled and presented (Longboat, 2006). The study was riddled with evidence of data that suggested that the Aboriginal population was an attractive market. Competing universities referred to the policy on "Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples," and a blank slide demonstrated a lagging response. A story of ethical space has begun. Members of the committee are a mix of graduate and undergraduate students and community, but lack the influence of an Aboriginal faculty member. There has been discussion that the group serves as a voluntary advisory role without the resources to be fully effective in terms of meeting deadlines imposed by the university's research ethics board. The Aboriginal-focused committee needs time to conduct careful reviews. The group members acknowledge the riddling and complex effect of politics and differences in Aboriginal communities such as geography, language, history, and the praxis of urban and rural centers. The committee is cognizant of research scholarship outside Aboriginal needs and intents that has contributed to overall genocide plans directed at Indigenous peoples worldwide. At the time of writing, they are organizing statements that will contribute to changes in the university's research ethics policy. There is a sense that progress is jagged and tentative as each side responds to the other's requests as a story unfolds in the creation of ethical space.

The Family and Community

My grounded roots are tied together with Ojibwa and Mohawk bloodlines from southern Ontario. My current lifestyle evolved from 35 years of life with the peoples along the North Shore of Lake Huron. My ancestral story nurtured my tenacity to seek knowledge and to develop my patience to listen for understanding of differences. I feel comfortable in those places where I have been accepted and then adopted into the ways of a family. A

family provides a place for its members for expectations and responsibilities. There is support, caring, respect, giving, and sharing in a family. Most important to me is the willingness to give and receive knowledge. When I left the shores of Lake Huron to attend a university in southern Ontario, I had the full support of my family. With the assistance of a non-Aboriginal professor, I undertook an internship and was adopted into an Aboriginal research facility. I was greeted with a semblance of the protocols I had come to expect. I am a grandmother of both my nuclear family and traditional community family. I am an Elder by age in the community of my life partner. The offering of tobacco, the invitation to smudge with sage, and the welcome in words of both Ojibwa and Mohawk were indications that I was in the right place. I needed an orientation before digging into the concerns and tasks of my chosen field of study. I needed to feel that I was a contributing member of my new community. I needed an opportunity to test my knowledge and determine how best to transform into a serious academic without losing my status as an Indigenous member of the community to which I would eventually return. I take the words of Ermine (2005) to express the intense need for Aboriginal scholars to find community in academia.

The indigenous concept of community and its epistemological underpinnings represent spaces from which it is possible to re-theorize the universal and legitimize models for ethical social relationships that are inclusive ... These are spaces constituted by discourses in Indigenous languages, worldviews, and community aspirations for an ethical order in society. (p. 3)

The Aboriginal staff of the research facility catered to my need to be adopted into a university community, and I was enabled to work with confidence and a feeling of safety to raise my questions and concerns about colonial-based education. I found ethical space in university life in the Aboriginal research center. From here I found the confidence to approach esteemed members of the teaching faculty and the office of research. The combination of being recognized as an Aboriginal person and a serious Aboriginal researcher in the university was an important step for me. I required a place where I could easily relate without going into great detail, where I could speak words such as the Medicine Wheel, Elder with a capital *E*, and leadership with mutual understanding of purpose and intent as I could not in my classes or presentations without attempting alternate definitions and examples.

Elders in Academia

I associate Elders in Indigenous culture as knowledgeable professors of the natural and universal world order. Each Elder holds specialized knowledge that was carefully developed from oral traditions and through reflective experiences. However, in academia, an Elder is not recognized as a professor until he or she completes the required "compartmentalized"

academic studies. Burns (2005) provides a succinct description of mainstream education as a closed and privileged model of colonialism.

One becomes an "expert" within—and generally only within—the compartmentalized parameters drawn by this model. Knowledge in this way is ordinated, sorted into hierarchies of sacred and profane; sanctioned and unsanctioned; knowledge versus understandings. (p. 3)

In the oral tradition of passing on knowledge, my teachers were Elders and usually associated with the clan of my mother or father. I attribute any success I have had in academics to the grounding they gave me. In my own evolving role as an Elder, I am participating in Euro-Western concepts of higher education in the hope of helping to generate new knowledge through ethical space theory. The road is difficult, and there are many sacrifices. My own discerning struggle is determining how to ensure that the knowledge I carry is protected without limiting original intents.

George Burns (2001) talked about "Aboriginal right to self-determination, and the inherent right of self-government; and the meaningful involvement of Elders in formal schooling as a new form of emancipatory praxis whose aim is emancipation, self-determination and self-government within the larger Canadian context" (p. 7). One inherent problem will be the knowledge of the Elders as they insist on telling the stories in their authentic form. Their knowledge recounts inherent rights and responsibilities of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island before colonialism. The results of these stories have influenced the insistent occupation of land by Aboriginal peoples such as reclamation of the Haldimand Tract in Caledonia.

There is room for studies with Elders' involvement. Studies are not yet complete to have an effect in academia toward the creation of new knowledge expected in ethical space when two cultures meet. George Burns (2001) identified certain steps.

Descriptions of the analytic categories of Aboriginal world views and Aboriginal epistemologies which contribute to the development of authentic knowledge and to authentic Aboriginal teaching and learning practices.... Within the context of these issues, it is also of vital importance to discover and describe the elements around which Native knowledge is developed and utilized; the historical context of Native knowledge production and use today; and both factors and themes pertaining to formal, informal and non-formal knowledge production and use by Elders in both Native and non-Native education organizations alike. (p. 7)

I am hopeful that new knowledge will be created as a result of Aboriginal-designed and delivered research for the benefit of cultures, but I worry that further inequities of knowledge possession are possible without acute scrutiny and protection of boundaries.

Conclusions

The negotiation of intellectual terrain in academic institutions has far-reaching implications for Indigenous peoples the world over. The paths

leading to ethical space in which to examine the truths held by each culture need to be thoughtfully nurtured and supported with knowledgeable scholarship, teachings, research, writing, community service, and methodologies shaped by Indigenous epistemic realities so that new knowledge is created without subsuming the Other. I believe that as Aboriginal peoples seek to understand themselves and embrace their own culture, they will then be able to embrace other cultures and begin the methodological steps to interpreting data in words that will transcend the grips of colonized knowledge. We have the tools of story, family and community, and Elders to encourage us. We have a foundation of data to retrieve. We need confident, knowledgeable Aboriginal people who are cognizant of intercultural dynamics and who are willing to scale intellectual terrains of ethical space to bring together the best of two worlds in dialogue that resists the old world order of colonial conventions.

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