

I Am My Subject: Blending Indigenous Research Methodology and Autoethnography Through Integrity-based, Spirit-based Research

Onowa McIvor

University of British Columbia

The preparation for an adult Indigenous language learning journey is explored in this article by blending autoethnographic methodology with Indigenous research methods. Themes such as spiritual preparation, truth in telling one's families stories, the role of integrity, and the exposure experienced through autoethnography are discussed. The author concludes by acknowledging the emergence of new Indigenous research paradigms and their potential for knowledge creation.

Introduction

In the dawn of my journey into adult Indigenous language learning, to be studied through autoethnography (a study involving the self), emerging Indigenous methodologies will be woven with the primary literature on the autoethnographic method, both of which will inform my study. In order to model the blend of autoethnography with Indigenous research methodologies, I will integrate relevant stories and entries from my language learning and research journals.

As is necessary in Indigenous research methodologies (Steinhauer, 2002; Wilson, 2003; Wilson, 2008) I will begin by telling you who I am, who my ancestors are, and why I am doing this work. My name is Onowa. I feel very fortunate to have been given an Indian name at birth. It means "bright eyes or wide-awake one" but no one is quite sure in what language. I always thought it was Cree but when I started to learn the language as an adult, I came to know that it wasn't. Rather, it seems that it belongs to a yet-to-be confirmed Native American tribe, but that is a story for another time.

My maternal relatives are Swampy Cree from the northern Manitoba communities now known as Cross Lake, Norway House, and Oxford House. I was raised in northern Saskatchewan, which is also in Cree territory, bordering on Dene territory to the north. My maternal grandparents have long since passed on but my grandmother's sisters are still with us. My maternal grandparents both spoke and understood Cree fluently. They did not, however, pass the language on to their children. In one generation the language was lost in our family. I have felt compelled since my early twenties to (re)learn my language. I have been preparing for this journey for a long time. Now I have children of my own and my motivation continues to grow, as I seek to break the cycle of loss of language and culture in my family.

(Dis)claimer

I struggled to begin this paper in “the right way.” I continually felt a compulsion to frame, justify, and defend what I was doing within a Western framework that would, therefore, be “acceptable.” To explain, I turn to a story:

One of my most formative experiences with research, as an Indigenous graduate student, was completing and then defending my Master’s thesis. I had an amazing (non-Native) thesis supervisor, who had the utmost confidence in me and respected my perspective—that things needed to be done in a “certain” way in order to engage in Indigenous research with communities. She gave me incredible freedom to shape and conduct my study in the way that I knew it had to be done. This is not to say that I did not make mistakes. As Indigenous researchers, and in my case as a young person, we are learning too and often encountering communities which are not our own. However, the opportunity to approach the work in a cultural and spiritual way, with my ancestors walking beside me, created outcomes that allowed me to maintain my integrity. Many months later as I read, re-read, and read again the results of my study (i.e., the words of the Indigenous community members who agreed to meet with me), I reduced, rearranged, and interpreted the knowledge that was shared into a 100+ page piece of written work. Near the end of this writing, my supervisor said, “So what methodology did you follow? What theory/ies can you name that would fairly define your work?” This was her job. She needed to prepare me for the questions that would come about the methods I used and why. So I did what I had been taught (in Western academia) to do. I researched, took books from the library, borrowed books from colleagues, and read journal articles until I found a methodology that most closely matched my work. I wrote it up in my Methods chapter as if this theorist had guided me from the start. At my thesis defense, I had a brilliant external examiner (also non-Native) who was a great supporter of Indigenous research and Indigenous graduate students in general. She saw right through it. She questioned and needles me on the subject until I cracked. I confessed my strategy, while doing my best to defend my supervisor, who I felt had supported me by allowing me to do what I knew needed to be done. But rather than scold me for what may have appeared to be deceitful, she scolded me for not believing in myself and delegitimizing Indigenous ways of doing research. She knew I had aspirations to go on to doctoral work, and so she said, “Next time, do it the way you know it needs to be done and name it what it is, Indigenous research. Do not believe that you have to hold up a Western research methodology or hide behind a big name to legitimize your work.” She was encouraging me to believe in myself and my people. I am eternally grateful to her for her words and also to my supervisor who trusted in me from the start to do my research in a way that was culturally necessary for me. This experience allowed confidence to bloom and has continued to guide my thoughts and actions in my pursuit of doctoral studies.

Indigenous Paradigms

With the exception of Linda Smith’s seminal text in 1999, it seemed to be post-2004 (the year I defended) that a steady stream of new contributions by Indigenous scholars to the development of Indigenous research (and scholarship) paradigms appeared (chronologically, see Grande, 2004; Alfred, 2005; Absolon & Willett, 2005; Thomas, 2005; Cole, 2006; Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008). While there is no authoritative summary that can be drawn from these works due to their necessarily diverse approaches, what can be said is that they now exist and have become the foundation from which many new Indigenous scholars are thriving. However, perhaps one common bond among these approaches is the underlying foundation of

self-determination and commitment to decolonization as a process and movement. In order to briefly explain the approaches that have emerged, I will highlight some key features of a few scholars' work.

Wilson (2007) describes good Indigenist research as when we are connected to all that is around us, such as family, ancestors, the land, and the cosmos. In addition, Wilson (2007) summarizes a list, co-created with other Indigenous scholars, of Indigenous principles necessary to guide good Indigenous research: respecting all life forms; conducting oneself with kindness, honesty, and compassion; bringing benefit to the community; understanding the research question lies within the Indigenous experience; knowing transformation will be one of the outcomes; never compromising the integrity of the researcher and others involved; and committing to being advised by an Elder(s) or knowledge keeper(s).

According to Absolon and Willett (2005), part of our journey as Indigenous researchers is to re-vise, re-search, re-claim, re-name, re-member, re-connect and re-cover. All of these "re's" (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 108) make up a part of the intent and necessary process of my doctoral research. Absolon and Willett (2005) also frame the foundational values of my study by stating, "the only thing we can write with authority about is ourselves" (p. 97). They also do not believe that neutrality and objectivity exist and therefore should be dropped from the aim of our research. These philosophies are the basis for the rationalization behind the blend of autoethnography and Indigenous research methods.

Quechua scholar, Sandy Grande (2008), introduces the concept of Red Pedagogy, saying it:

is not a method or technique to be memorized, implemented, applied, or prescribed. Rather, it is a space of engagement. It is at the liminal and intellectual borderlands where indigenous and nonindigenous scholars encounter one another, working to remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of the original colonialist "encounter." (p. 234)

Peter Cole (2002), of the Stl'atl'imx Nation, writes of his Indigenous methodology, which uses a canoe as the metaphor for the journey of research:

my canoe is a place of cultural understanding
it transports it connects me to the forest and the water and to my spirit...
the canoe comes from the forest and from place of mind spirit...
though it may seem the canoe and tree are from a conceptual space
they are from spirit and heart (excerpts from pp. 450-451)

Wilson (2007) argues, "It is not sufficient for researchers just to say they are Aboriginal and therefore using an Indigenist paradigm" (p. 194). Rather, Wilson (2007) explains that we must be clear as to what components are essential to doing Indigenous research in a good way so that it is worthy of the title. In addition, Wilson (2007) conveys that, "researchers and authors need to place themselves and their work firmly in a relational context" (p. 194). Wilson (2007) goes on to say, "we cannot be separated from

our work, nor should our writing be separated from ourselves (i.e., we must write in the first person rather than the third)" (p. 194). Absolon and Willett (2005) also believe that it is critical for researchers to locate themselves in the research. Certainly, it is important when conducting Indigenous research to ponder the following questions: What brought you here? What do you feel you have/need to contribute to your people/community/nation? From what "place" do you speak?

Preparation

This is a spirit journey, a journey of paddling back (and forward) to meet my ancestors and invite them to live with me in an authentic way, each day.

Weber-Pillwax (2004) states, "[O]ur connections—our identity with other living beings, the environment, and the Creator and the Creator's agents, are what maintains us in life" (p. 88). In order to be a good researcher, I must first be a good person (O'Bonsawin, Corntassel, & Thomas, 2009). In order to be a good person, I must be spiritually strong. In order to be spiritually strong, I must partake in ceremonies and rituals to stay connected with the ancestors. In preparation for research work in communities, I smudge and pray several times a day for weeks before. If I am staying in the community, I also smudge and pray (privately) while in the community before I meet with those who have agreed to be part of the research. When I come home to "analyze" and write, I smudge and pray daily throughout the time asking for guidance, strength, and blessings:

smudge, smudge, pray—repeat

Wilson (2008) describes research as ceremony, and explains that a necessary part of taking part in ceremony is prior preparation. Taiaiake Alfred's call for peaceful warriorism, *Wasáse*, is described as ceremony, ritual, war-dance—all preparation for a "spiritual revolution" (Alfred, 2005, p. 10). My research journey is a spiritual journey, as is much of Indigenous research and scholarship. I propose, as Indigenous researchers (while inviting our supporters to join), that we make a commitment to a greater uptake of spirit-based research in the academy and beyond.

Blending

The project of decolonization does not mean a full rejection of western-influenced theory, writing, or research (Smith, 1999). With the foundational Indigenous research paradigms firmly in place, we can look to methods that "fit with our methodology" and note that "some fit well with an Indigenous paradigm" (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). Narrative inquiry—and nested within it, the autoethnographic approach—is one of these methods.

The method of autoethnography is also largely about telling stories, in this case, one's own. As a research methodology, it extends beyond the realm of storytelling for entertainment but, not unlike much Indige-

nous storytelling, it holds a greater purpose of teaching, learning, and, at times, creating new knowledge. Autoethnography is, according to Carolyn Ellis (2004) “research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (p. xix). Denzin (Ellis et al., 2008) recollects a time when writing in the first person was “completely taboo” even in social sciences (p. 317). Ellis and Bochner (2000) eloquently frame autoethnography as the merging of “art and science” (p. 761).

There are two main spaces of synergy between an Indigenous research paradigm and autoethnography. The first is the centrality of the “self” in the work, without a sharp separation between the researcher and the subject (dual meaning intended). The second is the shared modality and intentional use of storytelling as method. It is a fundamental aspect of autoethnographic approaches, as well as a powerful and traditional part of oral societies.

Story-Telling

“Indigenous people want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes.” (Smith, 1999, p. 28)

Storytelling is a central part of Indigenous worldview and has been an important part of Indigenous culture since the beginning of time. Some are born storytellers, some become great storytellers, and some never quite develop the knack. Although Clandinin and Connelly (2000), with their decades of experience, assist the understanding of storytelling as a method within narrative inquiry; with more Indigenous scholars joining the academy, storytelling as Indigenous research is emerging. Qwul’sih’yah’maht Robina Thomas (2005) and Jo-ann Archibald (2008) are two Indigenous scholars who have taken this approach and created remarkable examples of how storytelling can be used effectively and with honour as a research methodology. Thomas (2005) brilliantly weaves her own stories, and those of her grandmother, with the stories of her research participants in a way that contributes to new theory and knowledge creation. Archibald uses storytelling as a way of further developing Indigenous education approaches and integrating the whole self into one’s work.

Truth

Indigenous scholars carry what is often called a dual responsibility. We are responsible to a scholarly community as well as to our own and other Indigenous communities to which we may be a part. We are held accountable to Elders, wisdom-keepers, leaders, family members, and fellow community members for what we write and teach. We have what Wilson (2008) describes as a “relational accountability” to “get the details right” (p. 77), [borrowed from Ellis, 1997]. As living examples of this, Thomas (2005) and Archibald (2008) both describe a painstaking and lengthy process of writing and re-writing, checking the words of the participants,

again and again, until they were told they “got it right.” We are responsible to the ancestors, our Grandmothers and Grandfathers, and all our relations for our research (Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2001) and therefore are not at liberty to embellish “our stories” to any degree.

Nudity

In order to do Indigenous research and autoethnography well, one must be willing to expose oneself. With exposure, private details are shared, bringing with it an open invitation for judgment and scrutiny. One hopes that through sharing some of the intimate details of one’s spirit, that it also opens possibilities for compassion, kindness, and greater levels of understanding. To provide an example of how I embody the work and the consequential nudity that follows, I turn to a journal entry written in 2004, followed by a response written in 2007:

Feb 2004

Although it is not the first language I learned in my conscious life, it is the language of my spirit, my cells and those who have walked before me. I have been on a lifelong quest to uncover, rediscover, connect with, reconnect with, learn about, live in—feeling, belonging, developing knowledge about my Aboriginal self.

I have tanned my skin, I have dyed my hair raven black, I have collected and adorned jewelry which says “I am” or at least “not quite White.” I have attended ceremonies from Métis to Nuu-chah-nulth looking for my authentic “Indian” self. I travel between hoping to find her and hoping she will emerge.

I marry ‘within’ hoping to strengthen, but lose myself in the process. I travel north to “my homeland” yet feel more like a foreigner than anywhere I’ve ever been before. At last I start to learn my mother tongue and though my lips fight to make the sounds, it’s as though I’ve always spoken it.

I wonder, is this it? Is this what I need to feel ‘complete’, ‘whole’, ‘authentic’, ‘worthy’, ‘entitled’? Or is it another token, another beaded earring, another notch in the bedpost of crawling towards self-acceptance or rather, outward acknowledgement?

What of learning the Plains dialect? Will I still appear an awkward outsider to “my own” culture? The Swampy Cree?

Always for the children. The spirits waiting to come. Will any of this make a difference in their lives? Will they damn me and curse like I did my own ancestors when they refused to speak the language? What will come of this leg of my journey? This longing, this pull ... I can’t know, I won’t know until I get there.

Feb 07 (Response)

Well... am I “here”? Now I know there is no “there,” only the journey which will never end. I have had to let go of the black and white thinking of neat beginnings and clear ends. Now I see that the path chosen/accepted will only be a series of ups & downs, pushes & pulls, starts and stalls, leaps and lags. Nothing glamorous, no gold medal or shiny start, not even encouragement from a family that has lost so much. Do it for them, those who are coming, those who deserve better and have a right to ancestral knowledge and knowing.

With sharing this piece comes great vulnerability. Ellis (2004) explains this as one of the hazards of autoethnography: “Not only your work but your personal life is scrutinized and critiqued” (p. 19). Ellis and Bochner (2000) acknowledge that it is “not easy being vulnerable, especially in the academy, where you’re expected to be in control and keep your private life removed from your professional life” (p. 755). If I am to truly have a transformative experience, how can I detach the various parts of myself? Simply put, I cannot. Therefore, my family, my place of work, as well as my spirit, will be on this journey together.

Em-Body-ing the Work

“She’s trying to find her voice, speak from her body ...” (Ellis, 1997, p. 135)

Although used in a different context, Ellis is able to translate an important quality of this journey—a necessary disconnection from the mind-focused world to “find” language within myself and access parts of my being that are not normally needed or valued in academia. Being more in the body also assists with a quest to connect with spirit and the spirit-world; many messages, gifts, and teachings are offered to us in non-verbal, non-cerebral pathways. Illustrating this, Stan Wilson (1995) quotes the late Lionel Kinunwa:

Our ancestral memories are in your blood, they are in your muscles, they’re in your bones, they’re in your hair... That is why when we hear the drum, our spirit is moved. The vibrations of the drum stir old memories—our ancestral memories. These memories come out of the molecular structure of our being. That is also why when you hear someone speaking your language, your molecular structure picks up those vibrations, because each language has its own peculiar patterns, and you feel good that somebody is speaking your language. (p. 65)

At the risk of being overly romantic or clichéd about Indigenous worldviews, there is truth to the commonly represented beliefs of Indigenous people about the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit. Acknowledging these connections and embracing them, I believe, will greatly assist in the quest to save our language. Many elders say that the language lives within us, and it is a matter of being ready, open, and then through the graces of our spirit helpers, the language will begin to emerge. I believe the act of learning our languages (especially as adults) is more than a cerebral activity.

Integrity

“I want to talk a different way, not just talk about talking a different way.” (Ellis, 1997, p. 116)

As modeled by Ellis and Bochner (2000), I want to “show, not just tell about,” in my case, adult Indigenous second language learning (p. 734). Grande (2008) confirms the ongoing tension regarding the history of research with Indigenous peoples which “raises significant questions for

the indigenous scholar," creating a dissonance where "one feels compelled to choose between maintaining his or her integrity (identity) as a Native person or do research" (p. 234).

Wilson explains (2001) that many people who go through a period of revitalizing their Indigeneity (for various reasons) often get caught up in a romantic notion of Indigeneity or develop only a surface level appreciation for traditional spirituality and beliefs. He goes on to advocate for "living the life and internalizing the things that [people] are learning about..." and further states, "[i]t is the act of living the beliefs that makes them real" (Wilson, 2001, p. 178). This is the foundation and rationale for my project. I must "step outside" of myself and the academic trajectory I am/have been on for some time and truly devote myself to an integration of the language (along with the teachings) on a cellular level. It will take a rearrangement of not only neurons, but blood cells and breath. Wilson (2001) notes, it is "this internalization [of] the relationship between the beliefs and the person [that] start[s] to gain its strength, and Indigenous people start to trust their intuition and really start to grow" (p. 178).

As an Indigenous person, studying towards a PhD brings with it great responsibility. The Elders and wisdom-keepers are always the experts, however, whom I will be called upon by my community and others to speak (with authority) on certain subjects, and if I am not strong in spirit, with a good level of integration with the teachings I have received, then I will not (yet) be worthy to take up this calling. As much preparation is required for this profession of academia, there is another level of preparation that is needed for Indigenous people in order to rightfully serve our communities and represent them when called upon to do so. Archibald (2008) includes the teachings of Snuneymuxw Elder, Dr. Ellen White, to explain:

You could study the ancestors, but without a deep feeling of communication with them it would be surface learning and surface talking. Once you have gone into yourself and have learnt very deeply, appreciate it, and relate to it very well, everything will come very easily.... When your hands are both full with the knowledge of both sides, you'll grow up to be a great speaker, great organizer, great doer and a helper of your people. (p. 40)

Dr. Ellen White's words realize a necessary process. In mainstream circles, to gain a doctoral degree makes you an expert (on something) and you are held in high regard in society. However, while many Indigenous Elders and community members express support and encouragement for higher education, it is disrespectful for a young person to put their self forward as an expert (on anything). It is not a circumstance or something to overcome; it is a cultural value and belief, the teaching of humility, and also the holding of our respected Elders as our highest wisdom-keepers, always.

Politics

There is a complexity of factors that influence all of who we become: the era in which we are born, our physical attributes, our self in relation to our parents and siblings, legal categories of identity (status, non-status, Métis, etc.), and such. The state system for Indigenous identity in Canada is completely contrived and based on colonial aims of extinguishing Indians altogether. The system is highly flawed and is so many generations deep now that it is difficult to rectify. Even with the introduction of Bill C-31 in 1985, some problems were solved, but new ones were created. A case in 2009 that has been twenty years in the making is that of Sharon McIvor v. Canada to challenge the *Indian Act* and prove that the amendments that were made in 1985 did not solve the inherent sexism that exists to this day in the Act. My family is a perfect example of how the system has failed Indigenous people in Canada:

My great-great-grandmother, Nancy Munroe, left her home community of Oxford House in 1890; this area would later become part of Treaty 5 as an Adhesion to the original Treaty that was signed in 1875 at Norway House. What is of interest to me is that this adhesion for the northern part of the province was signed in 1908, some eighteen years after my grandmother left with her Scottish husband, a Hudson's Bay Company fur trader. She would have been damned either way. She never got Treaty status in the first place because she wasn't in the right place at the right time and, even if she had, it would have been stripped due to her marriage to a non-Treaty status man. Had she been a man (marrying a white woman) she would have been granted Treaty Status (presuming that she would have been informed of the agreement and her respective entitlements) and it would not have been stripped. Rather, legally, as of 1908, she was no longer considered an Indian, although she had no white blood and spoke no English, and never lived a day away from her home territory of northern Manitoba. She gave birth to my great-grandmother who gave birth to my grandfather and on it goes. By the time Bill C-31 was introduced (which was only retroactive for two generations), too much time had passed. For those of you who are into blood-quantum membership rules, you might assess, "This woman is talking about five generations back. There is too much dilution of the original Indian woman to make a claim." However, what one must understand is that the original marriage was only one of many marriages to follow, of which most spouses on both sides were "half-breeds", Cree and Scottish. This story is repeated on my grandmother's side and therefore the Cree bloodline stays strong all the way down to my mother. Some would call us Métis, but I see myself as an Indian and therefore identify as a non-status Indian when asked to categorize myself. I do not consider myself Métis because there is a particular set of ideas about who these people are, tied to Louis Riel, the Red River, and the Métis sash, and these things are not part of my ancestry.

We were bush Indians from the North, my grandfather was a hunter, and they spoke Cree, not Michif. My grandparents left their homelands after WWII for a life in northern Ontario, where they had access to employment and education. Also, my grandmother was desperate to get away from the immense poverty that followed colonization and the fall of the fur trade. People now corralled onto reservations and Métis settlement lands, whose traditional ways of living were destroyed through floods, (swindled) territory land loss, and a new (foreign) system of dependency. My mother and her family were raised in northern Ontario in a small mining town, only going "home" to northern Manitoba for weddings and funerals where all services were conducted entirely in Cree.



Figure 1. George and Mildred McIvor, my maternal grandparents, circa 1948.

Politics 2

Long before the term political autoethnography was ever used, Ellis and Bochner (2000) judged that many have (appropriately and successfully) used narrative as a “source of empowerment and a form of resistance to counter the domin[ant]” (p. 749). This is an important juncture with Indigenous research paradigms that, by their nature, are in existence to empower marginalized peoples to resist and recover from colonial powers. In the case of my research study, it is to re-write a new story to counter the old (a.k.a., history from a Euro-Western view) and that of inevitable language extinction, and instead offer a new story of new language learners and new language speakers.

Stories hold power—the power to change lives and alter the course of history. Politicians (and many academics) love statistics but it is often a story that will change someone’s mind or at least pique their interest. Most, if not all, Indigenous research and scholarship is also some form of a political act. Taiaiake Alfred is perhaps the best contemporary example. However, there are scholars who use their work as acts of resistance. Alfred (2005) states, “I did not write this book *about* change, I wrote it from *within* change” (p. 17).

Contributing to a greater political purpose is one of the main hopes of my study and, in this case, of Indigenous rejuvenation, sovereignty, and a restoration of the strength and unity within our nations through language revitalization. I do not want my study to appear overly self-serving. Rather, I hope that others will see the immense role that integrity plays in my journey into research and higher education, and the potential outcomes for this generation of Indigenous adult second-language learners. Pelias (Ellis et al., 2008) addresses the charge of navel-gazing by pointing out that, “the navel tells the story of our first connection to another” and adds, “the self is always constituted in our interactions with others” (p. 324).

This resonates with Wilson’s (2008) insistence that all Indigenous research is about relationship: with self, with others, with community, your relationship with your participants, and the lasting relationship that must remain. Ellis et al. (2008) convey that, despite criticism of the method, autoethnography accomplishes “what needs to be done in scholarly circles—to uncover and to make present what has not been written before” (p. 324).

Divergences

Laurel Richardson (Ellis et al., 2008) shares that she explicitly does not write about her spiritual life. Richardson’s mention of spirituality (albeit to state that she does not discuss it) is highly uncommon in non-theological academia. This is one point of radical departure from research from an Indigenous paradigm, where connection to spirit and spirit in research is essential. Although I have mainly studied autoethnography from the perspective of the founders of the method, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, I have also read others. Ellis and Bochner discuss emotions and therapeutic value in several of their publications (1996, 2000, 2002) but it seems lacking in connection to spirit and therefore comes across, at times, as superficial. Certainly Ellis’ autoethnographic writing about death, grief, and loss (see Ellis 1995, 2002) has been much more meaningful than what she writes *about* the topic of autoethnography.

Our ancestors are with us at all times and our families/communities are the foundation of our lives; therefore, what would our research be without them in it? My ancestors and my children are the entire reason that I do what I do. Why would my research be void of them? This does not mean that I have an open license to share all family history through my own process—principles of respect for our elders and those who have gone before us still prevail. However, I will not be able to do my story justice without overturning a few stones and asking my family some difficult questions. However, I must proceed with respect at all times and ultimately be able to live with my work and the potential consequences. Surrendering to being guided by the ancestors, and following the teachings I have received, is essential to ensure good judgment. By blending the best

of what autoethnography brings with an Indigenous research paradigm, I hope to create a new method of research—spirit-based research—not to be confused with an association with organized religion but rather a method that is truly founded in the spirit-self.

Challenges

“... making herself the object of research ... breaching the conventional separation of researcher and subjects; the story often focuses on a single case and thus breaches the traditional concerns of research of generalization” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744)

One challenge – n = 1, or does it?

Ellis and Bochner (2000) point out that, “Our lives are particular, but they also are typical and generalizable” (p. 751). While my story is my own and will have parts that are unique to me, I also believe that my story is one of an untold generation—a generation that may feel that they have nothing useful to say because we do not have the language.... I hope that my story will bring voice to a generation lost. Lost without our language. Lost without our grandparents and their teachings. Lost without land and traditional food to nourish our mind-body-spirit. But especially for those who have not lost hope.

Another shared challenge between narrative/autoethnography and Indigenist paradigms is the issue of acceptance as legitimate science in the academy. Ellis et al. (2008) argue that there are “people across a number of disciplines who still find little use for autoethnography or for qualitative methods in general” (p. 324). What is worse is that they state that autoethnography is often held up as why qualitative methods shred at the fabric of science. Ellis et al. (2008) go on to say that those who work in the genre of autoethnography are sometimes seen as “destroying the civilization of inquiry” (p. 325). Sometimes the marginalization and dismissal happens right within the “camp” itself. Norman Denzin offers the example of Jean Clandinin’s (2007) most recent publication, *The Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*, in which there is no chapter on autoethnography exclusively. Denzin asks, “[H]ow did she do a book on narrative that excludes autoethnography?” He then answers, “Insularity of discourses”, taking the position that it is autoethnographic researcher’s responsibility to widen their circles of research-related dialogue and thereby, “position[ing] our discourse in a such a way that she couldn’t have ignored it” (Ellis et al., 2008, p. 331).

From an Indigenous perspective, Cree scholar Cora Weber-Pillwax (2004), unintentionally also discredits this form of research in her introduction to her article: “[This] is a story told from the heart, offering insight rather than science” (p. 77). The unintended implication behind her message is corrected by a later statement in her article: “[M]uch contemporary

research by Indigenous scholars uses narrative and storytelling as the primary method of supporting research objectives and community goals at the same time" (Weber-Pillwax, 2004, p. 81).

Contributions

"All of us are creators of social and cultural understandings." (Ellis et al., 2008, p. 327)

Creating new knowledge is part of the aim of scholarly work. Wilson believes that, "It is the use of an Indigenist paradigm that creates [new] Indigenous knowledge" (2007, p. 194). Thomas (2005) adds that, "Storytelling [also] uncovers new ways of knowing" (p. 245). By blending an Indigenous approach to research with the narrative tradition of autoethnography and storytelling (my own and others), I hope to contribute to the creation of new knowledge.

Ways Forward

Wilson (2003) recognizes the emergence of an Indigenous paradigm that is being noted worldwide, and identifies the four stages of creation that an Indigenous paradigm has gone through; only now, in its fourth stage, has an Indigenous perspective become "respected as... [an] equally significant paradigm" (p. 170), "that emanates from, honors, and illuminates [our] world views" (p. 169). The most recent edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), the foundational text of qualitative research in the social sciences and humanities, begins with a discussion on decolonizing research and ends with an epilogue also rich in its attention to issues of Indigenous research, with nearly half of the entire chapter devoted to "The rise of Indigenous social science(s)" and "The decolonization of the academy." This points to an intersection in history, too soon to be called post-colonial (after all, they are still the editors of the subject), with a strong inclusion of Indigenous issues at the fore and the conclusion, with chapters in between, and a new handbook some years later specifically dedicated to "Critical and Indigenous methodologies" (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). Perhaps by continuing this journey, which is a shared journey, we will begin to connect to spirit, our own and others', while making space for the creation of new knowledge and further inclusion/acceptance of Indigenous ways and spirit-based research in respectful and courageous ways.

Acknowledgements

I humbly acknowledge the land on which I have the privilege to live, study, and work—that of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ peoples. I also humbly acknowledge the Elders, other knowledge keepers, and those who have walked before me for the paths they've paved and the guidance they continue to provide.

Respect for those who have come before is of utmost importance for this journey into research and methodology. Following the recognition above, I begin with an acknowledgment and my appreciation for the battle fairly won for the inclusion of qualitative methodology as a serious form of science in the academy. To those who were both activists in this

movement and to those who widened their circle of inclusion, my humble thanks. Although qualitative methodology continues to be marginalized in some spheres, nevertheless, it now legitimately exists. Next, I offer my appreciation for the development (and inclusion) of narrative inquiry within qualitative paradigms of which many Indigenous research methodologies are a part. To those who expanded many horizons with their introduction of narrative methods to the “mainstream”, as well as those who chose to include them in the academy, *nânâskamon* (I offer my gratitude). Within the camp that is “narrative,” there is yet another lesser-known method, that of autoethnography. To the brave and creative pioneers of this method that is of particular interest to my study, I am very appreciative.

What is of equal importance, though, is the inclusion of Indigenous research paradigms and approaches in the academy which have been emerging for the past ten years. While I am reluctant to offer my appreciation to those who have welcomed Indigenous methodologies in the academy (as sometimes *doing* the ‘right thing’ is thanks enough), I do offer my gratitude to those Indigenous researchers who have contributed to the development of these methodologies as legitimate in their own right, and from which I have drawn the greatest inspiration, namely (in the order that I encountered them): Marlene Brant Castellano, Cora Weber-Pillwax, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Taiaiake Alfred, Peter Cole, Qwul’sih’yah’maht Robina Thomas, Q’um Q’um Xiim Jo-ann Archibald, Sandy Grande, and Oyate Tawa Shawn Wilson – *nânâskomtinâwâw* (I honour you all).

References

- Absolon, K., & Willett, C. (2005). Putting ourselves forward: Location in Aboriginal research. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 97-126). Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Alfred, T. (2005). *Wasáse: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.
- Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the Heart, mind, body, and spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Bochner, A., & Ellis, C. (Eds.). (2002). *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature and aesthetics*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Clandinin, D. J. (Ed.). (2007). *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cole, P. (2002). Aboriginalizing methodology: Considering the canoe. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15(4), 447-459.
- Cole, P. (2006). *Coyote and raven go canoeing: Coming home to the village*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y., & Smith, L. T. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ellis, C. (1995). *Final negotiations: A story of love, loss, and chronic illness*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ellis, C. (1997). Evocative autoethnography: Writing emotionally about our lives. In W. G. Tierney & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Representation and the text: Re:Framing the narrative voice* (pp. 115-142). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- Ellis, C. (2002). Shattered lives: Making sense of September 11th and its aftermath. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 31(4), 375-411.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (Eds.). (1996). *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ellis, C., Bochner, A., Denzin, N., Goodall, H. L., Pelias, R., & Richardson, L. (2008). Let's get personal: First-generational autoethnographers reflect on writing personal narratives. In N. K. Denzin & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry and the politics of evidence* (pp. 309-333). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Grande, S. (2004). *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought*. Lanham, MD: The Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Co.
- Grande, S. (2008). Red pedagogy: The un-methodology. In N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, & L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies* (pp. 233-254). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- O'Bonsawin, C., Corntassel, J., & Thomas, R. (2009). Indigenous approaches to research: Opening new pathways to community regeneration. *Teaching community-based research workshop series*, Learning and Teaching Centre: University of Victoria.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous people*. London: Zed Books.
- Steinhauer, E. (2002). Thoughts on an Indigenous research methodology. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 69-81.
- Thomas, R. (2005). Honouring the oral traditions of my ancestors through storytelling. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 237-254). Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Weber-Pillwax, C. (2004). Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research methods: Cultural influences or cultural determinants of research methods. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 2(1), 7790.
- Wilson, S. (2001). What is an Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 175-179.
- Wilson, S. (2003). Progressing toward an Indigenous research paradigm in Canada and Australia. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 27(2), 161-178.
- Wilson, S. (2007). Guest editorial: What is an Indigenist research paradigm. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 30(2), 193-195.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Wilson, Stan. (1995). Honouring spiritual knowledge. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 21(Supplement), 61-69.