

# Editorial: Connecting to Spirit in Indigenous Research

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Spirit: a mysterious energy that pervades the universe and gives life its essence, that animating force which joins all living things together. In our call for articles for this issue of CJNE, we asked for scholarly work focusing on the importance of spirit to Indigenous research. The articles collected here examine how we consciously seek the spirit-relation, whether through medicines, prayer, fasting, ceremony, relationships with sacred teachings, Elders, and community, and how our research practices are influenced as Indigenous scholars.

The importance of reclaiming and redefining *research* from Indigenous perspectives is highlighted in this collection. In this issue, we learn about the varied processes and approaches by which scholars connect to *spirit* in their research, with questions such as the following addressed.

- How do Indigenous research approaches contribute to the transformation of Indigenous education?
- How do researchers “connect to spirit” in their research?
- How do Indigenous research approaches and methodologies honour and strengthen our connections to our Ancestors, families, communities, nations, and ourselves?
- How does Indigenous research draw on Indigenous ways of knowing and being, connecting with self and spirit?

The importance of locating ourselves as researchers in relation to our topic has been established in several emancipatory research and theory paradigms. Indigenous researchers are well aware that who we are matters immensely to how we approach our research, as well as what we may see

when looking at a research question. One way in which Indigenous research is distinct from other research approaches is that, in locating *self*, we identify ourselves not only by our social markers (such as gender, race, class, etc.) but we also locate ourselves in relation to *spirit*.

Jean-Paul Restoule and Jo-ann Archibald, the senior editors of this 2010 CJNE theme issue, invited three Indigenous graduate students to the editorial team. Each editor is introduced below in relation to the theme.

Jean-Paul Restoule, *nintishinikaas-Wajask nitootem-Okikendawt mmissing nitoonci*, is a member of the Anishinaabek Nation (Dokis) of mid-northern Ontario, and was raised in Orangeville, a small town northwest of Toronto. He is an assistant professor of Aboriginal Education in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. He would like to thank Debby Danard Wilson for suggesting the concept for this theme issue and for developing the call for papers. Jean-Paul's two children, Vincent and Myra, connect him to spirit.

Jo-ann Archibald, Q'um Q'um Xi'em, from the Sto:lo Nation in southwestern British Columbia, is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. She connects to spirit in research through the teachings of the Elders, Indigenous storywork, and intergenerational learning.

Donna Lester-Smith, of Métis/Algonquin, English, Irish, and Scottish heritage, connects to spirit by following, first, her intuitive ancestral spirits, and second, our Knowledge Keepers who guide our practices in Indigenous knowledges, methodologies, and collaborative community health research.

Amy Parent's traditional name is *Nox Ayaa Wilt* (translated as 'one who is close to or near to her mother'). On her mother's side, Amy is from the Nisga'a Nation in northwestern British Columbia, is a member of the McKay family from the House of Ni'isjoohl, and belongs to the Canada (Frog) Clan. On her father's side, Amy is French and German. She is currently completing her PhD in education at the University of British Columbia. She is inspired by the youth in her community and enjoys spending time and learning from them as a way to connect to spirit in her research.

Christine Smillie's Anishinaabe name is *Nowa Geezhig Kwe* (translated as 'Centre of the Sky Woman'). She is from the Otter (Warrior/Healer) Clan, St. Joseph Island, in the (Bawating) Sault Ste. Marie area of northern Ontario, and has lived in various cities across Canada. She is a member of the Métis Nation of Ontario and has family ties to *Ketegaunseebee* (Garden River Reserve). The proud *Ngashi* (mother) of three and *Nookmis* (grandmother) of one, Christine is in her third year of a PhD program in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, where she is also enrolled in the Collaborative Program in Aboriginal Health.

Several of the articles that follow in this issue demonstrate how spirit manifests when we do our work. When we approach our research in a good way, with good hearts and good minds, spirit manifests to make things happen. Even if we are not mindful or conscious of spirit in our work, it, nevertheless, guides us. We cannot hide our intentions and our motivations from spirit. Spirit is present in ancestral ties, residing in all of us as it does in all our relations. When we locate ourselves, we identify ourselves in relation to a lineage, a people and a place, signifying that the past is alive and activated in the present. Almost all the authors in this issue provide a location for themselves, helping us to understand how they are situated, the forces that shape their experiences and knowledge, and the struggles that they have encountered on their research journeys. Some of the articles' authors make this their explicit goal: how to locate themselves as Indigenous researchers in relation to their research participants, the community, their families, and the Great Spirit.

In locating self in relation to spirit, there is also a process of reflection on how our pasts affect the present and the future. The bringing forward of traditional ways and practices in our research involves a connection to spirit. Emphasized in this approach is the significance of intergenerational learning, particularly a reverence for our Knowledge Keepers, our Elders, for their guidance in connecting us to spirit. Elders can teach us about protocol, about what it means to do things *in a good way*, and can instruct us about our cultural values and practices. Our Knowledge Keepers tell us who we are. Elders may take on dual roles in Indigenous research: they are often research participants and also act as consultants and counsellors, informing and guiding us on how to be respectful and responsible in our research. In determining what Indigenous research is, the role of our Elders is of central importance

These characteristics of Indigenous research convey an underlying assumption of wholism in Indigenous research. Connection to spirit is lived daily and is inseparable from research work; an Indigenous researcher cannot separate the role of researcher from one's personal identity as an Indigenous person. Who we are and what we do is also who we are and what we do as researchers. As corollaries to this idea, the significance of working *in a good way*, with *good medicine*, a *good heart*, and a *good mind*, is exemplified in many of the articles. All of these ways imply that the ethics of a good relationship enter into Indigenous research work much earlier than the moment we begin to seek research sites, participants, or data. The significance of centering oneself, getting spiritually ready and preparing in a wholistic manner, is a lesson bestowed by authors in this collection. Using the example of ceremony, Wilson (2008) reminds us of the critical role of preparation. Being prepared, the time required to develop 'readiness', is critical for knowing how to recognize when it is time to begin.

This preparation is part of a much larger and longer process that is part of doing Indigenous research. The authors of these articles, whether identifying as Indigenous or non-Indigenous peoples, whether firmly or tentatively rooted in their Indigenous identities, each recognize that the *way* we come to know matters greatly and perhaps more so than *what it is* we eventually come to know. Emphasizing the process, the journey, the path, the way, is a theme throughout these works that speaks to the necessity of nurturing a spirit of humility when we undertake our research.

Faith, or being able to trust in the spirit, is a critical part of this work also. Offering our intentions and questions to the spirits helps us to find our answers. By doing so, we find our paths, our faces, our hearts, and foundations (Cajete, 2000). Trusting in this process, even when we cannot foresee future processes or end results, is all part of the spirit connection in research and a theme that emerges in the authors' writings.

### *Presentation of Articles*

Kimo Cashman's stories begin and conclude this CJNE theme issue. His story *Celebrating a Spiritual Journey* creates a positive space for thinking, feeling, and doing in relation to spirituality. While the impact of colonization has often created negative feelings that are transmitted to those most close to us, Cashman instead reminds us of the need to recognize the importance of spirituality and our families, and to celebrate those positive defining moments and experiences. His story *Celebrate, 'Ohana* presents the power of family caring and love. While the work we do in academia can be overwhelming, remembering to appreciate and to celebrate those closest to us our families and our children will sustain us in our research journeys.

*Ahnungoonhs* / Brent Debassige's article *Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology: A Spirit-centered Way in Anishnaabe Research* examines the re-conceptualization of Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin as a research methodology, relates a spirit-centred way in Anishnaabe research, and contributes to the discussion of approaches informed by Indigenous ways of knowing used throughout the research process. Using a framework based on Bimaadiziwin, this concept becomes the article's focal point for re-conceptualizing and conducting spirit-centred research within Indigenous communities. The author states that, "... using Anishnaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin within the context of research can greatly contribute to Indigenous scholarship in at least five ways", and are described as (1) contributing to the well-being of the individual while navigating the waters of academe; (2) contributing to revitalizing language and culture; (3) protecting Indigenous knowledge that is generally inherent to lifelong practitioners; (4) using a distinctly Indigenous methodology which can greatly facilitate good research in Indigenous communities; and (5) countering hegemones of research in the academic and historical legacies of damaging research practices, forced on Indigenous peoples.

Debby Danard Wilson and Jean-Paul Restoule explore two central themes in their article *Tobacco Ties: The Relationship of the Sacred to Research*: (1) the way in which the natural world contributes to and informs Indigenous research and (2) how Indigenous research can draw upon Indigenous ways of knowing and being by connecting the self and spirit. The authors carry readers along with them on their research journey as they share important teachings about the meaning of tobacco from Indigenous Elders on northeastern Turtle Island. The authors also reflect on the unexpected directions their journey took as they sought to understand the deep spiritual significance of using tobacco ties as part of their research methodology. Wilson and Restoule demonstrate a deep and humble reverence for the important knowledge that can be received or 'gifted' from the tobacco plant. They explain that the tobacco plant possesses great power to connect individuals with the spiritual and physical world, providing that respectful protocols for its use are followed. Further, they share a wealth of Elders' teachings about the tobacco plant in a way that is true to Indigenous pedagogy, by inviting readers to derive their own understanding from these teachings. Wilson and Restoule conclude their article by providing a useful list of protocols for researchers to consider when working with tobacco ties as part of an Indigenous research methodology.

Donna Lester-Smith and Roberta Price are Indigenous scholars and community leaders immersed in their cultures. In their article *Aboriginal Health Roundtable Discussions: "Why We Accept Your Invitation to Join You"* they share personal stories, through participation in university-led roundtable discussions about Aboriginal health research, of their resistance to racism and they show how they negotiate an intellectual landscape that too often continues to be dominated by epistemic colonialism. Lester-Smith and Price begin their discussion by highlighting the important pathways that Aboriginal individuals, communities, and governing bodies have created in order to ensure that Aboriginal peoples' health and well-being remain central in all research practices (e.g., the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, traditional Aboriginal protocols, and the *Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People*). Although these initiatives are critically important, the authors share troubling examples of the ways in which racial discourses continue to be expressed in some areas of academe. These discourses can have a profound impact on Indigenous people's connection to self and to spirit, and reaffirms the need for non-Aboriginal researchers and Aboriginal communities to develop better relationships. Lester-Smith and Price conclude their article by providing insightful and practical steps that can help to transform relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health researchers. The authors' ongoing perseverance and desire to pursue systemic changes, despite encountering some racist undertones, demonstrates their strength of spirit and provides an uplifting example to researchers.

In their article *Learning from Promising Programs and Applications in Nourishing the Learning Spirit*, Jonathan Anuik, Marie Battiste, and Ningwakwe George define a *learning spirit* as “the entity within each of us that guides our search for purpose and vision.” Relationally, the authors focus on Indigenous foundations that might best facilitate greater understanding of traditional Aboriginal educational practices alongside more contemporary formal ones. As a pivotal means to fuse these two contexts, the authors express their quest for a ‘between-ness’ of mainstream theories of learning and Aboriginal ways of learning. Anuik, Battiste, and George provide significant evidential practices found in the Integrative Science Program and Mi’kmaq Studies at Cape Breton University, and in the Seven Generations Education Institute that promotes Anishinaabe education. ‘Cultural-camp’ programs emphasize the importance of foundational learning and the inclusiveness of Elders, traditional healers, health practitioners, and other traditional community members. Key to the learner-spirit is vast and vital knowledge shared by ancestral Aboriginal teachings. The authors refer to Aboriginal spiritual learning as wholistic, a life-long journey of rediscovery, a cornerstone prospective through which present and future teaching practices may contribute to well-developed learner-spirits that many First Nation peoples intuitively seek and exemplify.

In *Importance of Métis Ways of Knowing in Healing Communities*, Judy Iseke draws upon Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and connecting with self and spirit by focusing on storylines, histories, cultural contexts, and pedagogies with four Métis Elders. Iseke explores spirituality as a source of strength for Métis Elders, the importance of ceremonies in Métis communities, and some of the challenges to maintaining existing spiritual practices in Métis communities. The objective of the research discussed in Iseke’s article is to undertake a collaborative analysis with Elders in order to understand the stories and histories of Métis peoples, and the role of storytelling in the sharing of Indigenous knowledges, both past and present. The author’s research goals were to: (1) respond to the need for Indigenous interpretations and representations of culture, history, pedagogy, and curriculum; (2) provide increased research opportunities and publicize the work of Indigenous Elders; and (3) generate better understandings of the relationships between Métis peoples’ knowledges and mainstream education and research practices.

In *Learning to Relate: Stories from a Father and Son*, Jeff Baker and his father, Lee Baker, explore the relational queries *Who am I?—Who are we?* Their multiple discoveries are embedded in living stories, relations, time, and quiet reflection. The authors effectively demonstrate the Ancestral wisdom of many Indigenous Elders, Sages, and Scholars, who nudge us towards self-reclamation, mending our soul-wounds, and ultimately, re-birthing our authentic, familial selves. With candid awareness of their cultural and father-son disconnects, the Bakers cautiously revisit each oth-



ers' individual storied lives and then weave together a more spiritual connectedness with emphasized threads of wholism, respect, and honour. They traverse through critical distinctions of learning, knowing, and being with distress, acceptance, and forgiveness. While drawing on contemporary scholarship about Indigenous storytelling methodologies, the Bakers offer valuable contributions to educational research, particularly to the tensions of Indigenous traditional ways of being amid urban living. In addition, intergenerational ties are recreated and celebrated throughout their uniting self-journeys, inclusive of the past (Lee Baker), the present (Jeff Baker), and the future (their young grandchild and daughter, respectively).

Lyn Trudeau and Lorenzo Cherubini articulate culturally relevant ways of Indigenous research in their article *Speaking our Truths "in a good way"*. Through a collaborative, socio-personal thought-piece, Trudeau and Cherubini tease apart relational ways of Indigenous research and reclaim a spiritual vitality in their research, as demonstrated through the Taking Circle format, whereby each member can subjectively share individual and collective stories in a safe space without judgments cast. Parallel to this framework, the authors explore their own reflexivity about each other's original ways of learning and being, which highlight researcher-responsibilities, necessary protocol with Aboriginal community members, and stronger Aboriginal research processes. In their discussion of time-honoured learning perspectives and practices, Trudeau draws from her Anishnawbek culture and Cherubini from his experiences as a non-Indigenous scholar respectful of his Aboriginal colleagues. As one voice, they remind us that Western ways embedded in empirical ideologies do not often transcend spiritual ways; however, honouring research by recognizing collaborations has the potential to develop trustworthy relationships between non-Indigenous academic researchers and Aboriginal community members.

In *One Story of a Spiritual Journey*, Ross Hoffman shares an uplifting story about a personal spiritual journey that helped him to understand the spiritual nature of the self and which became the basis of his academic research. His story gently guides the reader through the process of how a personal search for healing eventually led to the completion of a dissertation. Hoffman, a non-Indigenous researcher, details the careful steps he took in order to conduct research in a responsible manner about the late Raymond Harris (a highly respected Arapaho traditional teacher and spiritual leader). This process required Hoffman to balance his lived experience with his understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm. To this end, he addressed the ontological and epistemological nature of spirit in his research and maintained a strong connection to spirit by following Plains Cree traditions and protocols as part of his method of inquiry. His involvement with a spiritual community, guided by gifted Elders, and a strong commitment to conducting academic research related to Indigenous knowledge and scholarship, were vital to his research journey.

In *I am My Subject: Blending Indigenous Research Methodology and Autoethnography through Integrity-based, Spirit-based Research*, Onowa McIvor discusses her use of narrative inquiry, autoethnography, and Indigenous research paradigms to address Indigenous spirituality in her research and her journey with adult Indigenous language learning. In an effort to break the cycle of loss of language and culture in her family, McIvor felt compelled to (re)learn her Cree language and to pass it forward to her family. The author offers extensive detail about the beginnings and emergence of Indigenous research internationally, specifically within the last ten years. McIvor is hopeful that such research will: (1) rewrite a new story to counter the old (a.k.a. 'history' from a Euro-western view); (2) offer a new story by new language learners and new language speakers; (3) contribute to a greater political purpose (in this case, of Indigenous rejuvenation, sovereignty, and restoration of language); and (4) bring a voice and hope to a younger Indigenous generation, many of whom do not speak their Indigenous languages, nor know the teachings of their grandparents, nor have access to a land-base or to traditional foods.

In Coast Salish tradition, the editors raise our hands in thanks, and with respect to the authors and reviewers of this CJNE theme issue, for contributing to the scholarly discourse on spirit and Indigenous research. We look forward to future scholarship in this important area.

#### References

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