

Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology: A Spirit-centered Way in Anishinaabe Research

Ahnungoonhs / Brent Debassige
University of Western Ontario

This article contributes to the discussion of approaches for conducting research primarily informed by Indigenous ways of knowing throughout the research process. Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) is a unifying and transcendent concept that, when activated, contains the past, present, and future of Good and respectful approaches to life, which includes Indigenous research. Although the use of Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as part of research is not a new occurrence, explicit examples of the application of Indigenous spirituality in the literature involving research are sparse. Through this work I propose a Spirit-centered way in Anishinaabe research under the banner Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as research methodology. I start by locating myself and situating my personal experiences as the backdrop for my understanding of Anishinaabe worldview. After a brief discussion of Indigenous research, I present a review of the literature on the concept of mino-bimaadiziwin. I then re-conceptualize Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as research methodology. Finally, I present an example of how I have begun to seek, do, learn, and live a Spirit-centered way in Anishinaabe research.

There are Indian people today who believe that the New People are with us today in the form of our youngest generation... They are finding their way to the Sweat Lodges, Spirit Ceremonies, Drum Societies, Midewiwin Lodges, Pipe Ceremonies, Longhouse Meetings, Sun Dances, and Kivas that have survived to this day (Benton-Banai, 1988, pp. 111 - 112).

My Location

Indigenous scholars have demonstrated the significance of locating oneself as being integral to Indigenous research and our lives (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Steinhauer, 2001). Sinclair (2003) suggests that “location in Indigenous research, as in life, is a critical starting point” (p. 122). Similarly, Elders and Traditional¹ people have taught me about the significance of locating oneself, so my location is where I begin.

Boozhoo, my Spirit name, is *Ahnungoonhs*, which translates as little star. My English name is Brent Debassige and I am an Ojibway-Anishinaabe of the Caribou Clan. I am from M’Chigeeng First Nation of Manitoulin Island², but I currently reside in London, Ontario. My parents, Nelson and Joyce, both grew up in M’Chigeeng but moved away before I was born. My early years were spent growing up in and near Toronto.

While in elementary school, my parents returned to M'Chigeeng, which has given me the benefit of being raised in urban communities as well as in a First Nation community.

I was not explicitly raised with Anishinaabe cultural learning. My parents were not ceremonial people. I was raised in the Christian faith and, through my schooling experiences, I have primarily been a student in schools dominated by Western European intellectual convention. Although I grew up in an environment with my parents' periodic use of Anishinaabemowin (loosely translated as Ojibway language), it was not enough for language acquisition or general comprehension. However, I have come to acknowledge that Anishinaabe cultural learning and the language were still part of my upbringing. My parents' decision to move back to M'Chigeeng when I was still a boy was partially due to their interest in connecting me to the community where they grew up. Although Anishinaabe ways of knowing were more accessible when we moved home, I resisted learning my language and I had little interest in my ancestral culture. I could not wait to leave home. As I grew older, this gradually changed. My interest in language and culture grew but many years passed before I connected in a serious way. Native Studies courses in university uncovered a history that I had never known before. After several years, I found my way to ceremonies and a different kind of education began.

From my Traditional teachers and through my participation in ceremonies, I have received teachings and learned about the significance of introducing myself before entering a Traditional lodge and before I speak. As I continue to develop a deeper understanding of Anishinaabe ways of knowing, I have gradually summoned the courage to make those teachings part of my daily practice. When I introduce myself as I have done at the beginning of this article by providing my spirit name, my clan, and my community before I speak (or write), I am situating myself spiritually, physically, and communally. I am one voice that is part of many interrelated realities. I am also situating my origin of learning about a way of knowing. For me, locating myself situates my participation in ceremonial participatory contexts that are facilitated by Traditional Knowledge holders of all ages. Through ceremonial participation, I have worked to facilitate a deeper, socialized, contemplative, spiritual, and relational way of living located in an Anishinaabe worldview. As a re-conceptualization, ceremonies are an Anishinaabe educational place/space that is a specialized *classroom*, and ceremonies represent a teaching and learning environment that is distinctly Indigenous.

I have reflectively applied what I have learned in and out of those ceremonial locations in daily life. Through this applied reflection of what I have learned, I am taking up my role and responsibility as a contributing member of the Anishinaabe Nation. I am working to earn Traditional Knowledge and learning to sustain that knowledge for future generations.

Couture (1985) outlines the significance of the responsibility of younger and Elder generations to work together for the sustainability of our ways of knowing in the following:

Oral tradition teaches that when certain values, or laws, are upheld and observed, the people survive: it devolves to elders to provide these precepts. However... the interpretation and application of the directives of elders is the responsibility of the younger generations (p. 6).... Much time is required to learn their ways and their teaching. For the serious student of Native ways, there is no other way but to relate consistently over time with elders (p. 8).

For me, Anishinaabe worldview is grounded in a Traditional way of knowing, learned from much of the following: my journey as a Sundancer, my participation and work around ceremonial lodges (e.g., fasting lodges, sweatlodges, and the Three Fires Midewiwin lodge³), and my time working with and listening to Elders, both those who have Traditional Knowledge and those who do not.⁴ Furthermore, the range of experiential knowledge I have gained through many other locations has facilitated my capacity in relating to, making meaning of, and learning to activate those specialized ways of knowing in a Good⁵ way in daily life. Even mistakes become valuable locations of knowledge when used in concert with contemplation about how I can learn and grow from my experiences. All of these aspects represent my journey as wholistically⁶ and continually working at strengthening an ongoing relationship with Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin⁷ (loosely translated as the Good Life).

Introduction

Through coming to know Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin and journeying as an *oshkabaywis* (ceremonial helper), I have laid the foundation and positioned myself to conduct research in a Good way. I feel it is significant to note that this self-referent examination was not intended to be the primary topic of investigation in my research. My primary motive for pursuing the Good Life is related to a personal decision and not an academic research project. It is only as a retrospective account that aspects of my journey began to be positioned as the source of research inquiry. However, this article will not delve into that inquiry. Instead, it examines the re-conceptualization of Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as research methodology and relates a Spirit-centered way in Anishinaabe research. The concept of Spirit-centred is borrowed from Akan (1999) and her reference to maintaining a healthy balance in life and an understanding that life is a Spirit-centred existence. I feel that Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin requires a re-conceptualization. When spirituality or our ceremonies are relocated in or partnered with the Western European intellectual enterprise, a re-conceptualization is significant to acknowledge.

There is a tenuous relationship in which Traditional people who are also scholars in academe continuously find themselves situated. Traditional scholars work through the tensions within and between teaching

and learning environments that are distinctly Indigenous, and schooling environments that are primarily steeped in Western European intellectual convention. To simply suggest that the terms 'research' and 'ceremony' are synonymous risks and undermines the hard work of coming to know Traditional Knowledge in a Good way.⁸ There are also ceremonies and aspects of ceremonies that are not available for public access or general use, and will never be synonymous with conventional research.⁹ In addition, as a Traditional scholar, I must be vigilant in my cross-cultural conceptualizations so that I honour and respect the keepers of Traditional Knowledge. It is the keepers of our Traditional Knowledge that have been given the responsibility to carry the rites to lead and/or conduct our ceremonies. My hope is that my emphasis on re-conceptualizing our ways of knowing will help to honour the sacred places and spaces of that knowledge, respect the Traditional carriers of that knowledge, and acknowledge the sacredness of the Traditional Knowledge carried by Indigenous peoples. As I tread cautiously and recognize my location as a new learner of Anishinaabe ways of knowing, I offer my work not as a blueprint but as a small contribution for careful consideration. This contribution places prominence on our ways of knowing being lived in and/or partnered with academe in a Good way.

The previous generation of Indigenous scholars has primarily written about the reliance on Western approaches for conducting research that ally with Indigenous ways of knowing. This article contributes to the discussion of approaches that are informed by Indigenous ways of knowing throughout the research process. I propose that Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as research methodology is a significant step towards enhancing research in a Good way. Although the use of Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as part of research is not a new occurrence,¹⁰ explicit examples of the application of Indigenous spirituality in the literature involving research are sparse.

I start with a brief discussion of Indigenous research, present a review of the literature of the concept mino-bimaadiziwin, and then I re-conceptualize Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as research methodology. Finally, I present an example of how I have begun to seek, do, learn, and live a Spirit-centered way in Anishinaabe research.

Indigenous Research

The historical legacy of research in Indigenous communities has been, for the most part, a horrific one, but gradually guiding principles for conducting respectful research in Indigenous communities have emerged (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous researchers bring hope for the conclusion of the legacy of research stemming from imperial and colonial subjugation (Smith, 1999). Indigenous communities are seeking and establishing their right to expressions of self-determination. Appropriating terminology and redefining concepts contributes to the

growing discourses about research by Indigenous people in new and meaningful ways. "From the perspective of Aboriginal groups, the primary objective is to gain more control over their own affairs by reducing unilateral interventions by non-Aboriginal society and regaining a relationship of mutual recognition and respect for differences" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, Negotiation and Renewal, para. 33). In the case of research, Indigenous people are establishing processes that are relevant, meaningful, and ethical to our worldviews which include our languages, our families, our communities, and our ceremonies (Castellano, 2004). In the document *Opportunities in Aboriginal Research: Results of SSHRC's Dialogue on Research and Aboriginal Peoples*, informed by over 500 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals of wide ranging backgrounds, McNaughton and Rock (2003) reported on a repetitive theme that acknowledged a "paradigmatic shift" of the conceptualization of research. "Aboriginal peoples are increasingly seen as researchers and research partners conducting research within Aboriginal knowledge traditions, using Aboriginal methodologies as well as methodologies drawn from interaction with non-Aboriginal traditions" (McNaughton & Rock, 2003, p. 4). Further, Cora Weber-Pillwax (as cited in Steinhauer, 2002) states that people involved with Indigenous research "must make sure that the three Rs—Respect, Reciprocity, and Relationality—are guiding the research" (p. 73). While the ways a researcher comes to understand and include the nature of the three Rs into their research can be quite complex, Indigenous scholars have begun using Indigenous ways of knowing as the foundation for adaptive approaches to conducting research.

*Traditional Knowledge and Academe:
Centering the Good Life in Research and in Daily Life*

In an effort to use a talking circle as methodology, Graveline (2000) adapted the Traditional way of conducting a talking circle for the purposes of data collection. Graveline believes adaptations are a necessity and can be respectful, but researchers must engage in them cautiously. Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, and Mackay (1999) also position the learning circle as research method as a "cultural adaptation." As an extension of adaptive approaches, institutionalizing Traditional Knowledge has also been revealed (Fixico, 2003). Fixico (2003) cites the movement in the US towards American Indian Studies as "a process for channeling traditional knowledge from tribal communities to the classroom" (p. 143).

As these approaches continue to emerge, is the work of sustaining Indigenous ways of knowing simultaneously at work among the students and people engaged with adaptations? Given that living knowledge and the expression of ways of knowing are always prone to movements, changes, and shifts¹¹, what is the potential for loss of knowing in adapting ways of knowing in research for future generations? Are Indigenous schol-

ars working closer to colonial mentalities under the guise of adaptations? Like Graveline (1998, p. 90), I wonder, "How can students [and others], steeped primarily in hegemonic Eurocentric consciousness, become aware of the nature of their cultural conditioning?" As Graveline "supports consciousness-raising in the classroom" (1998, p. 90), I am interested in complementary consciousness-raising aspects in research that is grounded in Anishinaabe spirituality.

There is research indicating the significance of including Indigenous ways of knowing in the academy, such as integrating "western ways of knowing and Indian ways of thinking" (Colorado, 1988, p. 49) for the development of research strategies; "curricular integration" of tribal group concerns in an effort to enhance cultural sensitivity and reduce ethnocentrism in the interpretation of data (LaFromboise & Plake, 1983); and the need to "meld 'formal' and Indigenous knowledge systems... to ease the tension that [Indigenous ways of knowing creates]... among dominant-system academics" (Wilson, 2003, p. 161). However, there is little available research outlining the use of *unadapted* spiritual practices as part of the research process. One example exists that indicates an unwelcoming attitude toward Indigenous ways of knowing by the academy. In a research study uncovering the ways Indigenous scholars incorporated their ways of knowing with Western approaches to conducting research, Sinclair (2003) related that all of her participants attended to the Spirit in some way but all recalled instances of not disclosing that information to academic faculty or funding sources. One of the participants revealed interest in using respectful protocol (i.e., presenting tobacco) as part of the research process and encountered dismissive attitudes from an ethics committee. The participant's research proposal was rejected because tobacco was not "sanctioned" as permissible in research. Unfortunately, these attitudes continue to prevail within academe and the struggle for the acceptance of Indigenous ways of knowing in research is a long way off. However, if scholars are left to solely adapt or institutionalize Traditional Knowledge, the sustainability of our ways of knowing may be jeopardized. I believe Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin in research situates our ways of knowing at the center of the research process, and anything that we choose to do in life because it is largely participatory.

I propose that Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin is more than a unifying concept of the Anishinaabe way of life (Gross, 2002) for the Anishinaabe. The concept transcends contemporary theories of research and education and is a guide to inform the use of new theories and methodologies. In other words, Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin is a unifying and transcendent concept that, when activated, contains the past, present, and future of Good and respectful approaches in daily life, which includes Indigenous research. As a concept, Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin has an increased presence in the literature and has set the stage for the

concept's significance for research. However, by conceptualizing Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin, I risk transforming a partnership between preservation (to save and/or record for posterity) and sustainability (to live wholistically) to a preservation *only* project. I take this risk with the following caveat: Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin is a wholistic way of daily living and should not be reduced to *only* an intellectualizing project.

Conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin

During the last decade, the term *bimaadiziwin* can be spotted in literature in reference to the historical religious practices of Ojibwe in America (McNally, 2000, 2006), in reference to Aboriginal women's health and healing (Anderson, 2005), in reference to Cree health and well-being (Adelson, 2000), in reference to urban Nishnaabe cultural resurgence (Pitawanakwat, 2008), in reference to Indigenous environmental activism (LaDuke, 1999), as Ojibwe narrative (Starkey, 2006), as narrative inquiry (Young, 2005), as an approach to helping in Aboriginal social work (Absolon, 2009; Hart, 2002, 2009), as the foundation for revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge in the contemporary context (Simpson, 2008), and within master's theses work (Goudreau, 2006; McCoy, 2007; McIvor-Girouard, 2007; Rheault, 1999) and doctoral dissertations (Bell, 2006; Bressette, 2008; Manitowabi, 2007; McAlpin, 2008; Settee, 2007; Toulouse, 2001) in the US and in Canada. The rise in the use of the *bimaadiziwin* concept suggests that Anishinaabe scholars and allies to Anishinaabe research are acknowledging its significance to their research and to the membership of the communities in which they are conducting research.

In his book *'You're so fat!' Exploring Ojibwe Discourse*, Spielmann (1998) reports on a teaching given by a monolingual Ojibwe language speaker, Okinawe. Spielmann comments on the word *bimaadiziwin* and its use during a teaching that was presented to him by Okinawe. In Spielmann's efforts to have the word translated to English, he uncovers that "*bimaadiziwin* is virtually impossible to translate accurately into English" (p. 159). His attempt to acquire an accurate definition from bicultural speakers (i.e., Ojibwe-English) uncovers that each person struggles with a translation. "There are, however, some common themes that come through in the translation, revolving around such things as, 'a worthwhile life,' 'a long, fulfilling life,' 'our walk in life,' 'walking the straight path in this life', and so on" (Spielmann, 1998, p. 159). Spielmann concludes that the word *bimaadiziwin* is best understood *in context* and *in the language*.¹² Spielmann's examination of the concept also reiterates much of an early anthropologist's findings in relation to the term *bimaadiziwin*.

In his research among the Ojibwa, Irving Hallowell (1967) uncovers the following understanding of the term *bimaadiziwin* (or *pimadaziwin*)¹³:

The central value of aboriginal Ojibwa culture was expressed by the term *pimadaziwin*, life in the fullest sense, life in the sense of health, longevity, and well-being, not only for oneself but for one's family. The goal of living was a good life and the Good Life involved *pimadaziwin* (p. 360).

Hallowell describes the work involved to achieve bimaadiziwin. He reveals that bimaadiziwin is a spiritual endeavour that involves seeking the aid of superhuman entities, and that Life could only be achieved by a person who maintains good social relations with people. Although bimaadiziwin is a central goal in life for both men and women, it is men who need to "seek out and obtain superhuman aid. Women might obtain such help; men could not get along without it" (Hallowell, 1967, p. 360). Seeking guidance from the Spirit was conducted in solitude (through fasting) and the Spirit took pity on the faster before gifting Life. Hallowell also reveals that fasters received "blessings from many helpers... [and] the nature of the gifts depended upon his [or her] own interpretation of the dreams or visions he [or she] experienced" (p. 360). The experience was never referred to lightly or the blessings could be lost (Hallowell, 1967). Lastly, Hallowell states that a relationship to living respectfully throughout his/her life is vital to maintaining the gifts received by the Spirit.

Pflüg (1998) adds another layer to Hallowell's interpretation through her research with Odawa Traditionalists. Pflüg suggests that Hallowell did not realize the significance that bimaadiziwin has "to... personal and social identity, interpersonal connection and interdependence, and moral integrity" (p. 68). Thus, the interpersonal relationships between oneself and the whole of Creation are a significant ethical responsibility in bimaadiziwin (Pflüg, 1998). Bimaadiziwin contains a vitality that transcends linear conceptions of time that are still active in Anishinaabe communities (Gross, 2002). As Gross (2002) suggests, bimaadiziwin has, is, and will continue to be "a unifying concept of Anishinaabe religion [or spirituality]" (p. 30).

As contextualized above, Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin involves what the educator and spiritual leader, James Dumont (1992), refers to as "a very special way of seeing the world" (p. 75). In order to appreciate Traditional Indigenous history and reality (Dumont uses the words, Native myth and legend), one requires a special way of seeing the world. Understanding this way of seeing begins with a person's willingness to accept that it exists (Dumont, 1992). Dumont suggests that "a necessary further step [requires]...mak[ing] an attempt to participate in this way of seeing" (p. 75). These two steps are the foundation of coming to know Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin.

I would suggest that non-practitioners are disadvantaged in their ability to adequately engage in an informed discussion about Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin. Moreover, in my experience as a new practitioner I have made overzealous assumptions and assertions that were mistaken. Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin is a life-long educational journey. Along my journey I continue to remind myself to only speak of what I know and accept that I have a lot to learn.

The increased usage of bimaadiziwin in research literature is a sound basis for the movement toward a research framework based on bimaadiziwin. This framework uses the concept as a focal point for re-conceptualizing and conducting Spirit-centered research within Indigenous communities in Canada and the US among the Anishinaabe.

Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin as Research Methodology
The expression of Spirit as part of research methodology is gradually making an appearance in the literature (Rheault, 1999; Sinclair, 2003), but the conceptualization of an explicit and distinctly Indigenous methodology that is grounded in Indigenous spirituality remains limited. As Kovach (2005) suggests, this is due in part to the resurgence of academic conservatism that is resistant to emancipatory methodologies such as Indigenous research. In the academy, "questioning established views about what counts as meaning, knowledge, and truth provokes defensiveness (p. 21)... Incorporating Indigenous epistemology into a non-Indigenous language... is complex. It is a troublesome task of criss-crossing cultural epistemologies" (Kovach, 2005, p. 27).

For Ermine (1995), Indigenous epistemology "is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown" (p. 108). Ermine suggests that "mythology, ritual, and ceremonies, the medicine wheel, nature, and language all reveal vestiges of grand discoveries and communion with the universe within. However, the greatest legacy of our ancestors is in what they discovered within individuals of tribal communities" (p. 110). Ermine suggests that this search within or "inwardness" is "a valid search for subjective inner knowledge in order to arrive at insights into existence" (p. 102). This inward search relates to what the Anishinaabe might refer to as a *biskaabiiyang* approach.

In her dissertation titled *Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Knowledge: A Biskaabiiyang Approach*, Wendy Djinn Geniusz (2006) uses a research methodology developed by the Indigenous Knowledge Masters program of the Seven Generations Education Institute in Fort Frances, Ontario. Biskaabiiyang¹⁴ translates as "returning to our Teachings" (Seven Generations Education Institute, n.d., p. 2). In a personal communication with Geniusz (2006), Laura Horton describes the biskaabiiyang research method "as a process through which Anishinaabe researchers evaluate how they personally have been affected by colonization, rid themselves of the emotional and psychological baggage they carry from this process, and... return to their ancestral traditions" (Geniusz, 2006, p. 13). The biskaabiiyang method is an intentional action involving a return to one's ancestral teachings and begins the journey of coming to know Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin. The Seven Generations Education Institute (n.d.) outlines the seven principles of Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as follows:

Anishinaabemowin is our original way of speaking which allows us to process and express our thoughts (p. 5)... *Anishinaabe Inaadiziwin* is our behaviour, our values and our way of living our life, and being Anishinaabe in the fullest sense (p. 6)... *Anishinaabe Inendamowin* is our way of thinking, our way of perceiving and of formulating thought resonating from our Anishinaabe beliefs and foundational truths (p. 7)... *Anishinaabe Gikendaasowin* is our knowledge and way of knowing (p. 8)... *Anishinaabe Izhichigewin* is our Anishinaabe way of doing things (p. 9)... *Anishinaabe Enawendiwin* is our way of relating to Spirit, to each other and to all of Creation (p. 10)... *Gidakiiminaan* is our connection and relationship to the land and all of Creation (p. 11).

These principles “do not belong exclusively to the Anishinaabe. They are the principles of Peace, Power, and Righteousness of the Haudenosacunee [sic]. They are the original teachings of all Nations on Turtle Island” (Seven Generations Education Institute, n.d., p. 4).

In terms of research, I believe Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin can be re-conceptualized to align with the overarching conceptualization of methodology, while the principles of Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin can be re-conceptualized as methods of accessing Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin. For a straightforward distinction between method and methodology I turn to Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) distinguished work *Decolonizing Methodologies—Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Whereas “research methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed... method is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence” (Harding, 1987, as cited in Smith, 1999, p. 143). Smith emphasizes the importance of methodology “because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and shapes the analyses” (p. 143). Smith further situates methodology and method within an Indigenous framework and discusses the primary location of Indigenous methodologies in the following:

Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and indigenous practices. The mix reflects the training of indigenous researchers which continues to be within the academy, and the parameters and common sense understandings of research which govern how indigenous communities and researchers define their activities (p. 143).

Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as a research methodology seeks to dislodge the primacy of academic training so that mino-bimaadiziwin locates “the parameters and common sense understanding of research” (p. 143). The mixing “of existing methodological approaches and Indigenous practices” (p. 143) gets to the heart of concern in this article. I propose, from the perspective of Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin as research, that Indigenous methodology and Indigenous epistemology can be synonymous. The synonymous linking of methodology and epistemology is exemplified in D’Arcy Rheault’s (1999) Master’s thesis research.

Prior to starting his research, Rheault approached an Elder for advice on how he should begin his work. The Elder answered Rheault’s request by saying that he should seek guidance through fasting. The Elder described fasting as a form of “Applied Anishinaabe research” (p. 1).

Rheault indicates that it was difficult to understand how a word such as research could relate to fasting. However, through his fasting experience he was able to locate a clearer understanding of how “research for an Anishinaabe person means more than an examination of an ‘objective’ world” (Rheault, 1999, p. 2). After describing his fasting experience, Rheault reveals that he was given direction through events involving dreams that took place during his fast and that informed how to carry out his work. Further, he states that when he faced moments of struggle during his degree there were always “dreams and insights” that came to him to guide him along his journey (Rheault, 1999).

Rheault describes his “method of inquiry” for his thesis research as “a philosophical system that finds its foundation in the traditional knowledge that forms the nexus of Anishinaabe culture” (p. 11). Rheault grounds his method of inquiry for his research in “primary experiential knowledge.” Primary experiential knowledge “is a process-oriented philosophical method interested in the theoretical and practical meanings of the metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, aesthetics, logic and ontology of Anishinaabe *Mino-Bimaadiziwin* (the Way of a Good Life)” (Rheault, 1999, pp. 11-12). He describes this method of inquiry as “coming to objective truths through a subjective method of inquiry and analysis not explicitly characteristic of any Western systems, but of Anishinaabe culture” (Rheault, 1999, p. 12). He locates himself as a spiritual being upon this Earth. While others may guide him along his journey in life, the journey is still centered with the self. “Thus, my method is a qualitative inquiry built on a blending of participant observation and participant participation incorporating my thoughts, reflections, emotions, spirituality and actions in my personal learning” (Rheault, 1999, p. 12).

I believe that Rheault’s method is part of a grander conceptualization that is housed in Anishinaabe *mino-bimaadiziwin* as research methodology. In the next section, I briefly share part of my research approach for my dissertation and make a direct link to seeking, doing, learning, and living a Good Spirit-centered way in Anishinaabe research.

Seeking, Doing, Learning, and Living a Spirit-centered Way in Anishinaabe Research

The data gathering in my research is within the methodological framework of Anishinaabe *mino-bimaadiziwin*. For example, using *asemah* (tobacco) is a method of inquiry for beginning good and respectful research as informed by Anishinaabe *mino-bimaadiziwin*. Offering *asemah* is sourced from teaching and learning environments that are distinctly Indigenous. Anishinaabe teachings and work with Elders remind me to “use tobacco when [I] want to speak with [my] Grandfather, the Creator” (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 24). Like Michell (1999), “to my people, the act of offering tobacco reinforces the ethic of reciprocity in a cosmological understanding of interdependence, balance, and harmony” (para. 3).

Seeking. Throughout the work on my dissertation I offered asemah for various reasons and at different times that directly linked to aspects of my research, such as offering asemah to give thanks during prayer in and out of ceremony, seeking guidance from Elders and community members with my life and my research, and offering asemah in seeking spiritual guidance with how I should proceed with various aspects of my life and my research. Offering asemah initiates a beginning. The roles and responsibilities required of the person offering the asemah do not end when the asemah is accepted. When I offer asemah I enter into what might be called a "spiritual-contract." My roles and responsibilities to the offering of asemah only begin when it is received and the same is true of the receiver.

Doing. I believe that inherent to the use of asemah is a responsibility to learn more about the meaning and purpose of that medicine. Learning about asemah is derived from its use and an understanding of Traditional teachings that are facilitated by Elders or Traditional Knowledge holders. As I have continued to put my hands to the work of learning about asemah, I have slowly built an increased capacity for understanding the deeper complex web of interconnectedness with that medicine. I know my connection to Spirit is strengthening with each use of asemah and prayer. However, my learning is still in its infancy and I am continually reminded of how little I actually know.

Asemah as a method of inquiry requires a commitment to the lifelong learning that is necessary to develop a greater understanding of its meaning. Self critical questions abound: What is the meaning and purpose of that asemah when I present it or receive it? What origins of knowledge do I draw on for my understanding? Do I have the teachings related to that medicine? What have I done to create a stronger relationship to that medicine and its use? Do I recognize my roles and responsibilities in presenting or receiving that medicine?

I did not begin using asemah with an understanding of these questions. I began using asemah like most Anishinaabe people that did not grow up with the ceremonies. I used asemah because that is what I was told to do by many community members and Elders. It is what Anishinaabe people do. Learning Traditional Knowledge is significant for passing that knowledge to future generations in a complete and Good way.

Learning. Anishinaabe scholars must be willing to do the work to increase an understanding of our methods of inquiry or we risk reducing our ways of knowing to a checklist. We study for many years in the Western European intellectual convention of schooling before conducting research. It only stands to reason that we also have to do the same amount of work and study (or more) before taking up our ways of knowing as methods of inquiry. This is not to discourage the use of asemah (or our methods of inquiry) as part of research for those who are just starting their journey. Using those methods is precisely how we learn. However, as

Indigenous researchers, we must do the work of learning our ways of knowing, learning our medicines, and learning our teachings especially when we feel that that is how we should proceed with our research. We must seek out knowledgeable Elders, ceremonies, and community members who can facilitate this teaching and learning.

Living. Through my work I have learned that there is much to teach and learn about our ways of knowing, and there are many research methods that can help us along our research journeys. For example, smudging, prayers, and prayer songs are other Anishinaabe methods that I used during my research. Medicines such as sweetgrass, sage, and cedar can be used for smudging. Benton-Banai (1988) shares knowledge informed by teachings of these medicines as follows:

The smoke of... Sweetgrass will keep evil away from your home and will keep you safe on your travels.... Use [Cedar] to purify your body from disease and to protect you from evil.... The smoke of this plant [Sage] can be used to purify your body and surroundings and keep you in good health (pp. 24-25).

I smudged regularly throughout my research project to restore my wholistic wellness. I also smudged my home, my computer, my journal articles and other written references, my transcripts, my notes, my hard drives and memory devices, my work space, my recording devices, and any tools that I was using during the research, whenever I felt it was necessary. These medicines helped to restore balance in my life and facilitated wellness when I struggled with my research. My use of medicines also facilitated the design and organization of the data for my research. I sought guidance using asemah, smudge, and prayer songs. Through that Good way I was gifted by the Spirit with a turtle shaker. That turtle shaker guided the organization of my data. However, that story and discussion goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

The Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin methodology is a specific approach for proceeding in research. It largely calls on individuals to seriously pursue Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin (or tribal equivalent) within the context of ceremonies and academic studies simultaneously. In considering this methodology, I believe it is significant that Traditional preparation and ongoing Traditional participation be at the heart of the Indigenous researcher's way of knowing. As I uncovered Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin for myself, I found that my life and my approach to research gradually transformed. Simply put, the Spirit has and continues to guide my research and my life in a Good way.

I believe this process of coming to know Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin and journeying as an oshkaybaywis within the context of research can make significant contributions to Indigenous scholarship in at least five ways. The first involves the well-being of the individual as one

navigates the waters of academe. The second is the revitalization of language and culture. The third involves the protection of Indigenous Knowledge that is generally inherent to lifelong practitioners. The fourth engages with a methodology that is distinctly Indigenous and can greatly facilitate Good research in Indigenous communities. The fifth involves countering the hegemonies of research in the academy and countering the historical legacy of damaging research practices forced on Indigenous peoples. As stated previously, Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin is a unifying and transcendent concept that, when activated, contains the past, present, and future of Good and respectful approaches to all aspects of life, which includes Indigenous research. Miigwetch (thank you).

Acknowledgments

Chi-miigwetch to all-our-relations, the Creator, the many Spirit helpers, and all those other helpers that helped me find that Good and kind way in my work and in my life.

I would also like to thank the numerous Indigenous peoples (intellectuals, community members, Traditionalists, and non-Traditionalists) and non-Indigenous allies who have blazed many trails and made it possible for Indigenous ways of knowing to be heard, read, and lived. You have been like a warm fire on a cold night, and I am humbled in our time spent together through each of your writings and our meetings in person. Chi-miigwetch for your perseverance.

Notes

¹I use capitalization for the terms Elder and Traditional to distinguish each from conventional use. In addition, I use capitalization with knowledge when it follows Traditional (e.g., Traditional Knowledge). When the terms are used in quotes, I use the author's original usage.

²Manitoulin Island is located in Ontario, Canada, at the northern part of Lake Huron just west of Georgian Bay.

³"The Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge is a sacred place, both earthly and in the Spirit World, that was given to all Anishinabe by the Creator, G'zhemanitou." (Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge, 2007, para. 4)

⁴Through acknowledging teaching and learning environments that are distinctly Indigenous, I am honouring the many people, places, and ceremonies from which I have received the knowledge. I am acknowledging an origin of knowledge and illustrating the interconnectedness to communities. I do this with the deepest respect for all of my many teachers who I have met along my journey.

⁵I use capitalization with the term Good to directly link with the conceptual framework of Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin (the Good Life). This conceptual framework is explained below.

⁶I include the "w" at the beginning of the term holistic because I concur with Antone, Gamlin, and Turchetti (2003) when they make the distinction as follows: "Wholistic describes the Aboriginal philosophy in which 'everything is related' by virtue of shared origins and in which, by extension, the human being is considered an entire whole; that is, mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally as an individual, with one's family and extended family, one's people, and with the cosmos in sacred relationships. This is distinct from a "holistic" philosophy in which the term 'related' is taken as meaning 'all things are interconnected' by virtue of sharing an environment in which action leads to a type of 'domino effect' in a secular world" (p. 9).

⁷I use the prefix mino- (good) in front of bimaadiziwin to emphasize that the life I am referring to is the Good Life. In this article, I use both bimaadiziwin and mino-bimaadiziwin to mean

the Good Life. Although Severud (2003) suggests that the word bimaadiziwin has two meanings (positive and negative), I am referring to the positive (Good) meaning in this article.

⁸Conversely, a synonymous linking of research and ceremony undermines the hard work of coming to know Western European intellectual convention (usually for the purpose of critique and/or employment) and the work involving Indigenous related initiatives (as driven by equity and social justice) in academe.

⁹This is a complex issue that goes beyond the scope and intent of this article. In brief, ceremonies (in my experience) happen in specific ways, in specific locations, with specific meaning and intent, and in some instances only certain community members have access to certain ceremonies. Comparatively, these examples can be stated of conventional research and academe in its own milieu, hence the terms ceremony and research are not automatically synonymous. In the instance of ceremonies, issues of access and usage are determined by ceremonial community members. Spiritual leadership and/or knowledgeable-regular-practitioners of a lodge are often the best sources to ask about issues of access and usage. Thank you to Canadian Journal of Native Education editor, Jo-ann Archibald/ Q'um Q'um Xiim, who brought this issue to my attention.

¹⁰Since Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin is practiced and infused with daily life, many Indigenous scholars automatically have and do apply mino-bimaadiziwin in the academy as part of their research.

¹¹Special thanks to my hard-working and patient dissertation supervisor, Dr. Celia Haig-Brown, for reminding me to keep these ideas about living knowledge to the foreground of my thoughts.

¹²Akan (1999) corroborates this statement in her case study research with Saulteaux Elder, Alfred Manitowey. In addition, Akan relates a distinction between the terms pimosatamowin (a person's walk in life) and pimadizewin (a person's life/a worthwhile life) in her translation to English as was communicated orally by the Elder.

¹³Pimadaziwin is one of the varied spellings of the word. Some other variations in spelling include, but are not limited to, the following: pimatisiwin, (miyu)pimaatsiun, pimadizewin, pimatisewin, bimadziwin, bimaadziwin, and bimaudiziwin. In this article I use one of the more common spellings, bimaadiziwin.

¹⁴A variation in spelling of biskaabiiyang is present in the Seven Generations Education Institute (n.d.) article but it may be a typographic error or a phonological spelling. Geniusz's (2006) spelling is present in other documents on the Seven Generations Education Institute website (see <http://www.7generations.org/index.html>) and is the spelling I use in this article.

References

- Absolon, K. / Minogizhigokwe. (2009). Navigating the landscape of practice: Dbaagmowin of a helper. In R. Sinclair/ Ótiskewápiwskew, M. A. Hart / Kaskitémahikan, & G. Bruyere / Amawaajibitang (Eds.), *Wicihitowin: Aboriginal social work in Canada* (pp. 172-199). Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- 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, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Adelson, N. (2000). *'Being alive and well': Health and the politics of Cree well-being*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Akan, L. (1999). Pimosatamowin sikaw kakeequaywin: Walking and talking, a Saulteaux Elder's view of Native education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 23(1), 16-39.
- Anderson, K. (2005). Minobimadziwin: The Good Life for Aboriginal women. *Centres of Excellence for Women's Health Research Bulletin*, 4, 8-9.

- Antone, E., Gamlin, P., & Turchetti, L. (2003). *Literacy and learning: Acknowledging Aboriginal holistic approaches to learning in relation to 'best practices' literacy training programs: Final report* (pp. 1-51). Toronto, ON: Literacy and Learning: Acknowledging Aboriginal Wholistic Approaches. Retrieved from <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/aborigt/finlrprt/cover.htm>
- Archibald, J. / Q'um Q'um Xiem. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Bell, N. (2006). *'Just do it': Providing Anishinaabe culture-based education* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. NR15717)
- Benton-Banai, E. (1988). *The Mishomis book: The voice of the Ojibway*. Hayward, WI: Indian Country Communications.
- Bressette, C. R. (2008). *Understanding success in community First Nation education through Anishinabe meno-bimaadziwin action research* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. AAT NR43043)
- Castellano, M. B. (2004). Ethics of Aboriginal research. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 1(1), 98-114.
- Colorado, P. (1988). Bridging Native and Western science. *Convergence*, 21(2/3), 49-68.
- Couture, J. E. (1985). Traditional Native thinking, feeling, and learning: Some thoughts on the relationship between Native values and the practice of Native education. *Multicultural Education Journal*, 3(2), 4-16.
- Dumont, J. (1992). Journey to daylight-land: Through Ojibwa eyes. In D. R. Miller, C. Beam, J. Dempsey, & R. W. Heber (Eds.), *The first ones: Readings in Indian/Native studies* (pp. 75-80). Craven, SK: Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Press.
- Ermine, W. (1995). Aboriginal Epistemology. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 101-112). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Fixico, D. L. (2003). Institutionalizing Traditional Knowledge. In *The American Indian mind in a linear world: American Indian studies & Traditional Knowledge* (pp. 141-171). New York: Routledge.
- Geniusz, W. D. (2006). *Decolonizing botanical Anishinaabe knowledge: A biskabiyaan approach* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3227544)
- Goudreau, G. (2006). *Exploring the connection between Aboriginal women's hand drumming and health promotion (mino-bimaadiziwin)*. (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. MR13817)
- Graveline, F. J. (2000). Circle as methodology: Enacting an Aboriginal paradigm. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(4), 361-370.
- Graveline, F. J. (1998). *Circleworks: Transforming Eurocentric consciousness*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood.
- Gross, L. W. (2002). Bimaadiziwin, or the "Good Life," as a unifying concept of Anishinaabe religion. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 26(1), 15-32.
- Hallowell, A. I. (1967). *Culture and experience*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Hart, M. A. / Kaskitémahikan. (2009). Navigating the landscape of practice: Dbaagmowin of a helper. In R. Sinclair / Ótiskewápiwskew, M. A. Hart / Kaskitémahikan, & G. Bruyere / Amawaajibitang (Eds.), *Wícihitowin: Aboriginal social work in Canada* (pp. 25-41). Halifax, NS: Fernwood.
- Hart, M. A. (2002). *Seeking mino-pimatisiwin, an Aboriginal approach to helping*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood.
- Kovach, M. (2005). Emerging from the margins: Indigenous methodologies. In L. Brown & S. Strega, (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches* (pp. 19-36). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.

- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- LaFromboise, T. D., & Plake, B. S. (1983). Toward meeting the research needs of American Indians. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53(1), 45-51.
- LaDuke, W. (1999). *All our relations: Native struggles for land and life*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Manitowabi, D. (2007). *From fish weirs to casino: Negotiating neoliberalism at Mnjikaning* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. NR27877)
- McAlpin, J. D. (2008). *Place and being: Higher education as a site for creating biskabii—Geographies of Indigenous academic identity*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3314851)
- McCoy, A. C. (2007). *Minobimaadiziwin: Perceiving the Good Life through Anishinaabe language*. (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 1451580)
- McIvor-Girouard, R. (2007). *Mino pimatisiwin: A content analysis of the Aboriginal and First Nations submissions to the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada*. (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. MR22567)
- McNally, M. D. (2006). Honoring Elders: Practices of sagacity and deference in Ojibwe Christianity. In L. F. Maffly-Kipp, L. E. Schmidt, & M. Valeri (Eds.), *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian life in America, 1630-1965* (pp. 77-99). Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- McNally, M. D. (2000). *Ojibwe singers: Hymns, grief, and a Native culture in motion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- McNaughton, C., & Rock, D. (2003). *Opportunities in Aboriginal research: Results of SSHRC's dialogue on research and Aboriginal peoples* (pp. 1-38). Ottawa: SSHRC [Electronic version]. Retrieved from http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/apply-demande/background-reseignements/aboriginal_backgrounder_e.pdf
- Michell, H. (1999). Pakitinasowin: Tobacco offerings in exchange for stories and the ethic of reciprocity in First Nations research. *Journal of Indigenous Thought*. Retrieved July 28, 2010, from http://wiki.kisikew.org/Know/A_Cree_Tobacco_Study/
- Nabigon, H., Hagey, R., Webster, S., & Mackay, R. (1999). The learning circle as a research method: The Trickster and Windigo in research. *Native Social Work Journal*, 2(1), 113-137.
- Pflüg, M. A. (1999). Pimadaziwin: The quest for the Good Life. In *Ritual and myth in Odawa revitalization: Reclaiming a sovereign place*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Pitawanakwat, B. (2008). Bimaadziwin oodenaang: A pathway to urban Nishnaabe resurgence. In L. Simpson (Ed.), *Lighting the eighth fire: The liberation, resurgence, and protection of Indigenous nations* (pp. 161-173). Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring.
- Rheault, D. I. (1999). *Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin (the way of Good Life)* (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. MQ40486)
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Conceptions of history: Stage 4: Negotiation and renewal. In *Report: Volume 1—Looking forward, looking back* (see Part 1, Chapter 3, para. 33). Ottawa: Canada Communication Group. Retrieved from <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071211050944/>
http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sg4_e.html#22
- Settee, P. (2007). *Pimatisiwin: Indigenous knowledge systems, our time has come*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. NR31078)

- Seven Generations Education Institute. (n.d.). *Anishinaabe mino bimaadiziwin: Principles for Anishinaabe education* (pp. 1-12). Retrieved from <http://www.7generations.org/Anishinaabe%20Mino%20Bimaadizwin.pdf>
- Severud, T. (2003). Bimaadiziwin, "a Good Life." *Canku Ota (many paths): An online newsletter celebrating Native America*. Retrieved from http://www.turtletrack.org/Issues03/Co10042003/CO_10042003_Good_Life.htm
- Simpson, L. (2008). Our elder brothers: The lifeblood of resurgence. In L. Simpson (Ed.), *Lighting the eighth fire: The liberation, resurgence, and protection of Indigenous nations* (pp. 13-21). Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring.
- Sinclair, R. (2003). Indigenous research in social work: The challenge of operationalizing worldview. *Native Social Work Journal*, 5(November), 117-139.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. New York: Zed Books.
- Spielmann, R. (1998). *You're so fat! Exploring Ojibwe discourse*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Starkey, J. A., Jr. (2006). *Back to the blanket: A Native narrative of discovery*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.
- Steinhauer, P. (2001). Situating myself in research. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 183-187.
- Steinhauer, E. (2002). Thoughts on an Indigenous research methodology. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 69-81.
- Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge. (2007). About the Three Fires Society. *Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge*. Retrieved from <http://www.three-fires.net/tfn/about.htm>
- Toulouse, P. (2001). *Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life): Sharing the living teachings of the people of Sagamok Anishnawbek implications for education*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. NQ61186)
- Wilson, S. (2003). Progressing toward an Indigenous research paradigm in Canada and Australia. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 27(2), 161-178.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood.
- Young, M. I. (2005). *Pimatisiwin, walking in a good way: A narrative inquiry into language as identity*. Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican Publications.