Tobacco Ties: The Relationship of the Sacred to Research

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This article aspires to raise consciousness of the spiritual power of tobacco in a modern context and the responsibility of using tobacco ties as a research methodology. An ambitious project to outline traditional ways of doing research became a humbling teaching in the necessity of honouring tobacco and the spirit connections when tobacco is involved. We recount our journey in the project and what we learned about the meaning of tobacco to various First Nations (primarily those in northeastern Turtle Island), about doing research with Indigenous Elders, and about Indigenous research methodology. We reflect on the relationships activated when tobacco is part of a research methodology and share some of the teachings Elders shared with us about research, with a focus on their thoughts about tobacco offerings. It is not this work's intention to prescribe a proper set of steps or a how-to manual for using tobacco in social research. Rather, this article is an attempt to reflect on what it really means to honour the spirit in Aboriginal research, particularly as it is embodied in tobacco.

> *You also have to be yourself, if you follow your traditions; tobacco is given before you give tobacco to the Elders. Find out what you are there to do, then do your work. (Jean Aquash)*[1]

Introduction

In this paper we describe and depart from our research project titled *Traditional Anishinaabek Teachings for Ethical Research.* What began as an ambitious project to outline traditional ways of doing research became a humbling teaching in the necessity of honouring tobacco and the spirit connections realized when tobacco is involved.

We recount our journey in the project and what we learned about the meaning of tobacco to various First Nations (primarily those in northeastern Turtle Island) and the process of doing research with Indigenous Elders using Indigenous research methodology.

Many relationships are activated when tobacco is part of a research methodology. We will outline some of the teachings Elders shared with us about research and about tobacco offerings in particular.

We begin by introducing ourselves and provide a brief overview of our original research project. We then discuss how the involvement of Elders changed the nature of our research and moved us in unanticipated direc-

tions. We attempt to honour those new directions by sharing the teachings that our Elder participants shared with us.

It is not our intention with this paper to offer a comprehensive overview of how to use tobacco in social research. Rather, this paper is our attempt to reflect on what it means to honour the spirit in Aboriginal research, particularly as it is embodied in tobacco.

Coming to the Idea

Living your life, seeking knowledge is research. (Langford Ogemah)

The initial goal of our project was to speak to Aboriginal traditional teachers and Elders, and identify how their cultural teachings and traditions might be applied to the development of research relationships and ethical protocols. The project was conceived as a response to the Tri-Council of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) review of its Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans as it pertained to Section 6 concerning research with Aboriginal peoples (in the current draft, research with Aboriginal peoples is in Section 9). It was anticipated that this project's results would complement the policy work undertaken by a Panel on Research Ethics Task Force Committee on Aboriginal Research (PRE-TACAR). PRE-TACAR's work is to find existing Aboriginal community protocols and consult with Aboriginal researchers, communities, and people to develop more specific and suitable guidelines for the TCPS. The original project had been titled *Traditional Anishinaabek Teachings for Ethical Research* and both authors completed several interviews with Elders and Traditional people as part of this project.

The following year, more detailed work was begun to collect guidelines and protocols from Aboriginal communities, organizations, and online resources and drafting recommendations. From its original idea, *Traditional Anishinaabek Teachings for Ethical Research*[2] transformed and evolved into "Tobacco Ties: The Relationship of the Sacred to Research." This paper reviews our experiences of engaging in research that uses *tobacco ties* to form relationships and gain knowledge from Elders and Traditional People. Throughout, we detail how tobacco is discussed as a research methodology.

A Note on Terminology

By beginning with Indigenous protocols for seeking knowledge, we are not setting out to document Indigenous research methodologies in this paper, and yet, in a sense, that is where we have arrived. Kovach (2010) states "there is a need for methodologies that are inherently and wholly Indigenous" and "we are now at a point where it is not only Indigenous knowledges themselves that require attention, but the processes by which

Indigenous knowledges are generated" (p. 13). Given that we were working within Indigenous protocols and paradigms with Indigenous participants and knowledge, with the goal of asserting Indigenous concepts and frameworks, it is obvious that an Indigenous research methodology would be followed. But what is Indigenous about an Indigenous research methodology? Porsanger (2004) says "Indigenous approaches are based on Indigenous knowledge and ethics that determine the means of access to knowledge, the selection and use of "theoretical" approaches, and determine in addition the tools (methods) for conducting research" (p. 109).

This paper might be viewed as tentative steps toward one aspect of an Indigenous research methodology that of how to begin to ask the questions. These approaches are situated within particular cultural contexts—one would not employ tobacco offerings within any First Nation, for example—but certainly these approaches are of importance among the peoples whom our Elders represent. There is also the matter of where the researcher is from, and considering what right or responsibility do they have to hold, offer, harvest, receive, and give tobacco—a matter that we've not received guidance on specifically in the course of our research project (although we've received guidance personally in our own lives), and which we would feel uncomfortable addressing in this paper. Who can use tobacco? It is an issue that requires more discussion, reflection, and teachings. As will be seen in our introductions, we've come to this protocol through our own personal journeys, and the answers likely will lie in others' personal circumstances as well. In a way, it is not unlike Wilson's (2008) detailing of research as ceremony.

This project sought to find out what our Elders tell us is research. In attempting to privilege Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, it was critical to begin with the keepers of that knowledge those who are respected in our communities as traditional teachers. Following Dei (2000), by traditional knowledge we mean to say a "continuity of cultural values from past experiences that shape the present . . ." (p. 84, footnote 2). One who lives in this way, and who is sought out by others to learn how to live this way, is considered a traditional teacher. Some traditional teachers who have earned great respect among their people are considered Elders. An Elder has been fairly described by Steigelbauer (1996) as "someone who has been sought by their peers for spiritual and cultural leadership and who has knowledge of some aspect of tradition" (p. 39). Learning from Elders is one of the 'methods' Simpson (2000) lists as critical to Aboriginal research.

Tobacco might be considered or viewed as a tool or method, although this seems crude. One Elder describes tobacco as the "911 call to the Creator." However, in establishing this connection to the Creator we realize that it is more than merely a tool or method; it is a practice of faith continued from the beginning of Creation. It follows that, in the use of tobacco,

there is a great deal of responsibility one must accept. Indigenous research methodologies are founded on relationships, which must, in turn, be based on respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility (Restoule, 2008; see Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991). A recurring theme in literature on Indigenous research methodology is the significance of who is doing the research (Restoule, 2004; Absolon & Willett, 2005). What is their location? Where are they from and who are their relations? It is with this in mind that we begin by introducing ourselves and situating ourselves in the research.

Introducing Ourselves

First Thoughts by Debby Danard Wilson. I placed a tobacco offering on the ground to ensure that this paper was written in a good way. This practice of offering tobacco with humble thankfulness is to petition guidance from the spiritual realm to the physical realm. Many non-traditional Aboriginal people and Euro-Westerners do not readily understand the (spiritual) power or the sacred relationship of tobacco. University-based researchers schooled in academic standards, established primarily in Euro-Western approaches and methodologies, have little opportunity for understanding or accepting spiritual knowledges or cultural practices. Aboriginal knowledge or ways of knowing are marginalized and not readily recognized as a legitimate base for knowing, inquiry, or action. As an Aboriginal researcher, it is a difficult challenge to deconstruct and transform Euro-centric hegemony, as Deborah Rose Bird (2001) explains:

> Scholars also face a double bind. We keep bringing our expertise to bear on the same issues; we refine our understanding in the process, and often we become more eloquent. But we do not educate those whose interest is only in power. It cannot be said that these debates further any knowledge system; increasingly they appear to debase far more than they enhance. Looked at from the perspective of defilement, I wonder if our engagement in these debates simply serves to sustain a pretense of open debate in a plural society, while we hover at the periphery of the destruction that continues around us (p. 116).

Aboriginal peoples' worldviews are rooted in the location and history of North America. It is unfortunate that Euro-Western thinking does not acknowledge that *it* is new, and that Indigenous worldviews and practices continue to exist that pre-date the 'enlightened' thinking of Western thought.

This paper aspires to raise consciousness of the (spiritual) power of tobacco in a modern context and the responsibility of using tobacco ties as a research methodology. I am hopeful that sharing the ancestral knowledge and my experience of using tobacco ties will bridge this cultural divide between traditional Aboriginal and Euro-centric knowledge and ways of knowing. It takes courage to ask and answer the 'Trickster' questions: "How do I/we take the risk to speak when I/we know not how or by whom my/our words will be taken?" (Graveline, 1998, p. 232). The risk is great, and yet I believe that it will be worth the journey.

First Thoughts by Jean-Paul Restoule. In undertaking a project to understand traditional concepts of doing research, I thought that there would be

guidance and redirection along the way, to get at what the "real" questions are. That is to say, that knowing and coming to know are personal experiences that tie us in relation to others, in a struggle to live and be well in a society that is opposed to our survival as Indigenous people. To work in ways that strengthen and uplift the community is to do research, because this working toward greater self-determination requires knowledge, and the building and internalizing of knowledge through relationships. These relationships are with other people—but not always and exclusively people. Knowledge is received or gifted from all living things and from the spirit world. And this is one of the things I forgot when I began the research project. I prepared tobacco for offering to the people we would talk to but I forgot to talk to the tobacco and the ancestors before I began.

Location of the Researchers

My name is Debby Danard Wilson. I am Anishinaabekwe Ojibway, Sturgeon Clan, from Rainy River First Nations in northwestern Ontario. As a mature student and mother of four, I started on my path in education to pursue my lifelong dream of being a teacher. Currently, I am a PhD candidate studying in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at OISE, University of Toronto. Along this path, I discovered the need for traditional Indigenous knowledges and worldviews to inform and transform education. By looking to my own family and community, I learned that academia could be a vehicle to share my research work with those who shared, directed, and guided me: the community. My hope is that Aboriginal communities will continue to strengthen and heal by reclaiming their history, identity, traditions, culture, and languages.

My name is Jean-Paul Restoule. I am Anishinaabe (Ojibwe), Muskrat Clan, and a member of the Dokis First Nation. I was raised in Orangeville, Ontario, northwest of Toronto, and learned of my Indigenous ancestry as a young child, but understood very little of its meaning or substance until many years later. While living in Windsor and pursuing a BA and an MA in Communication Studies, I started to connect with Aboriginal people and knowledge.

I worked for a Native non-profit housing agency and I saw Aboriginal people living their traditional life ways in the city. What I learned from them is that our knowledges and practices are being renewed daily, regardless of where we reside: urban or rural, on or off reserve. I had a right to follow the path our ancestors took and, more importantly, a responsibility to tread this way. When I moved to Toronto in 1997, I learned mostly from books about our histories, and ways of knowing and being. While working on my PhD, from 1998-2004, my learning moved away from books and instead towards relationships and experiences with traditional and non-traditional Aboriginal people. Many people taught me many things, for which I am grateful, and I realize how ancestral knowledge resides in the hearts and minds of the people.

Forming the Research Question

The original research project began with a main question: What are traditional knowledge contributions to ethical research with Aboriginal people and communities? Several sub-questions also arose: Do our traditional ways of knowing and learning involve research? Are there words for doing research in our languages? If so, what did (and does) this research look like? Were and are there protocols for research? Do they differ for different kinds of research? Am I asking the appropriate questions? What questions should I be asking?

The research project began with the desire and intent to resolve culturally appropriate and academic approaches to research, and to bridge the cultural divide between 'the sacred' (traditional knowledge and ways of knowing) and the academic. How would two Aboriginal 'researchers' located within a Western-oriented institution resolve the paradox of Aboriginal research and methodology?

We were never able to get to these big questions; we realized we had to slow right down to the first step: respecting tobacco. We had agreed that when approaching Elders, tobacco would be offered. As we engaged in conversation, much of the Elders' teaching centred on the use of tobacco as a protocol. The present article reflects this change of focus.

It was agreed that tobacco ties would be offered to each Elder and/or Traditional person and permission would be sought to ask questions relating to research, as outlined in the Project's Ethics Protocol (2006):

> [t]here will be a tobacco offering made in exchange, acknowledgement and gratitude for the knowledge that is shared... Consent will be assumed to have been given if the participant accepts the tobacco. Elders and traditional teachers know that refusing tobacco is an indication that one does not consent (Struthers & Hodge, 2004). Furthermore, if tobacco is accepted and the interview is begun, participants may choose not to answer questions or may answer questions in whatever way they feel (p. 4).

We discussed some of the limitations of the research, noting that once tobacco was handed over to the Elders, it would be difficult to 'control' the data. We acknowledged that, as an absolute or definitive research methodology, presenting tobacco is not predictable; this methodology often means greater scrutiny when compared against Western scientific methods. However, tobacco works with the spirit; it is sacred and its limitations must be respected as understood from an awareness of the cultural context in which the natural world responds to the spirit and the spirit responds to the natural world.

In addition to offering tobacco ties to the Elders and Traditional people, we were reminded by the Elders to offer our tobacco first *before* offering tobacco to the Elders. A tobacco tie is physically made by placing a pinch of tobacco on a small square cloth and folding the corners over until the tobacco resides in a small ball sachet that is tied in a way that one source described as looking "like a little ghost" (St. Georges Indian Band,

2010). One of these sachets is called a tobacco tie. They may be tied together to form a chain of tobacco ties. This is often done when praying, fasting, or attending ceremonies. In addition to the physical description of the mechanics of making a tobacco tie, there is also the spiritual connection of "making" a tobacco tie. When the seeker prepares his or her tobacco ties, often accompanied by a smudge ceremony for both the person and the tobacco ties, his or her intentions, thoughts, prayers, questions, emotions, and feelings are working with that tobacco and travel with the tobacco (and the smudge medicines) to the spiritual realm. This bonding to spirit is also present and manifesting at the time when the tobacco is offered to another person, to the waters, to the Earth, or to fire, all these being the most common recipients of a tobacco offering. Indeed, this bond to tobacco, the first medicine, occurs much earlier than during the process of making one's ties. At the time of harvesting, and at the time of planting, one's intentions, whether explicitly reflected upon or tacit, are operating. It is important to be mindful of this spiritual power and its connection to the physical world. These deeper intentions will always be known and activated by tobacco.

Our stories and teachings about the origins and spiritual relationships of tobacco remind us of this primary connection. In attempting to understand how this relationship works, we find Atleo's (2004) description of *oosumich* in Nuu-chah-nulth territory instructive: the material world makes an offering to the spiritual world that manifests and affects processes in the material world. So, too, do our offerings of tobacco enact a formal spirit bonding that has implications for what happens in the material/physical world.

Tobacco as Sacred

> Traditional people say that tobacco is always first. It is used as an offering for everything and in every ceremony. 'Always through tobacco,' the saying goes.
>
> Traditional tobacco was given to us so we could communicate with the spirit world. It opens the door to allow that communication to take place. When we make an offering of tobacco, we communicate our thoughts and feelings through tobacco as we pray for ourselves, our family, our relatives, and others.
>
> When you seek help and advice from an Elder, Healer, or Medicine person, and give your offering of tobacco, they know that a request may be made, as tobacco is so sacred (Stump, 2010).

By reclaiming the traditional use and sacredness of tobacco, we begin to stop it from being misused and misunderstood. The teachings, although they are different for many Nations, are consistent such that tobacco is a sacred medicine (Montaño, 2008). The relationship between Aboriginal people and tobacco has been told in stories. Included here are a summary of Elders' stories, one from Ernie Benedict (Figure 1) and one from Archie Cheechoo (Figure 2).

Elder Ernie Benedict from the Iroquois Nation tells a Creation story, explaining the sacred relationship with tobacco:

Sky Woman began to fall to earth, and as she fell she brought with her two main plants of Tobacco and Strawberry. The water animals watched her descend. In preparation for her, the muskrat took bits of dirt and carried them to the surface of the water. The dirt was placed on the back of the sea turtle, and it is here where Sky Woman landed. The plants she was carrying took seed and continued to grow as Strawberry and Tobacco on what is now known as Turtle Island. Tobacco was symbolic of the initiation of life, while strawberries symbolized the afterlife. Tobacco was given honour as a plant of a heavenly nature. When Tobacco is burned the smoke rises, which provides the link to all the spirits beyond the sky. Tobacco was a gift that was given to Aboriginal people, and it had a spiritual place within our community. This carried with it a great honour. Pipes are also tools that assisted with communicating with the spiritual world. Therefore smoking Tobacco in pipes was held in a high regard, as symbols of communication with higher powers and great symbols of peace. The pipe was a communicator, a strong symbol of peace when oral language and speech became barriers to communicating (Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit, 2005, p. 3).

Figure 1. Ernie Benedict story.

Elder Archie Cheechoo from the Cree Nation tells *The Story of Life: Original Teaching of Tobacco:*

Prior to the creation of the earth as we now know it, there was a time when Creator communicated with all spiritual beings and indicated that an Earth would be created. The spirits of all things, including the animal, bird and tree spirits, said that they wanted to go and be a part of this new creation of the earth. Tobacco would be representing all plant things and was a symbol reflecting creation itself. That is how Tobacco came to have sacredness. Tobacco came before the Creator and said that it wanted to be a part of the ceremonies and teachings of Aboriginal people, to help them communicate between this world and the spiritual world. The understanding of life itself flowed through this connection (Aboriginal Cancer Care Unit, 2005, p. 3).

Figure 2. Archie Cheechoo story.

These stories are teachings that are sacred like "tobacco [which] is a petition between the giver and receiver…the relationship is between the two people in which tobacco was exchanged" (Grafton Antone, personal communication, 2006). The relationship between the story and the reader is one that requires the reader to find meanings based on their own understanding. The key here is to look *within our own minds* and allow the connections to transform rather than 'conform' our thoughts. Similarly, Jan Longboat (personal communication, 2006) reminds us that "people need to experience it (research) from the inside out, not the outside in".

Further, Elder Grafton Antone (personal communication, 2006) reminds us "[r]esearch is learning more of all the pieces of the story. No one knows everything, we are always learning. We can learn by reading other peoples' work and by looking within our own minds and thoughts."

The Impact of Colonialism on Indigenous Thought and Research

Put your tobacco down and let the Creator do 'his' work. (Hector Copecog)

Breaking Down, by Debby Danard Wilson. I struggle to write about the sacred relationship between tobacco and research for an 'academic' audience. As an Aboriginal person within 'academia', I am often required to explain, defend, and legitimize my (our) worldviews. As an Aboriginal person within my community, I am required to respect my ancestors and act in a responsible manner for my family.

It's a great personal challenge to balance the internal and external influences of Western society and Aboriginal worldview. Gregory Cajete (2000) describes this concept as having a "split mind" (p. 186). "As a result of colonization, Indigenous people are in many ways acting like the *pin geh heh* [split-mind]. We lead lives of paradoxical conflict and contrast...."(p. 187).

I struggle to challenge the dominant centre and promote anti-colonial theory rather than [post] colonial theory. I struggle to write about ancestral knowledge that has historically been silenced and pushed to the margins. I struggle to break down "a set of cultural patterns that carries with it all the baggage of colonialism, privilege, domination and sense of belonging. It's about whiteness as normativity..." (Dua & Lawrence, 2000, p. 121). I struggle to give voice to the words shared with me by the Elders and Traditional teachers.

I struggle, even though I understand that control of Aboriginal peoples is rooted in nineteenth century colonialism with the basic "epistemological framework [that] has remained essentially unchanged" (Henderson, 2000, p. 60). I struggle even though I know this epistemological framework can be deconstructed. I struggle because "[t]he legitimization of Native American thought in the Western world has not yet occurred, and it may not for some time" (Duran & Duran, 2000, p. 99). I struggle even though I believe we must continue the recovery of our histories, cultures, identities, and traditions. I struggle knowing that in order to break down the barrier I must continue writing through an Aboriginal perspective and move towards reclaiming our Aboriginal languages, stories, social structures and cosmology, lands, and inherent sovereignty.

Elders and Traditional People

How can I trust myself to write about the sacred in a way that will respect our Elders? To answer this question, we sought guidance from many sources including Anishnawbe Health Toronto's "Approaching a Traditional Healer, Elder or Medicine Person" (2000) and The Traditional Peoples Advisory Committee (TPAC) at the University of Manitoba. TPAC's pamphlet (University of Manitoba, 2006), designed to ensure "the respectful treatment/use of Elders", suggests:

When giving tobacco, place it in front of the Elder and state your request. The Elder indicates acceptance of your request by picking up the tobacco. If you hand it directly to the Elder you do not give him/her the opportunity to accept or pass on your request it takes away their choice. Always speak to the tobacco BEFORE handing the tobacco to the Elder (p. 1).

The significance of recognizing and respecting the spiritual space of our physical reality is paramount to understanding Aboriginal cosmology. One of the founding principles in *Section II–Ethical Principles of Aboriginal Health Research* (2005 Draft) attempts to explain this spiritual space, through acknowledging 'sacred space and traditional knowledge'. It states that "[s]ubstantive principles must be understood in the context of the sacred space. This includes an understanding of sacred knowledge as engaging the relationship between the recognized spiritual entity, Land and the Ancestors" (p. 12). It concludes that the 'researcher' has the responsibility to contextualize research approaches to "the values and beliefs of the local [Aboriginal] community"(p. 12).

"Sacred space" is defined as:

... the relationship between the individual and a recognized spiritual entity, the Land, Kinship, networks (including all plant and animal life) and Ancestors. This relationship is both spatial (where the individual is inclusive of the family and the community) and temporal (where the present generation is inclusive of past and future generations). In this sacred space there is an interconnectedness founded on purity, clarity, peace, generosity and responsibility between the recognized spiritual entity, the Land and the Ancestors (p. 12).

The relationship to the spiritual using tobacco as a research methodology is difficult to translate. The provisions outlined in the Ethical Principles are generalized to include a 'kinship' that includes 'all plant life', but it doesn't directly address the sacred relationship with tobacco or the spiritual/physical relationship.

Bringing it All Together: Thoughts on Tobacco Ties in Practice

The Elders we approached shared their thoughts on research and often referred to the significance of tobacco. The quotes in this section derived from conversation asking how research may have been or is carried out in a traditional way. This discussion presents what we learned as we went about our research and where tobacco led us. Below are some of the teachings and wisdom shared with us by the Elders.

Gilbert Sewell (Mi'gmaq Elder, Pabineau First Nation)
Tobacco can be offered. The Elder will take it if he can help you. If he doesn't know the answers he will give the tobacco back and send you to someone who does know the answers.

Jean Aquash (Ojibway Elder, Walpole Island)
Respect the people you are talking and listening to. Find out about the people you are visiting, learn about their ways. Don't just do everything your way or the way you're used to. Respect what the people you are with do. Respect. It's not about ego and expertise; it's about being humble.

You also have to be yourself, if you follow your traditions; tobacco is given before you give tobacco to the Elders. Find out what you are there to do, then do your work, respecting others.

Lillian McGregor (Ojibway Elder, Birch Island)
Keep working; need all kinds of people to bring from the past what we will need now and in the future. All research is different. Tobacco sometimes can be answered immediately. Sometimes an Elder may send you somewhere else.

Grafton Antone (Oneida Elder, Oneida Nation)
Research is learning more of all the pieces of the story. No one knows everything; we are always learning. We can learn by reading other peoples' work and by looking within our own minds and thoughts.

Research is time; it's not always the right time to read a particular book; sometimes you have to wait. It's a process, learning takes time.

We are just a part of the learning. Someone may not have the language, but they can do what they can to be "new medicine" people working now and for future generations.

No one is an expert; we are part of the whole. All we are is facilitators for others to uncover their own truths, as much as we can. We don't know the truth for everyone else.

Everyone is born with certain knowledge and we can help him or her uncover what he or she knows. People, if they are given the opportunity, will share what they know. No one is greater than another. Even when you "help" another person, it's really them that do the work.

Research comes from within, what you want to learn. Our eyes are like batteries that contain all the information we need to interact with the world, what we "see" inside and outside ourselves.

The tobacco petition is between the giver and the receiver. We can share information with each other but the relationship is between the two people in which tobacco was exchanged.

It's good to ask different people (Elders, Traditional people) these questions and each one gives a different idea. The younger people are responsible for gathering information and recording it and writing papers.

Pauline Shirt (Cree Elder)
Boozhoo is an introduction, from Nanaboozhoo, our first teacher our name and who we are and our clan. Pauline Shirt, Thunderwoman, Red Hawk Clan. You should always start with Spirit; when you give tobacco it is from the spirit of what you are asking for.

Then you acknowledge the earth and when you use the smudge you are creating a purified space for the spirits to come and help with what is going to be talked about. Tobacco is presented and then it can be sent up as an offering to the Spirit world.

Every Nation is represented on the Medicine Wheel with the fire at the centre, represented as a candle. She gives participants tobacco to hold during the opening prayer so that everyone's spirit is praying. The tobacco is then collected and taken care of (i.e., put in a fire, put out on the earth).

Open with a shaker or a drum four times to get attention of the Spirit. That way everyone is heard. You can answer any question by using tobacco and also while on a fast. The answer will come to your Spirit.

Research is like fasting, using your tools to find answers to your questions, and asking/finding the right people to guide you. For non-Aboriginal people they make their connection when they are visiting the Red Nation and find answers to their questions. They might bring back to their own people what they learned, and their spirits are awakened. There is a protocol of offering tobacco when you are 'visiting', and your questions should be answered, and talk to lots of people [Elders].

There are lots of people who have knowledge. There's a balance. For Aboriginal people use what you have in your bundle to guide you. Tobacco is the bridge from the physical to the spirit. We need all three parts: Mind, Body, and Spirit. Fasting connects you to the spirit world. Share and learn about your own spirit. Spirit is very important.

Langford Ogemah
"Chandekendimawn": finding out what you know. I can only tell you what I learned from my Elders and Grandparents. And that is how I live my life.

Finding out what you need to know. That word is like research. Find out who you are. Tobacco comes first.

Why are you seeking understanding?

There are lots of answers to research about a sweat lodge. There are different ones all over the place, even in South America. Some things, like the pipe, are the same, but the ceremonies are different. Research can't all be put together. It's separate what you are going to learn. Like about the feather or a pipe, what you are going to learn is going to be different for each item.

The seven grandfathers[3] are lived every day of your life, all day long. The first one, respect, is important to live respect every day, all day long.

[You] need to figure out what leads you to want to know something. Why are you seeking understanding?

There are probably other words for research in other languages. Tobacco is always given because 'research' is traditional. It's the word, but I only understand it in the language. [It's the way you live] I can't really translate it. But living your life, seeking knowledge, is 'research'.

Know yourself. Find out why you are wanting that. If you get an Eagle feather, you need to understand everything you can about that feather and why you need to know it for yourself. Why were you given it and what is it going to teach you?

If a non-Aboriginal person wanted to 'research' a sweat lodge, I would tell them, "There is lots to learn."

'Research' can't just be all put on one plate. It's separate, its own thing. That word [Chandekendimawn] is how I understand research.

We included the words of our Elders above so that readers might hear, in their own way, what was being shared. We have also summarized, into

a list (Figure 3), the teachings from the Elders and from published protocols that resemble some principles for working with tobacco. This list is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive but it does represent teachings that were shared and received on multiple occasions. When working with tobacco, these words may serve as a guide or reminder of the responsibilities inherent to this aspect of an Indigenous research methodology.

Locate yourself in relation to the research.
"Know yourself. Find out why you are wanting that. If you get an eagle feather, you need to understand everything you can about that feather and why you need to know it for yourself. Why were you given it and what it is going to teach you?" (Langford Ogemah)

Be humble. Respect. Keep a good mind.
"Being humble in what you are doing. Respect the people you are talking and listening to. (Jean Aquash)

Listen to what the people have to say.
"Research is listening, observation, experience and speaking. (Jan Longboat)

Respect that sometimes tobacco requests may not be answered immediately or may be forwarded to another for consideration.
"All research is different. Tobacco sometimes can be answered immediately. Sometimes an Elder may send you somewhere else." (Lillian McGregor)

Respect that not all Elders will 'receive' tobacco requests (some Elders do not use tobacco).
"Tobacco can be offered. The Elder will take it if he can help you. If he doesn't know the answers he will give the tobacco back and send you to someone who does know the answers." (Gilbert Sewell)

Tobacco is given before you give tobacco to the Elders.
"You also have to be yourself. If you follow your traditions, tobacco is given before you give tobacco to the Elders. Find out what you are there to do, then do your work respecting others." (Jean Aquash)

When someone accepts tobacco it does not automatically mean consent.
"Find out about the people you are visiting, learn about their ways. Don't just do everything your way or the way you're used to." (Jean Aquash)

Respect the sacred relationship between tobacco and the Spirit (spirit world). Tobacco is the bridge from the physical to the spiritual.
"For Aboriginal people use what you have in your bundle to guide you. Tobacco is the bridge from the physical to the spirit. We need all three parts, Mind, Body and Spirit." (Pauline Shirt)

A relationship is established by offering and accepting tobacco and can't be broken unless broken by both parties.
"The tobacco petition is between the giver and the receiver. We can share information with each other but the relationship is between the two people in which tobacco was exchanged." (Grafton Antone)

Place tobacco between you and the person you are asking. Be very specific about your request (intent). Allow the person to pick up the tobacco if they choose to.

Tobacco is not a 'payment' for eliciting research and should never be considered as such.

Respect four-day drug and alcohol-free guidelines for giving tobacco (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000).

Respect not to give or receive tobacco at moontime (menstruation).

Respect that research is a process that takes time; sometimes you have to wait for the 'right' time.

Figure 3. Using tobacco ties as research methodology.

Conclusion

Final Thoughts by Jean-Paul Restoule. There was a teacher whom I visited who did not accept my tobacco offering. I had asked, "What are some notions of traditional research?" and he laughed and responded, "Why would you think I would know anything about tradition? What is your question?"After some back-and-forth, I was told, "I can't offer you what you're asking for but I can tell you about myself." He told me some stories and explained that the stories were chosen to demonstrate what happens if we follow the culture slavishly. "We have to change."

Water was described as a teacher, and as the element that represents change. It is never the same. It journeys. Students who journey have to find the right balance between shutting out the world and experiencing the world. It is no use asking what is traditional because cultures change. If it didn't change, it couldn't survive. I felt as though I was being given direction, to not essentialize and assume that there is an accessible "traditional" way of doing things. I felt this teacher was equating change with a move away from tradition. However, I fully believe that "traditional" does not have to conflict with or contradict the notion of "change". Indeed, to me, traditional knowledge is a continuity of cultural values from the past that enables us to live well in the present (following Dei, 2000, with some adaption). It is adapted to the present moment in the lives we live today. Tradition does not mean unchanged or static. I like to think of traditional knowledge as being like a jazz standard that each cultural member can play. It provides the foundation and the ground from which we all understand what everyone else is doing. Each person is playing it their own way, and some have more facility and skill or express it more aesthetically or beautifully but anyone can learn it and anyone can practice it. The more people that take it up, the more familiar and yet diverse are all the variations.

Final Thoughts by Debby Danard Wilson. I struggled to translate the tobacco ties stories from aural to written text for an academic audience. I can only hope that it is received with humble respect.

Jean-Paul and I started the research and conceptualization from similar perspectives; we then found ourselves located in different personal connections to the research, with the end result being reconnected by the teachings of the 'tobacco ties', and coming full circle with the research project.

Allowing the ancestral knowledge to speak through the teachings of the tobacco gives voice to knowledges that have been stripped away, rearticulated, and restructured.

Sharing my experience of using tobacco ties as a research methodology creates space for the sacred. Allowing space for the sacred ensures that it continues to expand rather than vanish in an environment that does not readily accept or acknowledge the spiritual significance of Aboriginal worldview and ways of knowing.

As I journey through listening, observing, learning, and exploring, following the signs and facing the challenges, I will put down my tobacco. Meegwaych.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Lee Maracle for her reviews of earlier drafts and the anonymous reviewers of CJNE for their comments. The research was sponsored by a Connaught Research Fellowship at the University of Toronto and by graduate assistantships supplied by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).

Notes

[1]We have chosen not to date the Elders' quotes to avoid detracting from their teachings. All quotes without dates were shared as part of the research conducted between September 2006 and August 2007.

[2]Using the word "Anishinaabek" in the project title led to some confusion when meeting with some Elders. Anishinaabek, the word we use to refer to ourselves as first peoples, is sometimes used to speak only of our nation, but sometimes is used to include ALL first peoples. While it was the latter that was intended, when speaking with Elders from other First Nations, there was occasionally some confusion. Some Elders explained that they could not speak for the Anishinabe—'only the Anishinabe could do that!' When it was explained that by this term we meant to refer to all first peoples, the negotiations about what knowledge could and could not be shared began in earnest.

[3]7 Grandfathers (7 Sacred Laws of the Anishinabe):

Love—To feel true love was to know the Creator.

Respect—The Buffalo through giving its life and sharing every part of its being showed the deep respect it had for the people.

Courage—To have courage is to overcome fears that prevent us from living our true spirit as human beings.

Honesty—The essence of honesty is innocence. Honesty meant being an honourable person free from fraud or deception.

Wisdom—To know and understand wisdom is to know the Creator gave everyone special gifts, which were used to build a peaceful and healthy community.

Humility—To be truly humble was to recognize and acknowledge a higher power than man—one whom we call the Creator.

Truth—It is said that when the Creator made human beings he gave the human being seven sacred laws to live by that would guide him/her to the truth and the meaning of their life on the earth.

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