# Knowledge Making: Indigenous Undergraduate Research as Cultural and Language Revitalization

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*A key part of revitalizing Indigenous languages and cultures is the Indigenization of higher education. Higher education has historically and continues to reinforce a monocultural knowledge system that is firmly anchored in Western understandings of the world. However, more recently there have been calls for change that higher education institutions are attempting to answer through the process of Indigenization. To Indigenize higher education institutions, we must change research, curriculum and pedagogy, and institutional structures through the integration of Indigenous knowledge. This will only be possible if we have Indigenous peoples at all levels of higher education. To aid the Indigenization process, we must grow Indigenous researchers who will be able to contribute to and lead change in higher education. The Knowledge Makers program provides one example of how it is possible to contribute to the Indigenization of the academy through an Indigenous undergraduate research program that values Indigenous languages and cultures.*

## Introduction[1]

Indigenizing higher education institutions is a strategic step towards the revitalization of Indigenous language and culture. Higher education institutions have played and continue to play a role in the silencing of Indigenous epistemologies and, as a result, it is necessary to transform these institutions from places of monocultural consolidation to places that embrace multiple knowledge systems. It is therefore crucial that higher education institutions contribute to the capacity and capability building of research within Indigenous communities so that higher education institutions can be transformed into the pluriversity (Boidin, Cohen, & Grosfoguel, 2012) that is necessary for them to undo the monocultural damage for which they are responsible.

This article will first demonstrate why change is necessary within higher education by considering the number of Indigenous graduates within Canadian universities. Following this, a brief contextual introduction of the Knowledge Makers program will be provided in order to place the program and provide background for its role in contributing to Indigenization. Subsequently, Indigenization as a term will be explored to clarify how this article understands the term. Finally, Indigenization as a practice will be explored using Knowledge Makers as an example of how one pro-

gram can contribute to an institution's Indigenization process. Throughout this article, quotes are used that can be found within the *Knowledge Makers* journals. Some of these are attributed to a particular author as included within their journal article, while others are simply noted as a knowledge maker. Knowledge maker refers to a quote that is within the publicly accessible journal that has not been attributed to a specific person; instead, it is part of the public record of knowledge makers that year.

As is the custom where I am from, I would like to take a moment to situate myself in relation to the Knowledge Makers program and Turtle Island more generally. I am Indigenous Fijian/Palagi. My mother was raised in Nakida, Natasiri Fiji, before moving to Aotearoa New Zealand. My Father is Palagi (settler) and grew up in Auckland Aotearoa New Zealand. I migrated to Canada to complete my PhD and now work at Thompson Rivers University as an international Indigenous guest on Secwepemcul'ecw. I am the co-founder of Knowledge Makers and work towards handing over the program to an Indigenous person from here, who is passionate about transforming the academy. As an international Indigenous guest, I am aware of the importance of holding space and not taking it within higher education institutions. I am grateful for the hospitality shown to me so far and I continue to look for ways that I can be of service during my time on Turtle Island.

### Higher Education and Indigenous Peoples in Canada

Higher education in Canada is failing Indigenous learners. Currently, Indigenous students are underrepresented in almost all higher education outcomes as measured by credentials achieved. The table on the following page can be found in Airini and Naepi's (2018) discussion of first-generation Indigenous researchers and provides some insight into Indigenous learner outcomes in higher education and the work yet to be done within Canada (p. 76).

As the following table indicates, something needs to change within Canadian higher education so that institutions can better serve Indigenous communities. While of those Indigenous learners who attend university, more will achieve a bachelor's degree than non-Indigenous, and the number of Indigenous students achieving graduate degrees decreases until it halves at a doctoral level. This suggests that more work is needed in order to grow Indigenous research capability and capacity.

In the 2010s, there was a surge of calls for higher education in Canada to recognize and respond to the need to be culturally responsive, from both Indigenous and institutional groups. Indigenous organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations (2010), outlined the expectation that federal and

Table 1: *Profile of Outcomes of Post-secondary Education Outcomes for 100 Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Canadian Students*

| Canadian post-secondary education indicators | Indigenous students | Non-Indigenous students |
|---|---|---|
| For every 100 students in Post-Secondary Education overall (College, Institutes, Universities, etc.), how many... | | |
| Are their family's first generation to post-secondary education | 53 | 36 |
| Stay on in post-secondary education beyond first or second year (retention and moving towards graduating) | 69 | 87 |
| Achieve a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree | 30 | 88 |
| Achieve a university degree | 10 | 26 |
| For every 100 at university how many... | | |
| Achieve a Bachelor's degree | 71 | 64 |
| Achieve a Master's degree | 13 | 19 |
| Achieve a Doctorate | 2 | 4 |

provincial governments in Canada would provide and be responsible for ensuring culturally relevant and supportive education in all institutions for Indigenous learners. Institutional groups, such as the Association of Canadian Deans in Education (ACDE) (2010) stated in their *Accord on Indigenous Education* that the time had come for them to respond to recommendations "that Indigenous knowledge systems have a central position in educational policy, curriculum, and pedagogy, in order to make significant improvements to Indigenous education" (p. 2). However, these calls have resulted in rhetoric and not necessarily action. When exploring the University of British Columbia's commitment to Indigenous learners, Pidgeon (2016) found that of the 124 publicly available strategic plans in Canadian colleges and universities, only 35 per cent had a specific institution-wide Aboriginal strategic plan. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) *Calls to Action* report has also called for action on the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. It is clear from the statistics and community calls to action that higher education institutions need to do something about how they currently serve Indigenous learners. At Thompson Rivers University, the

Knowledge Makers program is understood to be one response to these statistics and calls to action.

## The Creation of Knowledge Makers

The Knowledge Makers undergraduate program was designed initially in response to Thompson Rivers University's Research and Graduate Office's request to establish a program that would increase Indigenous student engagement in research opportunities at Thompson Rivers University. The Research and Graduate Office's approach to Knowledge Makers has been one of trust. As such, there have not been the institutional walls that have come to be expected when running Indigenous programs (Ahenakew & Naepi, 2015); instead, the institutional walls that have traditionally blocked Indigenous programs have been identified and dismantled to make this program possible[2].

*Table 2: Five Approaches in Strong Indigenous Research Mentoring*

| Assumption | Practice |
|---|---|
| We draw upon the knowledges of our ancestry | Knowledge makers are encouraged to bring the knowledge of their ancestors into the research space. |
| We value Indigenous research methods as expanding the research canon, resisting 'miraculating' the Indigenous | Knowledge makers engage in being critical not only of mainstream research methods and methodologies but also Indigenous research methods and methodologies, identifying how particular research methods and methodologies may not work for their project. They are also encouraged to consider how current research processes serve or don't serve Indigenous peoples. |
| We take a strengths-based approach | Within Knowledge Makers those involved in the program consciously work against deficit thinking, research design, and words. |
| Our research will be a form of service | Knowledge makers are encouraged to consider and understand that action and change are a necessary part of our research process. |
| We commit to legacy | Within Knowledge Makers those involved in the program understand that Knowledge Makers is creating a legacy of Indigenous researchers, and that these researchers need to be able and are motivated to undertake quality research that positively impacts Indigenous communities. |

(Naepi & Airini, 2018)

In response to the Research and Graduate Office's request, two Pacific academics with experience in developing student-focused Indigenous research programs (Airini & Naepi, 2018) developed a trial program that was designed to engage Indigenous undergraduate students in the research process from within an Indigenous environment. The Knowledge Makers program is built from five assumptions about Indigenous research, as shown in Table 2.

These assumptions are built from the foundational belief that Indigenous peoples have always been researchers, as captured in the following quote from Knowledge Makers:

Indigenous peoples are strong, intelligent, bold knowledge-makers who created the original realms of higher learning. Indigenous ways of knowing and discovery preceded the university. We were this way generations ago; we still are today. We are the original scientists, philosophers, engineers, theorists, economists. We take ownership of our future and name it. (Airini & Naepi, 2018, p. 78)

### Knowledge Makers Process

Senior Indigenous undergraduate students apply to be part of the Knowledge Makers program that has historically taken place in February. The process below outlines previous processes' timelines and is then followed by some reflections and new directions moving forward.

### Preparation

Students whose applications are accepted meet with the Knowledge Makers coordinator in a one-to-one meeting to discuss their research ambitions or topics they are interested in and the Knowledge Makers program. After this meeting, the knowledge makers create e-portfolios (https://knowledgemakers.trubox.ca/knowledge-makers-i/e-portfolios/) that are designed to create an "opportunity for us to reflect and share about the people and communities that motivate us to pursue research" (Naepi, 2017, para. 1). The coordinator uses these meetings and e-portfolios to create individual reading folders that provide intersections between the knowledge makers' discipline and their nation. These individual reading folders mean that the student is able to see that it is not only possible but also accepted within their nation or discipline to do research from an Indigenous standpoint.

### Workshop

Three weeks after their initial meeting, the knowledge makers attend a two-day workshop with Elders, Indigenous faculty and staff, and anybody from within the institution or community who has supported their learning journey. The workshop is designed to introduce the knowledge makers

to Indigenous research methodologies and methods, support them in writing a research plan that will help them to make the difference in the world that they wish to see, and finally, to begin to think about what article they would like to submit to the *Knowledge Makers* journal. Importantly, at the end of the second day, the knowledge makers both receive and give Knowledge Makers hoodies. The Knowledge Makers hoodies are given to the Elders who have been present and actively involved in the two-day workshop. To give them to the Elders, the hoodies are passed around the circle of knowledge makers and they address the Elders while holding the hoodies, and communicate how much they have appreciated their guidance on their learning journey.

## Publication Process

At the end of the workshop, the students receive a formal call for papers from the *Knowledge Makers* journal that they must respond to within two weeks. Once they have submitted their essay, it goes through a peer review process with Indigenous academics. They then have 48 hours to respond to any comments from the reviewers. These comments can be small or they can involve a rewrite, in which case the coordinator works with the student to locate resources. After this, the articles go to a copy editor and the knowledge makers once again have 48 hours to turn around the requested changes. The journals (which are smudged) and the award ($1,000) are presented to the knowledge makers at a celebration dinner. The first journal must be given to a family member, friend, or mentor as a reinforcement of Indigenous practices. The dinner is an emotional night where knowledge makers and their families share their journeys. At the 2018 dinner, the daughter of a knowledge maker stood up and shared that after seeing her mother's journey, she could not wait to take part in the Knowledge Makers program when she attended university.

## Reflections and Future Plans

The Indigenization of higher education is a difficult challenge. Not only must we work at breaking down old habitual walls (Ahmed, 2012) in research, pedagogy and curriculum, and institutional structures, we must also prevent new ones from being erected. Ahenakew and Naepi (2015) use the Pacific trickster and demi-god Maui as a teacher for explaining how Indigenous staff can dismantle or prevent walls from being built. Indigenous staff must be flexible and try out new "tricks" in order for there to be equity (Ahenakew & Naepi, 2015). For the Knowledge Makers program, this means we are always adapting. Since beginning as an undergraduate program, it now also includes a PhD program and is

beginning to explore the possibilities of a master's program in 2019. Knowledge Makers is also now embedded within an Indigenous research centre; this means that all the students who participate in Knowledge Makers are part of a wider community of Indigenous scholars or "tricksters" (Ahenakew & Naepi, 2015). This embedding has led to more opportunities for Knowledge Makers students, including international conference presentations, research assistant roles, and international Indigenous knowledge exchanges.

However, it has also become clear that the timeline for Knowledge Makers needs to be shifted to develop healthy work habits for the participating students. This coming year, applications will be open in September and with a workshop in November. Knowledge makers will be given two months to produce a paper, ten days to respond to editorial feedback, and ten days to respond to copy editing. This extending of the process is to alleviate added stress to what is already a stressful time for many knowledge makers.

## *Outcomes*

Since its inception three years ago, Knowledge Makers has had 42 participants, of which two have gone on to post-baccalaureate study, two have received national graduate scholarships, four have gone on to master's degrees, nine have gone on to to be research assistants, five have received graduate studies scholarships, one has participated in an international internship, one has received mainstream funding for an undergraduate research project, one has started his own business, and 42 have published, some more than once. Participants have self-identified as being Ojibway Nation, Secwepemc Nation, Saulteau First Nation, Métis, Seton Lake Band, Shushwap Nation, Dakelh Nation, Stó:lō Nation, Cold Lake First Nations, Waywayseecappo First Nations, Treaty Four Gimley, Ahnishinaabe, Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, St'at'limc Nation, Ts'Kw'laxw First Nation, Tsimshian, Carrier, Mi'kmaq, Nsyixcen: Upper Nicola Band, Tkemlups te Secwépemc, Tlingit, Neskonlith Indian Band, Inuit: Nunatsiavut region, Haida, Tahltan, T'exlc (Williams Lake Band), Tsqescen (Canim Lake), Stella'ten First Nations, Te Tsq'escen, Gitanmaax Band, Nak'azdli and Saik'z First Nation, Dene, Simpcw, Nisga'a, Nak'azdli Whuten, and Skidegate, Haida Gwaii. For the first time in 2018, Knowledge Makers had more than 50 per cent of participants from Secwépemcul'ecw. Beyond the statistical measurements for Knowledge Makers, there have also been more holistic outcomes. Reading through each year's *Knowledge Makers* journal gives insight into how the program has impacted students' understanding of the role of their knowledge

within research. Marcus Scherer (2016), a knowledge maker from the first cohort, reflected that this program had:

> encouraged me to think of research through the eyes of my people ... Consequently, I am able to look at research with a more holistic point of view, and incorporate Indigenous values into my methodology ... I now look at research from a new perspective—one that is closer to who I am, and not based solely on what a specific institution's ideals and expectations are. (p. 7)

*Knowledge Makers* provides a space for these realisations and, in turn, the journal provides an outlet for the ideas that can come from the realisation that not only is one's knowledge and culutre valid, it is also valuable.

## Indigenization and Knowledge Makers

I use the term Indigenization to emphasize that the academy is redeemable. This belief is shared by others in higher education where there appears to be some agreement that Indigenization assumes there is something redeemable in the current higher education institution and that the integration of Indigenous worldviews and people will address the inequity and marginalization within the current system (Durie, 2009; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Nabobo-Baba, 2012; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016). In their book *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*, Mihesuah and Wilson state that in using the term Indigenization "we are beginning from the assumption that the academy is worth Indigenizing" (2004, p. 5). This core assumption of redeemablity leads on to discussions of how the academy can be redeemed through the Indigenization project. Alfred (2004) stated that Indigenizing the academy is "working to change universities so that they become places where the values, principles, and modes of organisation and behaviours of our peoples are respected in, and hopefully even integrated into, the larger system of structures and processes that make up the university itself" (p. 88). What is important about Indigenization is the idea that there is something still redeemable in the university and what is required is a shift in thinking, processes, and structures for the university to be a more inclusive and responsive space for Indigenous peoples.

I also acknowledge that Indigenization is deeply intertwined with decolonization, as both are about how to respond to the historical and ongoing suppression, discrimination, and harm of Indigenous peoples through imperialism and colonization. Decolonization in higher education can be understood as "an umbrella term for diverse efforts to resist the distinct but intertwined processes of colonization and racialization, to enact transformation and redress in reference to the historical and ongoing effects of these processes, and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being, and relating that these processes seek to eradicate" (Stein &

Andreotti, 2016, p. 1). Decolonization does not believe that the academy can be redeemed; instead, decolonization calls for a complete restructuring of the academy so that Indigenous land and life is taken back in a way that is irreversible and unrecognizable to the current system (Battiste, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Decolonization and Indigenization become linked when we understand Indigenization as a pathway towards decolonization (Kuokkanen, 2007; Pidgeon, 2016; Wilson, 2004), as the more Indigenous staff who exist within the institutional space the more potential for change there is. The interaction of these two theories is important to keep in mind when critiquing each other's work, as both Indigenization and decolonization are necessary to ensure Indigenous peoples' success. The Indigenization of the academy can occur within three areas of higher education: research, teaching, and structural mechanisms.

### Indigenizing Research

Higher education institutions continue to be a place where the production of knowledge is dependent on reproducing a monocultural knowledge system that is firmly anchored in Western understandings of the world. Higher education operates on the "presumption of a Eurocentric epistemic canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production at the expense of disregarding 'other' epistemic traditions" (Tamdgidi, 2012, p. viii). The colonial project has deemed who can produce knowledge and who cannot (Shilliam, 2016) and it has also worked "to segregate peoples from their lands, their pasts, their ancestors, spirits and agencies" (Shilliam, 2016, p. 378). Researchers have contributed to the historical and continuing colonial project that sees Indigenous peoples disposed of their land, knowledges, bodies, and spirituality. Maldonado-Torres (2016) outlined that the first act of colonization was to create a logic where it was possible to "discover" an already occupied land. In order to do this, colonizers needed to follow "radical questioning about the humanity of colonized humans" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 68); this decision to see colonized people as not people or as a different class of people continues to impact Indigenous people today through resource extraction (both knowledge and physical), silencing, and violence (Tuck & Yang, 2012), amongst other impacts. Research has played a key role in creating and maintaining the process of colonization and its ramifications by framing Indigenous peoples in problematic ways: through misunderstanding, misrepresenting, and undervaluing Indigenous knowledges and peoples and, as a result, researchers have helped to inform harmful policies for and social perceptions of Indigenous communities (Alfred, 2004; Battiste, 2013;

Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012; Corntassel & Gaudry, 2014; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Naepi, 2015; Nakata, Nakata, Keech, & Bolt, 2012; Smith, G., 2000; Smith, 1999; Smith, L. T., 2000; Stewart-Harawira, 2013; Thaman, 2003; Wilson, 2004). Higher education's historical and continuing research practices are a core threat to Indigenization as they continue to marginalize and engage in the epistemological silencing of Indigenous knowledge (Thaman, 2009). It is therefore necessary that reframing research to be open to plural worldviews be a key step towards the overall Indigenization project.

One of the responses to the calls to Indigenize research are Indigenous research methodologies. Indigenous research methodologies can be understood as a way of doing "research by and for Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions and knowledges of those people" (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 6). This reframing of research methodologies focuses on "the restoration and legitimation of Indigenous knowledge systems and methods of conducting research" (Stewart-Harawira, 2013, p. 43) and highlights "that there are other epistemologies and other standpoints from which Indigenous people come to know the world and from which we understand and analyse our more recent encirclement by Western knowledge over the last few centuries and its legacies" (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 124). Indigenous research methodologies and methods have been developed in Canada (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009, 2015; Wilson, 2008) as part of the larger body of Indigenous research methodology work.

Another response to the calls to Indigenize research has been the inclusion of Indigenous researchers within the university. In spite of the critiques of the academy and the actions of these Indigenous researchers, Indigenous knowledge and research continues to have unequal status in the academy which "demonstrates the "epistemological tyranny" of 'Western' science, its rules for determining truth and so it's rules for disqualifying and marginalizing Indigenous ways of knowing" (Stewart-Harawira, 2013, p. 46). Deloria (2004) has also expressed concerns that the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and knowledge within the academy without the critique of the academy has led to a new generation of Indigenous scholars who do not share the same values as their communities and instead have more in common with the values of the academy and mainstream society. Deloria's (2004) concerns are symptoms of Stewart-Harawira's (2013) identified epistemological tyranny. Knowledge Makers students experience this exclusion of their own knowledge from the academy:

I'd like to learn more about Indigenous research methodologies. I haven't really been taught that in the institution before. I have been taught how to be a person of character from the

land—caribou hunting, blizzards—native ways of knowing there. But I have never learned native ways of knowing from inside the school. (knowledge maker, 2017, p. 33).

However, Knowledge Makers holds the belief that it is possible to ensure Indigenous researchers are able to stand strong in their cultural values and, as a result, not just withstand but also challenge the epistemological tyranny of Western science. Knowledge Makers is growing the next generation of Indigenous researchers to stand up to and challenge the academy by ensuring that Indigenous ontologies and research methodologies form the basis of Indigenous students' understanding of what research is, as opposed to it being an add-on course in their graduate education. We do this by unpacking the definition of research and identifying Indigenous research practices within the two-day workshop. Knowledge makers are encouraged to understand the academy's traditional definition (and therefore value base) of research and then to identify where this definition falls short when they think about how their own communities understand knowledge and the sharing of knowledge. Through their personalised reading folders, knowledge makers are also introduced to how other Indigenous academics in their field or from their nation have conducted research so that they can see how it is possible to use our own ontologies within their discipline. Finally, knowledge makers produce their own piece of writing for the *Knowledge Makers* journal, where some choose to rework assignments from class and produce an article that addresses the assignment from an Indigenous standpoint (Troke, 2017).

It is this critical reflection on the work they produce within a Western education model that empowers knowledge makers to use their own ontologies in future class assignments, such as Lapointe's (2018) article on storytelling and land use within tourism. Lapointe (2018) shares a story from Dakelh Nation and reflects on how if it was included within tours it would move a simple "hike" to an experience that connects people with the land. Through the exercise of reworking, they find Indigenous academics who speak on the same topic but from a different perspective to those they read in class, they find a way to weave their own experiences and ontologies into an assignment, and finally and most importantly, they find their voice. As one knowledge maker explained after experiencing Knowledge Makers: "Being part of this made me more confident. It affirmed *my* identity. This is who I am" (knowledge maker, 2017, p. 10).

## Indigenizing Pedagogy and Curriculum

Education is a space where society teaches norms, values, and beliefs through a hidden (and sometimes overt) curriculum that is key to "maintaining social and cultural divisions within society" (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 341)

by reinforcing that Indigenous knowledge is not legitimate and rewarding students who subscribe to mainstream value sets. As a result of education's power to teach societal norms, some Indigenous academics believe the Indigenization of teaching can deconstruct these social and cultural divisions (Alfred, 2004; Battiste, 2013; Durie, 2009; Gone, 2004; Hunter, 2004). Thaman (2003) argued that a key component of Indigenizing pedagogies is "developing a new philosophy of education that is culturally inclusive and gender sensitive" (p. 3). The importance of Indigenizing the curriculum can be seen in the vast amount of research on teaching for Indigenous success by including Indigenous worldviews (Airini, Curtis, Townsend, Rakena, Brown, Sauni, Smith, Luatua, Reynolds, & Johnson, 2011; Airini & Sauni, 2004; Anae, Anderson, Benseman, & Coxon, 2002; Battiste, 2013; Pidgeon, 2008, 2016).

Ideally, Indigenizing curriculum would involve a restructuring of all courses and professional development for all staff within higher education institutions. However, until this is possible we can provide moments of Indigenous curriculum and pedagogy such as Knowledge Makers. The Knowledge Makers workshop is predicated on a relational pedagogy. For the Pacific facilitators, this is understood as *teu le va*. Teu le va is a Samoan concept that is found throughout the Pacific that refers to the tending of or caring for the sacred space between people (Airini, Anae, Mila-Schaaf, Coxon, Mara, & Sanga, 2010); therefore, it is the relationship between the facilitators and the students that is the most valued part of Knowledge Makers, not the imparting of knowledge. In practice, this means that the facilitators ensure they know the students, and not just what they are studying but also who supports them, who they support, their history, their aspirations, and such. This knowing ties back to the five principles outlined earlier; as a facilitator, it is possible to respect the knowledge of the ancestors if I am aware of the ancestors in the room and the knowledge they bring with them. It is through knowing the knowledge makers that the facilitators are able to establish the relationship and trust necessary for the knowledge makers to be successful in their endeavours to publish. The centering of relationship as opposed to knowledge transmission results in students reflecting that Knowledge Makers feels like "You know when you go home to your family and you feel relaxed. That is how [Knowledge Makers] feels—you can be yourself and you're contributing to something bigger" (knowledge maker, 2017, p. 79).

Knowledge Makers also provides a space where Indigenous students are a majority. The importance of this in terms of curriculum and pedagogy is evident when trauma is discussed. Knowledge makers share stories about their family history and current situations, including residential

school, the Sixties Scoop, drug and alcohol addiction, and abuse. In this sharing, it becomes evident that the students appreciate not being seen as "the expert" or being judged by other students, as can happen when an Indigenous student is in the minority. Instead, Knowledge Makers provides a space to speak with peers with whom they can identify and who have a shared understanding: "It's nice to not feel like not a minority in a space. It is nice to have a space to talk" (knowledge maker, 2017, p. 25).

## Indigenizing Structures

Organizational structures have been recognized as a key part of the Indigenization project (Alfred, 2004; Clark, 2004; Durie, 2009; James, 2004; Mihesuah, 2004a; Pidgeon, 2008, 2014, 2016). When introducing the series of decolonization essays on Oceania by Tongan academic Epeli Hau'ofa (1993), Waddell, as cited by Hau'ofa, asked questions that are poignant to consider when critiquing the university: "Who is at the helm? Who sets the course? Who reads the sky and searches the horizons for signs? Is it us? Or is it someone else? Who are we? Are we satisfied, even conscious of the way we are going?" (p. xv). These are questions that Indigenizing organizational structures are attempting to address and explore.

In asking these questions, academics have begun to critique who holds power within seemingly unbiased structural systems. James (2004) shows how informal and invisible rules, social groupings, and identities supersede formal university ideals, goals, and policies. It is these invisible rules that show that universities continue to inform their actions based on the same colonial ideals upon which they built their institution. University gatekeepers enforce these rules by deciding "who is amiable enough to be hired, neutral enough in their writing to be published and Euroamerican enough in their outlook to earn rewards or qualify for grants and fellowships. In other words, in order to be acceptable to gatekeepers, Indigenous scholars and their work must be non-threatening to those in powerful positions" (Mihesuah, 2004a, p. 31). Indigenous staff who are given access to the institutions are only given a limited amount of access; as James (2004) observes, Indigenous staff "often seem to find themselves excluded from access to important information, excluded from important decisions and excluded from important resources" (p. 48). A way of combating that is by ensuring that there is transparency between those who delegate the resources and the Indigenous staff who are on the ground. For Knowledge Makers, this meant that the research office was not only enthusiastic and supportive of the program but was also transparent about how much funding was available for the project and then left it up to the Indigenous staff to allocate the funding. They have also been instrumental in ensuring that

there are no "gatekeepers" that prevent us from providing a successful program. In practice, this meant that when Indigenous students said they did not want a fees bursary, as they were more concerned with the cost of living, the research office found precedents to ensure we could give the knowledge makers an award for them to spend as they saw fit, as opposed to a fees bursary.

It is also important that Indigenous staff work to collapse the invisible barriers and structures that are found in higher education institutions. Ahenakew and Naepi (2015) employ the Fijian lesson of generosity "at the table"[3] arguing that remembering our ancestral stories can "offer a glimpse of better practices and horizons" (p. 192) and perhaps offer ways to shift or collapse these invisible rules and structures. Knowledge Makers employs generosity at the table by being inclusive of all Indigenous staff and faculty, and asking them to give whatever time they have. In practice, this means that Indigenous staff or faculty drop by the workshop whenever they are available and the workshop is stopped to take a moment (or however long it takes) to listen the Indigenous staff or faculty and what they wish to share.

Beyond having Indigenous leadership, Knowledge Makers also actively encourages students to disrupt structures and systems. This was captured perfectly in 2017 when Joanne Brown, supervisor for Aboriginal Services at Thompson Rivers University, joined the knowledge makers at the beginning of the workshop and told them:

When you think about your ancestors and what built your bones and values that you put upon that what you are doing here in education you create a trajectory that is totally unique in this world. You have the ability to make changes. That is honouring the chief in you. You have permission to be stubborn against systems that humans made, to make your way up this system. Find the words. Be stubborn and do not be bowled over... We have to work together. Think about our traditional roots, think about traditional knowledge. We have got lots of work to do. (2017, p. 2)

## Conclusion

The Indigenization of the university will not happen overnight; it will take small incremental changes that will feel painfully slow for those within institutions. However, spaces like Knowledge Makers provide a refuge from the current monocultural higher education institution and also provide a way for us to build Indigenous capability and capacity for research, and therefore institutional change. Knowledge Makers is a small step towards Indigenization that provides a simple way to engage in changing higher education institutions through Indigenizing research, pedagogy, and structures. I wish to end this article with a final call to action from a knowledge maker in 2018:

I believe that each and every level of society needs to consciously create space, resources, and opportunities for Indigenous peoples to connect and reconnect with their cultural identities; it is up to each and every one of us to take responsibility, in whatever capacity to which we are best suited, in order for our Indigenous brothers and sisters to heal, reconnect and thrive … Decolonization and reconciliation are but words. Words are powerful, but without action, they are nothing more than lukewarm whispers upon the wind. Our Indigenous brothers and sisters have been here since the beginning of time; we are not going anywhere … My name is Roxie Defant, and I am Haida strong.(Defant, 2018, pp. 110-111)

## Notes

[1] This article was written and the Knowledge Makers program takes part on the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwepemc Nation within Secwepemcul'ecw. I am grateful for their generosity in allowing me to be a guest on their territory and their support of the Knowledge Makers program.

[2] The author acknowledges that this is not the typical experience.

[3] The practice of placing an empty eating mat at the *katuba levu* (main door) so that anybody who passes can join the meal without a formal invitation.

## References

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