

Kaandossiwin: Honouring How We as Indigenous Scholars Mobilize Our Worldviews in the Academy

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Aaniin and Boozhoo. Minogizhigokwe n'dishnaukaus, waubzhizhe n'dodem. Flying Post n'donjiba miinwa Kitchener, endiyan. Ojibwe Anishinaabe kwe n'dow.

Greetings. I am Shining Day woman and I am marten clan. I come from Flying Post First Nation and live in Kitchener. I am an Ojibway woman.

I want to say *miigwech* to the ancestors of the land, the Elders of the territory, John Crier for his prayers this morning, all the amazing words and sharing that's happened so far, and to the gathering of people here. It's quite amazing. It's full of such good medicine.

I just want to start with a little song. Beginning with a song is how I work. I'm just going to sing the first verse of it. And it's a question and answer song. This song was shared with me by my friend Violet Cabiosai and it was shared with her by one of her friends. And it's one of the songs that I believe is sung in our lodge, our medicine lodge. The first question is the Creator asking, "Who is it that's walking? Who is it that's coming down the path? Who is it that's leaving those footprints?" And then in the song is the answer. And we answer that question. And we say *Anishinaabe*. And that means the people. The original people, the Anishinaabek, are walking. "Anishinaabe is coming down the trail. Anishinaabe is leaving those footprints." *Miigwech*.

This conference setting is so beautiful because the students brought creation here, through those trees that are positioned throughout the room. That really touched me when I saw the trees here. I felt comfortable. I felt like, okay, that was thought about. Our connection to the land is here. Because that's who we are, we're land people. We're people of the earth.

My presentation was through a photographic journey. I really like to not only stimulate your ears but also to give you something to visually

anchor the context. To readers now: please keep in mind this article was written from a visually-based presentation and the author now sets each photo in writing. In sharing these stories, I am sharing a process of reconciliation and restoration of self through journeys of personal healing, education, remembering our families' stories, reconnecting to Creation, and searching for knowledge through research.

Reconciliation with Self

To begin, I present an old black and white photo of me sitting with my brother with worn out clothes and messy hair. That's me as a little kid. The journey of how I reconcile has been really a journey of recovering and restoring. And reconciliation has been within my wounded self. In public school, I was told that I wouldn't go to university. I was told that I would just become a waitress so I should just prepare for that. "Don't expect too much of yourself, Kathy" was what I was told.

Positive cultural mirrors? There weren't any. What we did see in our schools and in our communities were negative representations of who we were. The chaos and the crisis, and that woundedness, was reinforced as how things are. My little girl self, because of negative images, had internalized a lot of inferiority, self-doubt, shame, and humiliation. I tried to erase my brown skin. And I looked at the sky, the blue sky, wishing my eyes would turn blue. There were no cultural mirrors. I'm sure many of us have stories of what it's like to be *the only one* in our classrooms, or in teaching, or in the work that we do.

To me, our work is initially about reconciliation of self. And I think that's what we're all doing. I really believe that was what I was doing when I did my work and I went on my search (Absolon, 2011). Many Indigenous researchers—I would say most of us, if not all of us—are searching for who we are, where we come from, and what that means to us. This journey has been a lot of work, at many levels, but there's something in me that kept ushering me forward despite the overwhelming odds. The only thing I can think of is that it's my spirit. It's that spirit within that this human vessel carries.

I searched to find myself, to find my truth. It wasn't easy. It was messy. And it was hard. And it felt like sometimes I was drowning in the rapids of many things. Seeking the truth for me seems to have been one of my significant life quests. From when I was a little girl, I had this burning question: "What the hell happened?" There was so much craziness in my friends' families and in the communities I hung out in. I grew up in a family where there were addictions all around me. My family was disconnected from our community and extended family. My family of two

parents and five children and a bunch of dogs were on our own. Because we were isolated in the bush, I didn't see a lot of other families. I didn't grow up with a lot of places where I could go visit aunties, or uncles, or cousins down the road. I rarely saw my extended family and, when we did, we travelled north and took an old train to my grandparents' cabin. So, there was my ongoing curiosity and inner question: "What the hell happened? Where are my relatives?"

In those days there were no places to find answers and I couldn't even ask it out loud. No one was talking about issues. Back then, the teachers at school couldn't answer my questions; they were a part of the problem. My mom couldn't answer my confusion, because she was still reeling in her own. My dad couldn't answer anything, because he didn't understand our history. I couldn't even ask those questions out loud without fear of being called crazy or teased for being ridiculous. I remained silent for a long time in my own confusion. But inside, my whole self was wondering about a lot of things. It was really my life's inner burning question that's guided me to be here.

For me my journey has been, in part, about dealing with all the fears I internalized. I was a scared little kid. "Do I belong? Do I fit in?" I really had to deal with fears, insecurities, and uncertainties about who I am. Many times I felt like an outsider, not really knowing where I belonged. I have learned that, over time, we learn to hide behind our false faces to hide our vulnerabilities for self-protection and survival. It is those false masks that we carry to compensate for the worries, fears, and insecurities of living in a place where "Do I belong?" is often the question. I had to deal with those things within myself. It's taken a long time. I have sought various self-help programs, healing ceremonies, and education over the years.

Path of Reconciliation

Now I show a slide of squiggly lines that depict a messy path. It's a messy life journey. I echo what people have shared so far about looking back at where we come from. There's a little circle with the four directions and the star in the upper left-hand corner. That represents where we come from—our spirit.

We all have creation stories. We all have these stories and teachings about where we come from. When I learned our creation story, I realized that I belong. I realized that creation would be incomplete without me, and I realized that creation would be incomplete without us (Indigenous peoples). We belong here. We're here for a reason. So, I turned around and I looked at where I came from, and I travelled a lot and took those journeys to find out what being Anishinaabe means. I went to our lodges. I went to

conferences. I listened to our Elders. I travelled over the years to many places, to recover who I am and where I come from.

But seeking the truth isn't easy, so there's a part on this image that's really got a lot of squiggly lines at the beginning because it's painful, and we have to deal with that. We have to go to those difficult places within, to heal our wounds, to recover our true self. Because when we walk through those places with support, we find the beauty of who we are. We find our people, and we can identify with each other. We share our stories, and learn that our stories are real and that we belong. And we can accept and be ourselves. Then we're not judging others in the way we were judged, and then we're not trying to get other people to be like us in the way Euro-colonial values were forced upon us. Or perhaps we won't feel that insecurity because we don't look or talk like settlers. All that internalized lateral violence that's going on today is really messy, and it's having such a negative impact on this journey of recovering, restoring, and reconciliation within self, family, and community. Yes, it is sometimes a painful journey.

The Layers

On my journey, I've had a lot of helpers. So, I'm standing here but I'm not standing here alone. I'm standing here with my *Cocomish bah* and my *Shau-mish bah*, and my aunties and my uncles who are in the spirit world. I'm standing here with my colleagues, my communities, my partner, and my children in spirit. I'm not standing here alone. And I acknowledge all those helpers that have walked with me. And I heard Evelyn Steinhauer do that earlier. It was so beautiful to hear you acknowledge your helpers. Because, within Indigenous ways of knowing, that's one of our values: to acknowledge where our knowing comes from rather than to stand up here and think that each one of us is the expert in our own brilliance—that's not how we are. We acknowledge our supports and teachers. We talk about who we are, where we come from, and the people who taught us and also the people who helped us. That's been so important for my journey.

Oh, yes, I have layers. My sister was laughing at me because I have all my bags. I have bags inside that bag and smaller bags inside those bags. I travel with my bundle. This is a little travelling bundle. I carry different bundles. I have this bag and this bag. Then I had in this bag, this bag. And even inside this bag, I have my *mashkikii* (medicines): my *sama*, sweet grass, my cedar and sage. I have bags inside these bags with my *mashkikii* in it. And my medicines travel with me. And I have my helper here, she is with me: my *migizi miigwans*, my eagle feather. I have a number of helpers. Acknowledging our layers of history, family, stories, experiences, individ-

ual life, interpersonal and intergenerational experiences, that bring us to where we are today helps to understand that reconciliation is a layered process requiring attention to many parts of self, family, community, nation, and creation.

We have layers. I try to not project that I'm just a one-layered person, because I'm not. I don't believe any of us are. We all have layers. And all of those layers are okay. It's just who we are. Today we are diverse. And we have many layers in how we are. Understanding them is more of a challenge. That's why the photo displayed is messy and layered.

Academic Learning Spaces

Now I show a picture of the academy as a means, not a definition, of who I am. The academy to me is not the defining place of who I am. Don't let it be the defining place of who you are. Let it just be the means in which you recover, and uncover, and unlearn. Let it be the means but don't let it be what defines you. When we leave the academy, we take our gifts with us. So, the journey, for me, has been a journey of searching, and healing, and restoring myself. Strengthening my mind. And I always ask myself this question because of where I come from. "Can I fill my sap pails there?" "Can I get life there?" "Is it going to help me have life?" "Is it going to help me have *Mino Bimaadsiwin*, a good life?" "Is it going to help me have a good life?"

Now I show a photo of me gathering maple sap in the spring and pouring the sap into a larger container. In the academy, I must ask myself: "How can I fill my sap pails here? How will I do that? How will I bring my Indigenous self here in terms of what gives me, as an Indigenous person, a good life?" The sap pail relates to the harvesting of sap in the springtime, and the life that sap provides to us and our relationship to the tree.

The academy is a strange and scary and lonely place. And there are a lot of thorny, prickly bushes there that we have to walk through, and we go, "Ooh, eeh." We have to navigate through those prickly bushes really carefully, and we do so tentatively, and a lot of times in anguish. We are pulled to restore Indigenous knowledge but are conflicted with Euro-Western theory and knowledge. We're not sure what we can bring there: Our sacred knowledge bundles? What do we bring with us? What do we leave at the door and protect? How do we navigate landscapes where there are Euro-Western dominated methods and theories, along with post-colonial this, and post-structural that, and post-modern that? I'm not knocking other forms of knowledge paradigms. I just want to create space for Indigenous knowledge. So, to me, I said, "The only post I'm going to talk about is Flying Post, which is where I come from." When I was forced into Euro-Western landscapes and discourse, I felt inadequate. I felt stupid. I started

to feel inferior when I had a hard time relating to the jargon and to the language. I felt like I didn't belong. I questioned whether university was for me, and I felt like quitting. I had to return to my own forests of knowing and work at restoring my own Indigenous knowledge. When I did that I felt like possibilities in my capability, knowledge, and intelligence were being restored.

When I started to stumble and doubt my knowledge, I returned back to what I know. I returned to the landscapes that are familiar—landscapes of my identity, history, culture, language, and knowing. Those are the landscapes in my heart that I really want to lift up. Those are the landscapes that I really want to validate and affirm. So, my reconciliation story is a story of saying a lot of "no" to domination and saying a lot of "yes" to the possibilities and spaces for restoration and re-emergence of my own Indigenous knowing. I encourage you to bring your whole self to your studies. Don't check yourself at the door. Don't hang your spirit on the door. Don't leave your heart at the door. Don't leave your family out there. Don't leave your *Nokomis* and your *Shaumish* out there. Don't leave creation out there.

Through my educational journey I carried many questions. I wanted to understand what happened to us. I wanted to understand what went on. So, I set on a path of reading—I guess, you could say, taking Indigenous studies courses. I am so amazed that the University of Alberta has adopted that mandatory [Indigenous education and pedagogy] course. I'm going to take that back to Laurier and they're going to have a hard time now because that's been one of the things that I've been pounding: a mandatory Indigenous studies course across all disciplines. How many teachers or physicians or lawyers, or people in positions of power, are graduating from schools ill-equipped? I really applaud the University of Alberta for those changes.

Know your purpose. Have a vision for yourself. Become grounded in what it is that you're seeking. I've had so many students worry about what their professors want from them and what they think they're supposed to do. And they get lost in those landscapes. They get lost in those forests. And my question is always, "What do you want to do?" It's your thesis. It's your journey. What do you want to do? What do you want to learn about? What do you want to uncover, restore, recover? What's at your heart? And do that from your heart. And don't be afraid to change things. That's just what I do. I can come into a room and say, "You know what: this has to be different." And, chances are, I am restructuring a square classroom into a circle.

Create change. Be brave and be yourself. This simple act will bring change. For example, I feel uncomfortable speaking from a podium, and

would prefer to walk around and step away from the stand. I encourage you to take those steps forward to change what you need to change to feel okay and have an impact. To have an impact we have to think from own centre. Maybe I'll indigenize the academy through my presence and voice. Maybe I'll restore Indigenous knowing here.

What if the academy tries to change me and assimilate me? Given the goal of colonialism, this is a real possibility and fear. So, when I decided to do my doctoral studies, I said to myself that I'm going to turn that around. I decided I would leave good footprints there with my presence and voice. How is the university going to change with my presence there? What is the impact that I'm going to leave here? And I believe there is an impact with our presence, with the contributions and changes we bring. We are stronger today. On our journeys toward reconciliation, recovery, and restoring our identities, we didn't get through the valleys because we were depleted. We got through the valleys because we have amazing, beautiful strengths and gifts. And this spirit—our creator, *Gichi-Manidoo*. And the spirit that brings us *Mino Bimaadsiwin*, a good life.

Our connection to the Creator is embedded in our creation stories. So, we have the spirit. Each one of us has a spirit connection to creation and to the land. And when we are doing our work, attending to that spirit in however we need. And do you attend to the spirit? How do you attend to your spirit? The breathing that we just did. That was so beautiful to do that. We must not check our spirit at the door of the academy. Students will ask, "How can we do that?" Well, bring the medicines to your space and let them sit there. Let them witness what you're doing. I carry the medicines. I have four little wooden medicine bowls that I put out. So, those medicines, I am grateful to them for helping me today. They witness what I'm doing. They help me. My relationship with the medicines comes with me.

If I'm having a crappy day and I'm struggling with myself (and the only one I struggle with these days is me), I go out on the land. I talk to creation; I talk to the spirit of the land. I tell them all my problems and I share my grief. By the time I come back from my walk, I feel better. I know that I've been touched by the spirit of the land. I know the medicine of the earth and creation has blessed me. So, I bring that with me. I bring that with me every day.

So, I thought about that word reconciliation. I think I always translate words. And to me it's about reconnecting. It was about reconnecting and restoring. That little kid that I carried that I felt was broken. My work has been to restore myself. Today, I can look at pictures of myself and I can think, "Gee, I was kind of cute," and I can see my positive qualities.

I show you different photos of myself on this journey toward reconciliation. I have this little girl in me that I've been working at restoring, and loving, and being kind to. I have this spirit in me that is embodied in my dancing. I have this critical scholar mentality that I carry as well. Everything that we have that will help us today Creator gave to us. So, we have to build and make everything. I wore this skirt that I sewed. I make a lot of my outfits. You can't buy these kinds of clothes at The Bay or at Sears. You can't buy clothes that reflect our Indigenous pride and so I tailor my own.

We have to restore, build, and make our bundles. Everything that we have, everything that's in my bundle, has been made or gifted to me. I emphasize that we are the ones that have to do this. It's not going to be done for us. Everything that we do is in affirming and recreating pathways for our Indigenous knowledge to be supported. It is hard trailblazing. It's like walking in the snow without snowshoes. It's a lot of work and it's tiring. But we stop and we rest. And somebody comes along and talks to us and gives us tea. And so we get up and we start doing a little bit more. We find our energy and we carry on.

I really believe in using and privileging Indigenous scholarship. One of the speakers was doing that yesterday. I think that was Karen Pheasant citing Indigenous scholars. And I was like, "Right on." Right on. We've been invisible for so long. And now we're finding pathways to affirm our voice. To reconcile our truth, and have that truth be told, bring your families with you and include your family.

Restoring Memories and Remembering

I restore our memories. When I talk about my *Kokomish* and my *Shaumish*, I acknowledge our loss, our deep-seated wounds that will take a lifetime to heal and recover from. I don't hide from those. I'll talk about them openly. I'll talk about myself as an example. When I worry or I have fear I try to confront those. I really feel like it's important for us to tell our stories and to gather the stories from our families because that's where our knowledge lays.

Gathering Truths and Restoring Resilience

My mother went to St. John's Anglican Residential School in Chapleau, Ontario. The bottom picture is my mother and two uncles who were in that school. When I was a young girl, public school was horrendously awful for me. My experience in school in those days was laden with racism on the playground and in the curriculum. I experienced a lot of anxiety and fear those days. After school, the bus would drop us on the road. I would

come home and ask my mom, "What was it like for you when you went to school?" And my mom told me stories of resistance, and they were stories of how she survived the residential school. She didn't tell me about the pain and the trauma. She told me the funny stories.

She told me stories about how they made bras for the other girls. How they defied the sisters and crossed the line that they weren't supposed to cross. One day she was held back from going on a fieldtrip. She figured out how to click the door open, spend the day at the school, going into the kitchen eating, and bringing cookies and milk back to her room. When she went back to her room, then she thought, "How do I click that door back?" And she thought about it and thought about it. And she found a way to put that click back on the door. She hid her cookies under her mattress. She drank her milk and she had to put her milk cup there because kids weren't allowed having those things in the dorms. She told me wonderful stories of being so sneaky. They were good stories.

Today, I'm gathering these stories from her. There's so much resilience there. But the kicker was that, when I was young, I didn't know she was talking about the residential school. I had no idea what she meant when she said she was sent to a school and lived there. So, when I started taking Indigenous studies courses, my mind started connecting the dots between my mother's stories and the colonization. This learning began the journey of sorting out what the hell happened, and I began to understand the impacts colonialism and assimilation policies had in my life. I read about it in a history reader in Native studies. I went home and I bawled my eyes out. "Oh my God. That was my mom and this is our family. And that was my aunties and my uncles." I cried and today I still cry. I didn't know my mother's stories were the stories of her resistance, from her wounds and her trauma of growing up in the residential school. So, I have something to do about that now. I have to tell those stories. I want to tell her stories in a different way. I want to recover the stories. I want to talk about her resistance and her resilience, and reconnect with those memories. My mother is so beautiful. She's 83 years old and she's survived so many things. She is so resilient.

Telling 'His-story' and 'Her-story'

This is a picture of Flying Post, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Post at Kakatoosh, Horwood Lake, Ontario. The building there is a little log cabin that was owned by the Hudson's Bay Company where our traditional summer camps were. That Hudson's Bay post was called Flying Post, so that's why our First Nation is called Flying Post First Nation. We are named after that HBC Post. This is 'his-story.'

There's a second picture that is about 'her-story.' I need to recover her story. The second picture is a picture of a burial ground. The fading sign says, "Native Burial Ground." I took that picture on a snowy day and I was in one of those rowboats while fishing early in the morning. Betty is an old trapper woman who lives at Kakatoosh now. While visiting her, she told me that burial ground is where my *Kokomish's* family is buried and it's unmarked. There's so much to my grandmother's story that needs to be recovered because our women's stories were erased. Our grandmothers were erased. So, that's another thing that I have to do. I have a lot of work to do.

Duality in Being

This next photo honours duality. Today, I acknowledge that I'm bicultural like many of you. We understand Euro-Western ways, and my channels of learning have also been in sacred lodges, on the land, sitting with the Elders, and learning language. I have been relearning what it means to be Anishinaabe, what is my creation story, and what is the story of my treaty so that I know that and can pass that on.

The image in the middle is our logo in the Aboriginal Field of Study (AFS) at Wilfrid Laurier University where I work. Our AFS team created that. We needed our own identity and so we began with a logo. We took control of how we wanted to represent who we are as a program, as a team. There's a story in that emblem. And, so, we have to stand up for who we are. It sometimes means that it's stressful, and we have to go into battle and we have to be strong. And, remember, we belong. We have a right to be here. And we have a right to bring our whole self here.

When I was hired by the university, I was hired as an Indigenous scholar. This is what I was to bring to the faculty and program. I'm an Indigenous, culturally-based, critically-conscious, community-oriented helper, person, and woman. That's who I am. That's why I'm here. I remind my institution of this when we are blazing Indigenous pathways in programs and initiatives. We need to stand up and remind our academics that we are here to create change. So, we steer, we lead, and we direct change. I say in meetings, "We need to do this, this, and this. This is how we're going to do it." And we need to bring people together to talk about this. We have to stand up and we have to be clear why we're doing what we're doing. We have to understand our position, purpose, and vision. We have to understand and be rooted in our worldviews.

So, there are meltdowns, and it's overwhelming at times. We have to always be present and aware. We cannot assume our non-Indigenous peers will think for us. When we're not present things happen in our absence

and it's usually not what we wanted. Then we have to go back and say, "What's going on? We didn't agree to this. Who was at the table to help make this decision?" But we can't do it alone. We have to create these experiences where we laugh, build community, and have joy with each other. We bring joy.

Remember, we're not alone. We're trying to pick ourselves up. We're trying to dust ourselves off. And we're trying to walk our path, whatever that path looks like. Remember, if you feel alone, you're not. Just take a moment and look around. Look around, and look for other travellers and learners. Look around, stand up, get up, look around, and, when you're working, close your eyes and remember what you're seeing here today. Remember that you are not alone. All these people have published and have left footprints for us. Go search and you'll find other Indigenous searchers and authors around.

Embrace Our Diversity

This is my beautiful, diverse family. The other thing that I feel is really important is to embrace our diversity. The more we reconcile with ourselves, the more we restore our wounded selves, the more we deal with our wounded spirits, our wounded hearts, our wounded minds, and take care of our bodies in a good way—the more we do that, the more we can accept who we are. The more we can accept the person beside us. We have so many young people who don't carry that, whatever that is, that look, but that doesn't mean they're not Anishinaabe or they don't have that spirit. My eldest daughter has red hair and blue eyes, and she is Anishinaabe.

In my family, we are diverse nations today. We have Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. We are walking treaties. We are the blending of two hoops, or three hoops, or two spirit hoops. But all of our hoops are really beautiful. They're like that powwow regalia that Karen Pheasant was talking about. It's diverse today and that diversity is so beautiful.

Closing Words

What I want to leave with you is a seed to become grounded in who you are. Become grounded in where you come from and what that means to you. That, to me, is what reconciliation is about. That, to me, is how we mobilize our knowledge, because our knowledge is steeped in our land, language, Nations, families, Spirit, Creation, and Creator. Our knowledge is steeped in who we are. We are the bundles. Our spirits, our hearts, our minds, our experiences, our histories are our knowledge bundles. We are the knowledge bundles. Each one of us has a story that needs to be told.

Those stories have been erased, they have been annihilated, they have been attacked, and they have been stolen. Nobody else is going to bring those stories back. We have to make what was invisible visible. Yes, that's a big burden. I acknowledge that burden. We all carry it.

Before the residential school system severed the transfer of important life knowledge, our grandparents had "good life" teachings and knowledge to pass on. So, now we have to learn and have courage to restore what was taken. Be brave. I want to encourage everybody to just try and keep trying, and trying together is better. Don't worry or apologize for being a learner or not knowing. Begin from where you are and bring who you are. Try and take one step at a time. As we reconcile ourselves, pathways are restored and our light grows as a people. Please do not check yourself at the door because you are a powerful cultural mirror. You, too, are a cultural mirror for other Indigenous peoples travelling on their journey of reconciliation and restoration. *Miigwech!*

References

- Absolon, K. E. (Minogiizhigokwe). (2011). *Kaandossiwin: How we come to know*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood.