Research Is Ceremony

Indigenous Research Methods

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Foreword and Conclusion

This section is written in order to provide some context for the reader. Through anticipating and responding to the concerns of academics accustomed to the dominant system's method of research presentation, I hope in this foreword to make the book more readable and more understandable. Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers. It is my hope that readers of this book will begin to question some of their own beliefs about the way research needs to be conducted and presented, so that they can recognize the importance of developing alternative ways of answering questions.

> Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen. (Tafoya, 1995, p. 12)

It is my intention to build a relationship between the readers of this story, myself as the storyteller and the ideas I present. This relationship needs to be formed in order for an understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm to develop. This paradigm must hold true to its principles of relationality and relational accountability. As I cannot know beforehand who will read this book, I cannot be sure of the relationships that readers might hold with me or the ideas I share. So, I will start from scratch just to make sure that we begin this book from a common ground.

Finding this common ground is one of the struggles of cross-cultural communication. Yet it is necessary so that both sides in the communication process can begin to see or understand the same things. When communicating with like-minded others, we often take many things for granted. There is an expression: "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it." The opposite holds just as true: "If I hadn't believed it, I wouldn't have seen it." When talking or writing, we usually expect others to make the same jumps

in logic, to follow the same patterns of communication and to have similar terms of reference. The reader must be able to comprehend the writer's beliefs in order to see what the writer sees. When this is not happening, miscommunication is inevitable.

So in addition to explaining the aim of the book, this foreword explains a bit about how my logic works, the pattern my cultural style of communication follows, some of the terms of reference I use and my role in this process. As Terry Tafoya (1995) said, when speaking with people from another culture it often takes longer to explain the context, background or meaning of a story than it does to actually tell the story. On the other hand, when communicating with people who share the same culture, too much explanation or background detailing could be seen as disrespectful of the intelligence of the listener. Since I have no way of knowing if the reader is from the same culture as me, I hope I will be excused if I am being insensitive in this foreword. I come to you with a good heart.

This book describes one view of an Indigenous research paradigm, in the process answering the following questions:

- What are the shared aspects of the ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology of research conducted by Indigenous scholars in Australia and Canada?
- How can these aspects of an Indigenous research paradigm be put into practice to support other Indigenous people in their own research?

I put forward in the book that: 1. the shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality). The shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships. 2. The shared aspects of relationality and relational accountability can be put into practice through choice of research topic, methods of data collection, form of analysis and presentation of information.

While this paradigm has developed from working with Indigenous scholars in Canada and Australia, it is by no means intended to be exclusive to these groups. Indigenous scholars from other countries and homelands (especially some phenomenal Native Hawaiians) have read this manuscript and taken part in discussions of our paradigms, as have many non-Indigenous academics, and have confirmed that their own worldviews are compatible.. So I must apologize for leaving out any groups of peoples with my research questions. These were merely intended to provide some boundaries for the sake of my own research, not to limit the use of this paradigm. It is my hope that my continuing journey of learning in this area will allow me to incorporate the words of many more Indigenous scholars from around the world into this paradigm.

torical perspective. With that background knowledge in tow, it is pertinent to describe the path, the impact and the stages that Indigenous scholars themselves have taken as they attempt to break into (and possibly disrupt) a dominantly controlled Euro-western paradigm.

The Development of an Indigenous Paradigm

During the assimilationist period a small number of Aboriginal scholars managed to enter mainstream educational facilities and through diligent effort began to understand and even mimic western scholars. Patsy Steinhauer (2001a) describes the development, from this period onward, of an Indigenous research paradigm by Indigenous scholars.

First Stage

Steinhauer says that the understanding and articulation of an Indigenous paradigm progressed through at least four stages. During the first stage, she explains,

> Indigenous scholars [and others who sought to align themselves with research "with" and "on" Indigenous peoples] situated themselves solidly in a western framework. There is little evidence that they attempted or even considered that this "western" way could be challenged. In fact in order to have their work considered in scholarly academic realms they strove to be western researchers of the highest caliber. (2001a, p. 15)

These Indigenous scholars were somehow able to separate their own Indigenous lives from their academic endeavours. Medicine gives an excellent example of this dichotomy in her text, *Being an Anthropologist and Remaining "Native"* (2001). Still other Aboriginal scholars used a western paradigm in order to write about their discontent and to give voice to sentiments that were decidedly non-mainstream, as in *Custer Died for Your Sins* (Deloria, 1969), *Prison of Grass* (Adams, 1975) and *God is Red* (Deloria, 1973). For the most part however, Aboriginal scholars within dominant system universities were few and far between. Those who sought and found research positions were either decidedly dominant system in perspective or led academic lives that often ran contrary to their Indigenous worldview.

As in the chronology of political and historical events that impacted Aboriginal research, the stages in the development of an Indigenous paradigm are somewhat fluid. Although there is a definite progression from one stage to the next, there will always be those Aboriginal scholars who choose to work within a western framework. Some have particular reasons for making this choice. This is the reasoning that leads to stage two.

Second Stage

Steinhauer explains that the second stage in the development of an Indigenous paradigm introduces the notion of the paradigm but seeks to maintain mainstream western influences to avoid marginalization. "The first problem is that it [Indigenous research] will be defined in comparison with western or European models for the acquisition of knowledge, rather than on its own," (Urion, Norton and Porter, 1995, p. 56). Urion, Norton and Porter further caution that "Indigenous perspectives will be defined in terms of the exotic, and in the larger context this will marginalize Indigenous perspectives in the world of research (1995, pp. 56–57). Still other Indigenous scholars of this period felt challenged to restrict the Indigenous paradigm to one research method. Hermes (1998) expresses this categorization as troublesome, explaining that "the method still refuses a single category or any other formula that may make it a formula for research… [For example] a grounding in Ojibwa culture and community made it impossible for only one predetermined methodology to accommodate the paradigm" (p. 156).

For Indigenous researchers of this era, the struggle to "be accepted" permeates their work. They believe that incorporating culturally specific models of Indigenous research would present problems to predetermined methods available and yet they teeter on the edge, "wishing that they could, but not attempting to do so." Hampton (1993) expresses this quandary: "I finally could not deny the six directions as I sat with Miles and Huberman's (1984) *Qualitative Data Analysis* and tried to formulate a tactic for generating meaning" (p. 281).

Third Stage

The third stage in the development of an Indigenous paradigm began a focus on decolonization. This stage, best articulated by the Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonising Methodologies* (1999), suggests a process of Indigenizing western methodologies. Although the process does not necessarily focus on what Indigenous methodologies actually are, it does challenge western methods and western-focused researchers who have studied Aboriginal peoples. The decolonizing movement has a large following of Aboriginal scholars, among them Marie Battiste (2000), Sakej Henderson (2000b) and Battiste, Finley and Bell (2002).

It would be foolhardy for any Indigenous scholar to ignore the impact that this movement has had on research. It is this awareness of colonization, and the firm belief that Indigenous peoples have their own worldviews, that have led to the present stage in the articulation of our own research paradigm.

Fourth Stage

Only recently have Aboriginal scholars been allowed the respect of conducting their own research. Equally important, as the number of Indigenous research-

ers grows, is that the use of an Indigenous paradigm has allowed them to do research that emanates from, honours and illuminates their worldviews. This present stage, referred to in Martin's chronology as the Indigenist Research Phase, challenges Indigenous scholars to articulate their own research paradigms, their own approaches to research and their own data collection methods. These researchers, Atkinson (2002b) among them, believe that:

> Research within Aboriginal communities can be problematic if it is not informed by Aboriginal people themselves, based on ethical knowledge(s) and procedures which locate the protocols of working with Aboriginal peoples within themselves. Research must be approached with integrity and fidelity to these knowledge(s) procedures and protocols. (p. 4)

The news that an Indigenous perspective is respected as another and equally significant paradigm within a number of mainstream universities, has brought Indigenous scholars to these institutions like never before. The University of Alberta in Canada, for instance, offers a First Nations Graduate Education program that emanates from an Indigenous perspective with core courses taught by Indigenous faculty who teach from this unique stance. That program graduated four Aboriginal PhDs in 2007, a number exceeding that of Aboriginal doctoral graduates in that university's long history (Wilson and Wilson, 2002), yet the university is surrounded by forty-six First Nations Communities.

A Shift in Terminology, a Shift in Understanding

A growing awareness of the similarities of experiences of Indigenous peoples worldwide has reshaped the terminology used to define their own lives. No longer are tribally specific or local terms such as Indian, Metis, Inuit or Native (as used in Canada) or Aborigine or Aboriginal (as used in Australia) inclusive enough to encompass a growing resurgence of knowledge that encompasses the underlying systemic knowledge bases of the original peoples of the world. The term Indigenous is now used to refer to that knowledge system, which is inclusive of all. Indigenous scholars are in the process of shaping, redefining and explaining their positions. They are defining the research, outlining the ethical protocols and explaining the culturally congruent methodologies that can be used at the behest of their communities. The language chosen in this chapter reflects this shift from Aboriginal to Indigenous.

Rigney (1997) says, "Indigenous people are at a stage where they want research and research design to contribute to their self-determination and liberation struggles, as it is defined and controlled by their communities" (p. 3). He explains that this is because, "Indigenous peoples think and interpret

the world and its realities in differing ways to non-indigenous peoples because of their experiences, histories, cultures and values" (p. 8). Evelyn Steinhauer (2002), in explaining this movement, says that her formal education left her conditioned to believe that Indigenous ways of knowing were only important to Indigenous people, that "we could never use that knowledge on a formal basis, therefore I never took a keen interest in the topic until now'" (p. 70). She goes on to say:

> It is exciting to know that finally our voices are being heard and that Indigenous scholars are now talking about and using Indigenous knowledge in their research. I think it is through such dialogue and discussion that Indigenous research methodologies will one day become common practice, for it is time to give voice to tnd legitimize the knowledge of our people. (p. 70)

Developing this Indigenous paradigm increases the possibility that research done with Indigenous people will, according to Weber-Pillwax (1999), be "a source of enrichment to their lives and not a source of depletion or denigration" (p. 38). Worldwide, a new level of awareness is growing as the academic climate changes. The need for research following an Indigenous research paradigm has come to the fore.

The Criterion for Indigenous Research

Unfortunately Indigenous researchers have often had to explain how their perspective is different from that of dominant system scholars; dominant scholars have seemingly needed no such justification in order to conduct their research. Yet, Indigenous scholars have met this task. Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000) explain that Indigenous knowledges are unique to given cultures, localities and societies, and are "acquired by local peoples through daily experience" (p. 19). The Mayan scholar Carlos Cordero (1995) describes the difference by saying that within the western knowledge system there is:

> a separation of those areas called science from those called art and religion. The [Indigenous] knowledge base on the other hand, integrates those areas of knowledge so that science is both religious and aesthetic. We find then, an emphasis in the western tradition of approaching knowledge through the use of the intellect. For Indigenous people, knowledge is also approached through the senses and the intuition. (p. 30)

The idea that knowledge is approached through the intellect leads to the belief that research must be objective rather than subjective, that personal

the open is indicative of her character. She identifies herself as having come from "the three I's: Indigenous, invader and immigrant.." Her Indigenous ancestry comes from the Bundjalung people of northeast New South Wales. The second self-identified I comes from the convicts and initial wave of settlers, of mixed English and Celtic descent, who invaded Australia. Finally, she is also of immigrant German ancestry. She has shared with me how much of a struggle it has been for her to come to terms with / among these various aspects of her identity. I have learned a lot from her about the need to listen with deep respect in order to build strong relationships.

She says that her family named her Wombat. Wombats are known for their determination; when faced with an obstacle, they just put their heads down and keep on pushing until they get through. And though Wombat certainly shows this determination and deep sense of commitment in her work, she is also a whirlwind of energy when she gets going. Her energy is enough to carry along those of us who sometimes become complacent or have lost the energy to fight. I guess that I would nickname her a "Cyclone Wombat."

Stan

It gets a bit trickier telling you about Stan. He is my father, an educator, a researcher and my friend. The reason that I am including him in this section is that he acted like the consulting Elder on this project. So not only has he read what I have written and discussed the research project with me, it is to him that I feel most accountable. As my father, he has obviously been the most influential person in teaching me about being Indigenous. I feel nourished by his guidance and also feel a sense of obligation to get things right. After all, I am a reflection of his teachings and want this reflection to be as true as possible. I have already told you a lot about Stan earlier in the book.

There are a lot of other people who have helped me and who I have learned from in this process, including Trish Fox and John Williams-Mozley, who were at the school of human services at QUT during my time there and helped me to get through the hoops that the system set in my way; Victor Hart and Penny Tripcony at the Oodgeroo unit of QUT, who gave me a lot of new ideas to think about and helped to firm up my ideas for my research; the rest of the First Nations education students at the University of Alberta, who have always been so open and welcoming to me whenever we talk; Jean, Brenda and Dawn in the First Nations and Aboriginal Counselling degree program at Brandon University, who put up with me and showed me a lot of this stuff about relationality in action through the way that we work together; the faculty at the College of Indigenous Australian Peoples at Southern Cross University, who have let me into their community of friends; and of course the rest of my family who have shared with me real insight in my "participant observation."

Now that you know some of my co-researchers, perhaps the words and ideas that they have shared with me will take on fuller meaning.

Introducing an Indigenous Research Paradigm

As I get down to the heart of what an Indigenous research paradigm is all about, once again I am filled with doubt about how to proceed. This is due to the fact that much of this knowledge came to me in an intuitive fashion. In talking about these ideas with the others who were helping me to form them, I often found that just mentioning a word or phrase would trigger the release of a whole load of information and ideas— within both me and the people I was talking with. All of us were research participants, rather than me being the researcher and them my subjects. We all learned and grew as a result of exploring our relationship with this topic. As I review my notes and transcripts, they seem incomplete without the final coming together that was required deep within our beings. I talk about this style of analyzing ideas in the next chapter.

Writing on a personal level, rather than in the abstract to an anonymous reader, has helped in some way to get these ideas out while retaining some of their context, but they still feel hollow or that a great deal of their context is missing. One problem is that the elements of an Indigenous research paradigm are interrelated or interdependent; it is difficult to separate one to write about. Again reviewing my notes, I find that there is no distinction between where one element ends and the next begins.

My friend Peter related to me having the same problem in presenting his thesis. When talking with his Elders, often he would find that they would say things or describe events that would take him to a different place. In his thesis, he was not sure whether to talk about what the Elders were saying or about the place where they took him. If I tell you about what we were talking about when I was doing this research, will you make the same intuitive leaps that I did? I cannot be sure of this. On the other hand, if I just tell you where I ended up with my ideas, will you be confused about how I got there? There is no real way for me to tell whether you are ready to receive this information.

Something that has become apparent to me is that for Indigenous people, research is a ceremony. In our cultures an integral part of any ceremony is setting the stage properly. When ceremonies take place, everyone who is participating needs to be ready to step beyond the everyday and to accept a raised state of consciousness. You could say that the specific rituals that make up the ceremony are designed to get the participants into a state of mind that will allow for the extraordinary to take place. As one Elder explained it to me: if it is possible to get every single person in a room thinking about the exact same thing for only two seconds, then a miracle will happen. It is fitting that we view research in the same way—as a means of raising our consciousness. But how can I reflect this ceremony in my writing? How can I get you to the same space that allowed me to understand these concepts, and how can I know when you are there? In short, how can I know when or if we are both thinking about the same thing at the same point in this process?

One thing that bothers me is when ceremonies and symbols become dogmatic One symbol in our culture that has amassed a great deal of this dogma is

the medicine wheel. People compartmentalize the circle into four quadrants, say that the east stands for this and this colour goes there, and so on. Now this is okay, but some people argue that only their understanding of the medicine wheel is the "right" one. This dogmatic approach to the understanding of the modern medicine wheel undermines the work of those who use the circle as a theoretical paradigm.

I am mentioning this because I would like to use what I believe is the underlying symbolism of the circle to illustrate an idea (I hope that I am not being dogmatic myself in doing this). For me, putting ideas in a circle or wheel indicates that they are interrelated and that each blends into the next. It also implies that the ideas flow from one to the next in a cyclical fashion. A change in one affects the others, which in turn effects new change in the original. All parts of the circle are equal; no part can claim superiority over, or even exist without, the rest of the circle. So forget for a moment any dogma you know about medicine wheels, so that I can use the symbol of the circle to explain an Indigenous research paradigm.

I have already explained how a research paradigm is made up of four entities: ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. But rather than thinking of them as four separate ideas or entities, try to think of them in a circle:

The entire circle is an Indigenous research paradigm. Its entities are inseparable and blend from one into the next. The whole of the paradigm is greater than the sum of its parts. Now that I think of it, perhaps that is another distinction between our paradigm and western ones, which scientists and philosophers seem to have no trouble dissecting.

As I write and contemplate, I can see how my research ceremony has led to a raised awareness of what Indigenous research is. Relationality seems to sum up the whole Indigenous research paradigm to me. Just as the components of the paradigm are related, the components themselves all have to do with relationships. The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of rela-

tionships that form a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships. There, that sums up the whole book in one paragraph! An Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability. Now, let's see if I can explain this all in the academic style.

Elements of an Indigenous Research Paradigm

In this chapter, some of the data from the participants who took part in my doctoral research are presented and analyzed. The following chapter discusses the form that the analysis took. As Lincoln and Guba (2000) discussed in regard to dominant research paradigms, I found that an Indigenous research paradigm can also be understood in terms of its ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. It is the uniqueness of these four elements that in part hold an Indigenous research paradigm apart from other research paradigms.

I am going to relate a story that was told to me and several other graduate students at a research methods colloquium. I am telling this story I can use it to demonstrate all of the elements of an Indigenous research paradigm in one fell swoop. As this section progresses, the story will be returned to in order to serve as an example of the four elements. Cora was a doctoral student in the graduate program in First Nations Education at the University of Alberta when she told this story. She has since gone on to become a co-director of the program. When I asked her if I could use this story as an example of an Indigenous research paradigm she was grateful to be of help. However, when I first re-told her story as part of a presentation at the Indigenous Scholars Conference in Edmonton, Alberta, she felt that I had misrepresented some aspects of it. Cora has since gone on to publish her colloquium presentation, so I will use her version of the story for my example. This version works even better as an example than when I told it, as Cora has had the opportunity to check the accuracy of her words to ensure that they represent the intent of her message. Here is Cora's story:

> One day when I was reading in an anthropology section of the library, I came across an article by an anthropologist. It was a description about a Cree man, his home, his ways, his words. Like the fog that creeps over the lake on a summer evening, a sense of disbelief slowly clouded my comprehension as I came to the rather sickening realization that she was talking about my grandfather. I could feel myself moving into a place of terrible stillness. After a while I took the book, checked it out of the library, and returned to my home community for the weekend.
>
> I read the article to my mother (who did not read in any lan-

guage), discussing one particular section with her in great detail because I felt that our lives had been assaulted and violated. I wanted her reaction to the situation. She didn't get as upset as I did, at least not as visibly, and I understood that as simply an indicator of her normally calm and thoughtful response to life in general. But she was not happy about the writing either. We talked and spent the whole weekend immersed in this experience of responding to what the anthropologist had written about our family. In the end I decided that some day I was going to do something about this. Several months later, I had vision about something I was to do, a vision that has not been completely fulfilled, but is still unfolding.

The article was a description of my grandfather in his home along with a verbatim transcription of his Cree words shared in an interview with her. Then followed the translation of the Cree into English. The English was not an accurate translation or interpretation of what my grandfather had said in Cree and this was the primary source of my anger.

Over the weekend, my mother and I talked a lot about the language and the translation and other things related to communication in this particular case. Aside from that, we also talked about my grandfather as a person and about his whole life. In other words, we talked about family history, and lived through many years and generations in that weekend. In one way it was a wonderful experience, having my mother share this part of the family history with me. The history helped me to contextualize this pain and humiliation and shock that I had felt on seeing my grandfather and his way of being objectified by this anthropologist. In another way it was very distressing because I was still left with the problem of figuring out where I fitted into this situation as a graduate student and as a member of the family that had been placed under a microscope by what I perceived to be an arrogant and aggressive stranger.

What, then, are the principles of Indigenous research that are reflected here? It was clear to me that I had dug the information out, that it was about my family, and that now I had the responsibility to do something about it. I carried that sense of responsibility away with me after that weekend, and it is still with me. (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, pp. 166–167)

What I can see from this story, apart from the shoddy research practices of the anthropologist, is a demonstration of an Indigenous ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology as Cora re-searches the relationship that she holds with her grandfather.

Indigenous Ontology and Epistemology

In an Indigenous ontology there may be multiple realities, as in the constructivist research paradigm. The difference is that, rather than the truth being something that is "out there" or external, reality is in the relationship that one has with the truth. Thus an object or thing is not as important as one's relationships to it. This idea could be further expanded to say that reality *is* relationships or sets of relationships. Thus there is no one definite reality but rather different sets of relationships that make up an Indigenous ontology. Therefore reality is not an object but a process of relationships, and an Indigenous ontology is actually the equivalent of an Indigenous epistemology.

One might use a chair to sit on, while someone else may use it as a doorstop or repository for a stack of journals (as the one in my office is used). Thus the ontology may have multiple realities—no single use of the chair is better or more real—but more importantly, the epistemology is based upon relationships. In the Cree language, the literal translation into English for a chair would be "the thing that you sit on," and the literal translation for pen would be "something that you write with." The underlying meaning behind words in Cree gives a clue to Indigenous ontology. You might say that the language uses many more verbs than nouns. Objects themselves are not named; rather what they might be used for is described.

That the English language requires but one word to describe something (a noun or pronoun), but many words to describe its use, reveals that the underlying importance is placed on the singular object or reality, rather than on multiple realities or upon one's relationships. A very different epistemology can be seen in the Cree use of the word *chapan*, which describes the relationship between great-grandparent and great-grandchild. Both people in the relationship call the other *chapan*. *Chapan* is a balanced relationship, without hierarchy of any sort.

In the speech of Aboriginal Australians, other Indigenous people are usually referred to as "cousin," "brother" or "auntie." This demonstrates an epistemology where the relationship with something (a person, object or idea) is more important than the thing itself. Inherent in this concept is the recognition that this person, object or idea may have different relationships with someone or something else. Someone who is my auntie is undoubtedly someone else's sister, mother or cousin. *Chapan* to my son is *Nookoom*, or "my grandmother," to me. There is no word for "grandmother" in Cree—it is either "*my* grandmother" or "*your* grandmother," *kookoom*. When I have asked people how to say grandmother, the response was, "You can't be a grandmother without being attached to something."

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the foundational belief that

> knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond this idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. Who cares about those ontologies? It's not the realities in and of themselves that are important; it is the relationship that I share with reality. (S. Wilson, 2001)

We can extend this thinking—of viewing objects as the relationships we share with them—on to how we see concepts and ideas. The concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them. Again, an Indigenous epistemology has systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves. Indigenous epistemology is more than merely a way of knowing (Meyer, 2001). It is important to recognize that the epistemology includes entire systems of knowledge and relationships. These relationships are with the cosmos around us, as well as with concepts. They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships, and relationships with ideas. Indigenous epistemology is our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities and our places in the cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship.

If I look back at Cora's story about her grandfather, I can see that for her, reality is not something that is external or fixed. Her reality is based upon a relationship. Cora had a specific relationship with her grandfather based upon her understanding of him. That relationship included how he related to Cora, and how Cora understood his relationships with the rest of his environment. Her grandfather was the sum of these respectful relationships, not some fixed object that could be stripped of its context to be examined "under a microscope" as the text had done. The new and fixed misinformation about her grandfather threw the relationship into disharmony—not because she believed this misinformation or thought it to be "factual," which could perhaps have been just as harmful, but because she knew it was false. It also called into question the relationships that she had formed as a budding researcher. I think that all Indigenous students fear that we will be seen as becoming as cold and objectifying as the anthropologist who wrote the article. That Cora felt it her obligation to do something about the article also tells me something about an Indigenous axiology and methodology. Knowledge and peoples will cease to be objectified when researchers fulfill their role in the research relationship through their methodology.

I want to share an experience with you that I remember from several years ago. Jamie was attending California State University at the time and had been home for part of the summer. I decided to keep him company on his drive back to Sacramento, so we took off together in his jeep. We camped out along the way with no real timeline for when we would arrive or definite route that we would take. It turned out that the jeep was what decided when and where we would stop for breaks.

While driving through South Dakota, the jeep bonked out on us just as we approached Bear Butte. This butte is a sacred site for Indigenous North Americans, so who knows what forces were at play, but we ended up spending the night there. Jamie and I decided to sleep up on the butte so that we could conduct a pipe ceremony there at sunrise. (It was still summer, so sunrise would be pretty early.) We took our sleeping bags and slept in the crook of the bear's neck—between the large butte that was its back and the smaller one that was its head. We made our beds on the south side of a large tree, about ten metres from a small rock face. Mosquitoes started to descend upon us, thankful for the fresh blood on their doorstep. After a brief prayer to ask them to leave us alone, they did.

Sometime through the night, a dream/vision came to me. I was my innermost self—a single point of light. Between the rock wall and myself were thousands of other points of light, looking in on Jamie and me. They floated in the space all around us. These lights nowhere near filled the space around me, but rather the space seemed indescribably large and well able to accommodate us all.

I cannot really describe the feeling that went along with this vision, even (especially?) after analyzing it over the years. Certainly it was not fear or even confusion; reviewing the experience now that is as clear in my memory as the night it happened, I feel a sense of mystery and of, I don't know, belonging? Words cannot adequately convey it. Another Indigenous man at Bear Butte that night said that he earlier saw streams of light coming down the mountainside from the area where we slept. I have had Elders tell me that the spirits were looking in on us that night, and that this was what I saw.

As I sit and write about an Indigenous ontology and epistemology, I am able to gain fresh insight into the vision that was given to me that night. Once again I have real difficulty putting this into words that can come close to explaining this idea. Perhaps it might be easier if you get someone else to read you this description, while you try to visualize it with your eyes closed.

Imagine that you are a single point of light. Not like a light bulb, or even a star, but an infinitely small, intense point of light in an area of otherwise total darkness or void. Now in the darkness of this void, another point of light becomes visible somewhere off in the distance—it is impossible to tell how far off, because you and the other point are so infinitely small. You form a relationship with that other point of light, and it is as though there is an infinitely thin thread now running between you and the other. All that exists are these two

points of light, one of which is you, and something that is connecting the two of you together.

Now another point of light is visible off in another direction, and again you develop a relationship, and another thin thread evolves. You are now connected with two other points. A fourth light appears, and another relationship and thread are formed. A fifth light. Then a sixth; slowly, slowly more lights appear. You build more and more connections. Now the lights are starting to appear all around you and are coming faster as you get accustomed to bringing them into your forming web of relationships. The lights are coming into being as fast as you can imagine them now, and as you build your web of relationships, slowly these infinitely small threads of relationship are building up into something resembling a form around you.

As the lights and the relationships come faster and faster, the form starts to take its shape as your physical body. While you notice this, your consciousness expands outwards, and you notice that another point of light—perhaps the first other one that you noticed—has also started to take on a shape as it makes its own web of relationships and builds up its threads of being. Now other lights are taking on their physical form, as their webs of relationships grow and coalesce. As more and more of these points of light take on their physical form, the world around you starts to take shape.

Now as you open your eyes, you can see all of the things that are around you. What you see is their physical form, but you realize that this form is really just the web of relationships that have taken on a familiar shape. Every individual thing that you see around you is really just a huge knot—a point where thousands and millions of relationships come together. These relationships come to you from the past, from the present and from your future. This is what surrounds us, and what forms us, our world, our cosmos and our reality. We could not *be* without *being in relationship* with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships.

As we relate this world into being, many other knots and connections are formed that do not take on a physical form. After all, my physical body can be defined by a boundary—generally speaking, my skin—that separates what is me from what is not. We all know though that our emotional and mental boundaries do not necessarily coincide with the physical. (If you have any doubt about this try to approach someone face-to-face, and get as close to him or her as you can. You will soon discover that our emotional boundaries are much further out than our physical ones—you will get increasingly uncomfortable when these boundaries are crossed.)

Who knows where our spiritual boundaries are; is our spiritual self that infinitely small point of light, or is it the aura that surrounds us and interacts with our environment? Perhaps that point of light is like some kind of reverse black hole—not really a point at all, but a space where so many relationships come together that they emit a light of their own.

Anyway, some of these knots of relationships are not visible or tangible

entities, but they are there just the same. They are developing ideas, grand abstractions, entire systems of thinking. This is our epistemology. Thinking of the world around us as a web of connections and relationships. Nothing could be without being in relationship, without its context. Our systems of knowledge are built by and around and also form these relationships.

Indigenous Axiology and Methodology

From an epistemology and ontology based upon relationships, an Indigenous methodology and axiology emerge. An Indigenous axiology is built upon the concept of relational accountability. Right or wrong; validity; statistically significant; worthy or unworthy: value judgements loose their meaning. What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship—that is, being accountable to your relations. The researcher is therefore a part of his or her research and inseparable from the subject of that research (J. Wilson, 2000). The knowledge that the researcher interprets must be respectful of and help to build the relationships that have been established through the process of finding out information. Furthermore, the Indigenous researcher has a vested interest in the integrity of the methodology (respectful) and the usefulness of the results if they are to be of any use in the Indigenous community (reciprocity).

Following this axiology, an Indigenous methodology must be a process that adheres to relational accountability. Respect, reciprocity and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology; Cora (Weber-Pillwax, 2001) calls these the 3 R's of Indigenous research and learning. In an Indigenous research paradigm, the researcher must ask:

- How do my methods help to build respectful relationships between the topic that I am studying and myself as researcher (on multiple levels)?
- How do my methods help to build respectful relationships between myself and the other research participants?
- How can I relate respectfully to the other participants involved in this research so that together we can form a stronger relationship with the idea that we will share?
- What is my role as researcher in this relationship, and what are my responsibilities?
- Am I being responsible in fulfilling my role and obligations to the other participants, to the topic and to all of my relations?
- What am I contributing or giving back to the relationship? Is the sharing, growth and learning that is taking place reciprocal?

When Cora's relationship with her grandfather was thrown into disharmony, it became her responsibility to do something to restore that harmony. There are several factors that contributed to the disharmony: the incorrect translation of his words into English and the misinterpretation of the intent of his speech among them. As her grandfather was no longer alive to process the misinformation, the obligation fell upon Cora to engage in a form of research or ceremony in order to restore the harmony to the relationship. Only someone who is fluent in the Cree language and culture would have recognized the mistranslation that had taken place to begin with. Even if taken only as a literal translation, the information presented was inaccurate. In addition to this, the language was taken out of its context of relationality. In the translation given, relationships were broken. The misinterpretation of the context of the story did nothing to restore these relationships or correct for the mistranslation.

The personal nature of the research added to the problem of misinterpretation. Cora felt a sense of being violated and assaulted. I am sure that any Indigenous researcher would be upset by the sloppy research and misrepresentation of an Indigenous Elder that had taken place. That Cora had a personal relationship with the "subject" of the research added insult to injury. Here was a situation where Indigenous ethics and accountability—or axiology—compelled Cora to act. The methodology she chose to follow was to restore the relationship with her grandfather to harmony. She could have merely stayed in the university library and re-translated the text, but that would not have accomplished her purpose. That may have helped to correct the misinformation, but it would not have restored the relationship.

She has partially accomplished restoring the harmony to the relationship in several ways. Cora had to return to her home community as a step in her research ceremony. I will discuss this further later, but a sense of connection to place is of great importance to Indigenous people. Sure, she was going home to talk with her mother, but her home community holds this connection to the land as well. The relationships involving her grandfather are the strongest there. Through the strength of her relationship with her mother, she was able to engage in conversation and to re-live memories of her entire family, including her grandfather. This became Cora's research method. Cora and her mother were able to discuss the mistranslation and re-analyze the text together. In her role as an Indigenous researcher, Cora still feels that it is her responsibility to do more to repair the damage done to her family as a result of this assault by an "aggressive and arrogant" outside researcher.

It feels strange to me to be writing these ideas down. It is as though I am taking such a basic and fundamental thing and trying to explain it or make some big deal of it. I feel that any Indigenous person will read this and say to themselves, "Well, duh, isn't that stating the obvious." It seems so obvious and simple to me, but I wonder if it is the same for non-Indigenous people? When I talk about the underlying fundamentals of being Indigenous, and doing Indigenous research, is it necessary to state the obvious? Upon reflection, I guess that it is. If the importance of relationships were understood at an inner or core level by dominant system researchers and academics, I wouldn't have witnessed the misunderstandings and resistance to an Indigenous research paradigm in connection with my own work and that of other Indigenous researchers.

So with all of these knots of being/relationships as our reality, we can go one step further and ask, "How can I find out more about this other being, or idea, or whatever you decide to call a particular knot?" The answer, which is our methodology, seems obvious—the more relationships between yourself and the other thing, the more fully you can comprehend its form and the greater your understanding becomes. Perhaps we can construct a new knot (or uncover a previously invisible one) that will coalesce into a theory that describes the relationship that you share with the other. So the methodology is simply the building of more relations.

While forming all of these relationships, you can understand the responsibility that comes with bringing a new idea into being (or articulating/making visible an existing one). The new relationship has to respect all of the other relationships around it. Forming and strengthening these connections gives power to and helps the knot between to grow larger and stronger. We must ensure that both sides in the relationship are sharing the power going into these new connections. Without this reciprocity, one side of the relationship may gain power and substance at the expense of the other.

The responsibility to ensure respectful and reciprocal relationships becomes the axiology of the person who is making these connections. We must also be responsible in our choice of where we will build these powerful connections as we choose the topics of our research. Do we want to give more strength to the connections that are building our forms into that which we can see as beautiful and positive, or give strength to connections that are detracting us and moving us away from the form we would like to take? Our axiology demands that we be accountable to these relations that we form. Speaking of which, the responsibility now falls upon me to explain these concepts in a manner that other academics might easily understand.