

## First Peoples Child & Family Review

A Journal on Innovation and Best Practices in Aboriginal Child Welfare Administration,  
Research, Policy & Practice

# Aboriginal Research: Berry Picking and Hunting in the 21st Century

Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett

Volume 1, Number 1, 2004

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1069581ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069581ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

ISSN

1708-489X (print)

2293-6610 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Absolon, K. & Willett, C. (2004). Aboriginal Research: Berry Picking and Hunting in the 21st Century. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 1(1), 5–17.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1069581ar>

Article abstract

In this article issues around research methodology specific to Aboriginal people will be discussed. A brief historical analysis lays a foundation for the need for unique research methodologies as it pertains to Aboriginal people both as researched and researcher. Contemporary critiques by Aboriginal writers and communities will be presented in relation to the limitations and effects of Euro-western research methods. Finally, the authors will discuss issues, possibilities and responsibilities around conducting research as Aboriginal researchers.

### Abstract

In this article issues around research methodology specific to Aboriginal people will be discussed. A brief historical analysis lays a foundation for the need for unique research methodologies as it pertains to Aboriginal people both as researched and researcher. Contemporary critiques by Aboriginal writers and communities will be presented in relation to the limitations and effects of Euro-western research methods. Finally, the authors will discuss issues, possibilities and responsibilities around conducting research as Aboriginal researchers.

## Aboriginal research: Berry Picking and Hunting in the 21st Century\*

Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett

### Locating Ourselves

Location of self in writing and research is integral to issues of accountability and the location from which we study, write and participate in knowledge creation (2002; Said, 1994; Tierney, 2002). As Aboriginal researchers, we write about ourselves and position ourselves first because the only thing we can write about is ourselves (Allen, 1998; Monture-Angus, 1995).

### Kathy

As an Anishinabe woman I assert a specific set of experiences based on my cultural, racial, geographical and political location. My name is Minogizhgo kwe (Shining Day woman) and I am Anishinabe kwe (Ojibway woman) from Flying Post First Nation. I am born of an Ojibway mother and a British father and grew up in the bush. My mother was dismembered from her Nation because of the patriarchal *Indian Act* legislation. She has since been

re-membered as a result of Bill C-31. I too have been re-membered. Searching and re-searching has been central to my journey of recovery and discovery of my history, culture and community. Acknowledgement of my existence as an Anishinabe kwe (Ojibway woman) did not come naturally or easily. The fact that I can say this sets forth the complexities of my political, racial or cultural location as an Aboriginal woman in Canada.

Searching was also central to my experience in the bush. I spent most of my childhood to young adulthood in the bush. The absence of fences, neighbors and physical boundaries led way for the natural curiosities of a child to grow and be nurtured. My curious nature ushered me to find my way in the bush. Exploring the woods was my favorite pastime. The wonders that awaited and the possibilities of discoveries made my journeys into uncharted territories even more exciting. I learnt to search for food, wood, plants, medicines and animals. Trees provided

\* Sometimes in Indigenous knowledge, meaning is not so transparent and can be interpreted differently depending on the listener. Berry picking and hunting are traditional practices that require a specific set knowledge and research skills and when we translate those forms of traditional seeking into the 21st century, we have transformed our knowledge and skill set into contemporary contexts.

---

*Because of who I am, I have accepted that my location, at times, can be isolating as I strive to introduce ideas, methods and practices of different ways of knowing, thinking, being and doing. In my work I often find myself 'trail blazing,' cutting through ideologies, attitudes and structures ingrained in Euro-western thought that can make the path for Aboriginal self-determination difficult, even at times, impassable. I expose people to new ideas and different ways of thinking, being and doing. I am a visionary with thoughts and dreams about life as an Anishinabe person.*

markers; streams, rivers and lakes marked boundaries, plants indicated location and all this knowledge I developed out of just being in the bush. I believe that growing up in the bush equipped me with an extraordinary set of research skills. My bush socialization has taught me to be conscious of my surroundings, to be observant, to listen and discern my actions from what I see and hear. Elements of the earth, air, water and sun have taught me to be aware and move through the bush accordingly. My experiences both of being lost in the bush and of knowing the bush really well and learning about its markings have become the roots of my skills as researcher. From these experiences I have also come to understand that, traditionally, Anishinabe people were well-practiced researchers whose methodologies were rooted in Aboriginal epistemologies. Today I am an educator, researcher, coordinator, facilitator, designer, developer and helper. Because of who I am, I have accepted that my location, at times, can be isolating as I strive to introduce ideas, methods and practices of different ways of knowing, thinking, being and doing. In my work I often find myself 'trail blazing,' cutting through ideologies, attitudes and structures ingrained in Euro-western thought that can make the path for Aboriginal self-determination difficult, even at times, impassable. I expose people to new ideas and different ways of thinking, being and doing. I am a visionary with thoughts and dreams about life as an Anishinabe person. In this article I am again challenged to embark on a study, a journey of self-determination in Aboriginal research. Yet, I know that I speak and write truly from my own position, experiences and perspectives and do not represent the Aboriginal peoples' voice. The only voice I can represent is my own (Monture-Angus, 1995) and this is where I place myself.

### Cam

Like Kathy, I am a Bill C-31 status Indian. I am from Little Pine First Nation

in Saskatchewan. My mother is Cree and my father is of Scottish/British ancestry. Like Kathy's mother, my mother was dismembered when she married my father, who is White. The Government of Canada no longer considered her an Indian and, under the rules of the *Indian Act*, her treaty status and band membership were taken away. Although, as their children, we too were dis-membered, our generation has begun the process of re-membering, of reclaiming and of re-searching our Aboriginal heritage. The following is my process of re-membering.

After spending half of her life in residential school, my mother returned home to her reserve and traveled every day to and from the nearest town north of her home to attend high school. It was there at Paynton High School that she met my father, a third generation farm boy whose grandfather had homesteaded about 10 kilometers north of town. After graduation, they both moved to Saskatoon where my mother attended Business College and my father completed a program in commercial construction. They soon married, had two boys, and moved around to wherever my father could find work. After a few years in construction my father bought a half share of the family farm with my uncle and moved us back home. It was there then, that my earliest memories were formed: the smell of freshly mowed grass, clear sunny days with piercing blue skies, and the sound of caragana pods popping in the heat. As a child I remember trying to avoid the bare white-hot light bulb that hung down from a bent nail above the sink where my mother bathed us; getting dressed in the morning beside the diesel-burning furnace in the middle of our tiny house; eating peanuts and listening to the Beatles "*Let it Be*" album on our 8-track stereo.

I have happy memories of playing and working on the farm, playing with the neighbor's kids, and going to town to pick up the mail. My memories of school are equally happy: making friends,

---

*Remembering and talking about my experience as an Aboriginal person is Aboriginal re-search. Through the telling and re-telling of my story, I am able to reclaim, revise and rename my history so that I come to a new understanding about it.*

participating in class, and riding the bus. Yet, as I remember and discuss my childhood with Kathy, what is missing from my memories is as revealing as the memories themselves: While my brothers and I were the only Aboriginal students in the entire school, I have always wondered why I could not recall any experiences of racism during those early years. Kathy, however, was not surprised, and asked me about the context of my experience. As I remembered the context, the answer to my question was unveiled: My family did not live on the reserve and we associated mostly with our White relatives in and around Paynton. We participated in community associations and events in Paynton: 4-H, softball, curling, library, sports days, auctions, dances, and church. We conducted all of our business in White communities. For all intents and purposes, we lived like White people and because of our connections at many levels (family, business, and friends), we were accepted as White.

To be sure, my family suffered many experiences of racism: I remember the way that many of my father's relatives shunned my mother and spoke of her in a patronizing or demeaning manner. I remember my mother crying because the captain of the Paynton ladies' softball team had pushed her and told her "Go home! We don't want to play with you!" I remember my brother (whose complexion was visibly darker than my own) being teased and getting his ears pulled until they bled by an older boy on the bus. However, for the most part, we were accepted and were treated with respect by the community. It wasn't until I left the comfortable confines of our rural community for the more overt racism of the city that I began to experience discrimination in a more direct way, which had a more powerful effect on me.

For me then, my life experience had left many questions unanswered. Remembering and talking about my experience as an Aboriginal person is

Aboriginal re-search. Through the telling and re-telling of my story, I am able to reclaim, revise and rename my history so that I come to a new understanding about it.

### **History of Research on Aboriginal Peoples**

As Aboriginal people, we often find ourselves negotiating the sensitive area of research both as researched and researcher. While Indigenous peoples are the most studied ethnic group in the world (Smith, 1999), the study of "other" has not been our tradition because in Aboriginal culture "one does not tell or inquire about matters that do not directly concern one" (Gunn Allen, 1998, p. 56). Mihesuah (1998a) explains:

While non-Indian historians and some Indians have made careers out of speaking for tribes and interpreting culture besides the one to which they belong, many Indians will not write about tribes other than their own, even if they have insights into those cultures. When it comes to speculating on Others' motivations and world-views, many Indians are simply uncomfortable and won't do it (p. 12).

Aboriginal peoples have a history of studying all things around us that we interact with and relate to such as the earth, animals, plants, water, air, and the sun. Traditionally, research has been conducted to seek, counsel and consult; to learn about medicines, plants and animals; to scout and scan the land; to educate and pass on knowledge; and to inquire into cosmology. The seeking of knowledge is usually solution-focused and has an underlying purpose of survival. Berry picking and hunting required a knowledge set of seeking skills, which sustained Indigenous families and communities for thousands of years. We understood that we are all related and that our actions affect our environment; that the mere observance of a thing changes it. Therefore, we must care

---

*While the role of Indigenous oral traditions were to remember authentic realities, the role of research and written text was to propagate the superior intelligence and strength of Europeans (Gilchrist, 1997; Smith, 1999). In the context of imperialism and colonialism, Aboriginal people were and continue to be misrepresented for the purpose of propagating, maintaining and justifying control, domination and genocide (Churchill, 1992).*

for our environment in order to care for ourselves.

Indigenous communities are comprised of cultural histories passed down since time immemorial. Cultural histories speak about the cosmology of the universe and our location in it. Such histories have been carried on from generation to generation via oral traditions of storytelling, ceremony, songs, and teachings, as well as rituals and sharing. Each nation retained, recorded and recounted its own cultural histories. These histories reflect in the names of places, people and elements of creation, a spirit that is alive in the land. The names are imbued with meaning, teachings and spirit. These histories were then relevant and meaningful to the lives, culture and survival of each Indigenous nation. They were then and remain today etched in the memories of their people and the land.

With the onslaught of colonization however, Europeans brought with them a reverence for the written word as the most valid representation of fact. Indigenous oral histories became misrepresented and were dismissed as legends, myths, and folklore. With the emergence of the printing press in the 1500's and 1600's came the development of travel books, whose pages misrepresented Indigenous peoples as "less than excellent people of the earth" (Miles, 1989). In the 1700's the social sciences, anthropology and ethnographic studies of 'other' portrayed another account of Indigenous people. What was recorded and represented were voyeuristic accounts of 'other' embedded in the values, beliefs, attitudes and agendas of the colonists. Fixico (1998) explains:

During the British colonization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, newspapers used negative reports about Indians to sell newspapers. Eager novelists picked up their poisoned pens to embellish on any Indian resistance to intrigue readers with horrific atrocities. In the 1800's ethnographers recorded notes, wrote articles, and drafted manuscripts

describing Indians and their cultures. More ethnographers and anthropologists followed in the late 1800s in desperate efforts to study Native American cultures... Careless historians followed ethnographers and anthropologists as a part of the academic community that wrote imbalanced articles and books about American Indians (p. 87-88).

While the role of Indigenous oral traditions were to remember authentic realities, the role of research and written text was to propagate the superior intelligence and strength of Europeans (Gilchrist, 1997; Smith, 1999). In the context of imperialism and colonialism, Aboriginal people were and continue to be misrepresented for the purpose of propagating, maintaining and justifying control, domination and genocide (Churchill, 1992). "Since the written work is considered the 'true medium' of historical accuracy, history was left to the discretion of the literate. Those with the ability and opportunity to write had their own agendas to promote" (Voyageur, 2000, p. 86). These written texts were fictitious representations of Whiteness in relation to 'other' that constructed images based not in truth, but on the colonizer's preferred image (Deloria, 1998; hooks, 1992; Mihesuah, 1998b). Contemporary critiques of ethno-historical accounts of Aboriginal people deal less with Aboriginal people and more with the "self-image of the writers and how the Indian world should properly be constructed" (Deloria, 1998, p. 65). Historical written texts by non-Aboriginal authors about Aboriginal peoples reveal more about the patriarchy, paternalism, racism, White supremacy, fear, ignorance and ethnocentrism of their authors than they do about Aboriginal peoples (Voyageur, 2000).

The Darwinism and evolutionary thought that was foundational to the worldview of Western authors molded and shaped the representations and images of Aboriginal people they presented by perpetuating competition

---

*Diminishing the value of Aboriginal knowledges has been an ongoing deliberate, calculated attempt to oppress and ultimately to extinguish the very Aboriginal cultures whose oral epistemologies, philosophies, worldviews and theories have sustained the earth and all its inhabitants since time immemorial.*

for survival via “survival of the fittest”, which, in turn, evoked rationalizations and justifications for the implementation of racist, discriminatory, and ultimately genocidal policies and practices against Indigenous peoples (Miles, 1989). Yet, at the same time, from their point of view, non-Aboriginal researchers saw themselves as merely curious observers and as objective, benevolent record keepers of history. Although not all anthropological representations were misrepresentative or written in malice of Aboriginal people, their cultural elitism and ignorance left fertile ground for written material that became foundational to genocidal policies and practices implemented against Aboriginal people in Canada.

The historical role of research in perpetuating colonial thought is documented in works of Smith (1999), Battiste and Henderson (2000), Cajete (1994; 2000), Hampton (1995a; 1995b), Gilchrist (1997) and many other Aboriginal scholars who also critique the Eurocentric and artificial contexts in which Aboriginal people have been forced to exist. Stiffarm (1998) suggests that measuring Aboriginal knowledges against Western criterion is academic racism and colonialism. She writes:

Aboriginal knowledge was invalidated by Western ways of knowing. This unconscious, subconscious and conscious means of invalidating Aboriginal knowledge served to perpetrate a superior / inferior relationship around knowledge and how this knowledge is passed on. Systemic racism was clearly perpetrated in this way (Stiffarm, 1998, p. xi).

The legacy of colonizing knowledges have attempted to disconnect Aboriginal peoples from their traditional teachings, spirituality, land, family, community, spiritual leaders, medicine people, and the list goes on. Diminishing the value of Aboriginal knowledges has been an ongoing deliberate, calculated attempt to oppress and ultimately to extinguish

the very Aboriginal cultures whose oral epistemologies, philosophies, worldviews and theories have sustained the earth and all its inhabitants since time immemorial.

In historical and contemporary terms, research continues to play a role in justifying oppression and genocide. Gilchrist (1997) explains:

The fact that much research does not confront ideologies of oppression prevents the application to research of critical knowledge regarding traditional culture, colonial history and racist structure. This results in research which does not use appropriate concepts as variables and defines ones culture using the cultural beliefs of another (p. 76).

Of particular relevance are the representations of images of Aboriginal people in written text and in social science research via anthropologists and ethnographers.

Any illumination of past, present, and future First Nations conditions demands a complete deconstruction of the history and application of ideology and, most importantly, of the impact (personal and political) of racism. That is, we need to know how we got into the mess we're in. “Colonialism means that we must always rethink everything” (hooks, 1992, p. 2). We need to have an analysis of the colonization (Smith, 1999) and our cultural past to decolonize our mind, heart, body and spirit. Without this critical knowledge, we are operating in a vacuum. Colonization of Aboriginal peoples could not have been perpetuated and maintained without the role of knowledge extraction and propagation of false consciousness. Henderson (2000a) claims that if the context of a person's reality does not allow one to move in their world and to discover as much about themselves as they can, then such a context is artificial. These false images and misrepresentations that hinder Aboriginal people from seeing themselves as they really are have disconnected them from their natural contexts and have

---

*For the Western-minded thinker, knowledge exists in an ethereal realm outside of the self. In Western society, there are generally accepted rules of order, principles of accounting, teaching pedagogies, rules of law, medical treatments, etc., which one simply learns without necessarily making a personal connection to. Yet for Indigenous people, knowledge comes from within (Ermine, 1995); knowledge is being, living, and doing.*

created ‘artificial contexts’ (Henderson, 2000a). Thus, re-contextualizing Aboriginal experiences, events and history can help us make sense of our reality (Henderson, 2000b).

Aboriginal research and writing then, as forms of media and as tools of education and socialization, demand a reconstruction and revolution of representations and images. We are concerned with the creation of written texts that liberate authentic Aboriginal knowledges, voices, and experiences at individual and collective levels. Smith (1999) explains this need to reclaim the power of the oral tradition:

Every issue has been approached by indigenous peoples with a view of rewriting and reighting our position in history. Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions in our own ways, for our own purposes. It is not simply about giving an oral account or a genealogical naming of the land and the events which raged over it, but a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying ... Franz Fanon called for the indigenous intellectual and artist to create a new literature ... to write, theorize and research as indigenous scholars (p. 28-29).

### **Limitations & effects of Euro-Western Research Methods**

Smith (1999) states that “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1). However, since there is a fundamental difference between Indigenous and Euro-western thought, “many critiques of research have centered around the theory of knowledge known as empiricism and the scientific paradigm of positivism” (Smith, 1999, p. 42). Western thought is linear, positivist, and normative. Research that is based in Western thought assumes that there are causal relationships in the world which can be observed, measured, catalogued, categorized and predicted.

Euro-Western research is “wrapped around empirical evidence and the ‘burden of proof’” (RCAP, 1996, Vol 4, Ch 3, s. 1). Indigenous thought, on the other hand, is holistic, circular, and relational. “Indigenous peoples have traditionally seen all life on the planet as so multidimensionally entwined that they have not been quick to distinguish the living from the non-living” (Kincheloe & Semali, 1999, p. 42). “All my relations” is a popular phrase we use to acknowledge our relationship with all things on the earth: plants, animals, earth, water, air, and other humans. As such, “the non-western forager lives in a world not of linear causal events but of constantly reforming, multi-dimensional, interacting cycles, where nothing is simply a cause or an effect, but all factors are influences impacting other elements of the system-as-a-whole” (RCAP, 1996, Vol 4, Ch 3, s. 1). For the Western-minded thinker, knowledge exists in an ethereal realm outside of the self. In Western society, there are generally accepted rules of order, principles of accounting, teaching pedagogies, rules of law, medical treatments, etc., which one simply learns without necessarily making a personal connection to. Yet for Indigenous people, knowledge comes from within (Ermine, 1995); knowledge is being, living, and doing.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) further illustrates the distinction between Indigenous and Western research:

The methods of [Western] science are essentially reductionist, that is to say, they seek to understand organisms or nature by studying the smallest or simplest manageable part or sub-system in essential isolation ... Traditional knowledge seeks to comprehend such complexity by operating from a different epistemological basis. It eschews reductionism, placing little emphasis on studying small parts of the ecological system in isolation (Vol 4, Ch 3, s. 1).

---

*Research methods and discourse by Aboriginal authors is met with resistance and fear because White academics have for too long enjoyed the status of 'expert' in matters concerning Indigenous peoples.*

These epistemological differences between Euro-western and Indigenous worldviews imply an inherent flaw in any attempt to apply Euro-western methods to Indigenous contexts. The study of Aboriginal cultural phenomena through a non-Aboriginal epistemological lens can only yield findings that are distorted and incorrect. Gilchrist (1997), states that the application of positivist methods based on control and manipulation produces data that is contrary to and works against principles of self-determination. For example, the flexibility, community participation, ownership, and control of the research process that is integral to community-based research contradict more positivist methods. Furthermore, Gilchrist (1997) contends that there are often no research mechanisms in place that might flag Aboriginal community participants of biased research results since there are often minimal efforts to return results to the community for review and validation.

Cole and Knowles (2001) suggest that "researchers (because they usually initiate such relationships) must do all they can to challenge the hierarchical principles and practices that traditionally define the relationship between researchers and those whom they research" (p. 26). We contend that, when it comes to the study of Aboriginal cultural phenomena, these hierarchical principles must be completely rejected. Because "there is a need for the community to express and define their own needs ... and to produce and implement culturally distinct theory and methods for solving problems which result from colonization" (Gilchrist, 1997, p. 77), research should be controlled by the community from the development of the research agenda through to data collection and analysis.

Today we face the fact that Euro-western theories remain safeguarded and upheld as superior sources of knowledge and analysis in text, often at the expenses of those being studied, usually Indigenous peoples. It is ironic that whole academia

bases its reputation and prestige on the study of Indigenous and marginalized peoples while, at the same time, questioning the validity of Aboriginal knowledge, research and literature because they do not reflect Euro-western research methods and writing. They feverishly resist any loss of power and authority erecting more barriers and moving the goal posts further along in an effort to exclude and isolate Aboriginal scholars.

Today, the game has changed. We Indigenous people own our own knowledge. We make up the rules. We set our own goals. We know who we are and what we need to do for our own sake. Aboriginal researchers are challenged with making transformative changes in research processes and practices. A revolution or transformation is a shift in context. As we shift our contexts, Gilchrist (1997) tells us that we

have a common struggle – that is to decolonize ourselves and our knowledge production. We need to change research methods to end the objectification of Aboriginal communities, and to encourage action based knowledge that is useful on the road to self-determination (p. 80).

Methodologies such as community-based research and participatory action research have provided a launch pad for the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies and community participation (Sinclair, 2004). At the same time, we must recognize that it is our responsibility as Indigenous researchers to continue in the development of methods that are embedded in our own epistemological frameworks.

### **Possibilities and Responsibilities**

Through the re-membling process, individuals are absolved of blame and the community is brought into re-connecting (Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, & MacKay, 1998, p. 114).

Indigenous researchers today carry the responsibility of understanding our history



---

*Renewal in Aboriginal research processes and methodology requires strength and pride in self, family, community, culture, nation, identity, economy, and governance.*

and applying that understanding to the development of knowledge that contributes to the liberation of our present and future. That is, “Indigenous researchers are expected, by their communities and by the institutions which employ them, to have some form of historical and critical analysis of the role of research in the indigenous world” (Smith, 1999, p. 5). Gilchrist (1997) outlines our responsibilities for conducting research:

We cannot blame the individual for underlying racist assumptions acquired through socialization and education. However, it is not unreasonable to expect researchers, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal alike (McNab, 1986), to bring with them a thorough background on the history of colonialism and a broad based knowledge of Aboriginal cultures when engaging in research with our communities. Researchers must have a critical interpretation of colonialism and western domination embedded in research methodology. They must be prepared to engage with community representatives so that their research methodology more accurately reflects an Aboriginal point of view (p. 80).

In other words, we have a responsibility to know our historicity. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers who tackle any facet of Indigenous study accordingly must have a critical analysis of colonialism and of research methodology as an instrument of colonization. In addition, we must learn, know and live our own Indigenous epistemologies, genealogies, traditions and cultures. The knowledge set that is expected of an Aboriginal researcher far exceeds what has been expected of non-Aboriginal researchers in Aboriginal contexts. We, as Aboriginal researchers, have had to be masters of both our own worldviews and Euro-Western worldviews. Gilchrist (1997) illustrates the layers of challenges that we have to overcome towards actualizing our potential for the production and sharing of knowledge:

When we have overcome the myths of value neutrality and objectivity; when we insist on historical contextualization and cultural acknowledgement, and when we have complete access to technical knowledge and ownership of our research; we will improve the quality and value of research concerning Aboriginal people. Only then will we fully realize the rights of Aboriginal people and construct our own reality. (p. 80).

Furthermore, Aboriginal researchers and non-Aboriginal researchers in Aboriginal communities must exercise a sharing of power in the research process. That is, community participation and community control and ownership at all levels of research process must be evident.

In short, an Aboriginal research methodology requires Aboriginal paradigms. Aboriginal research must have contexts that acknowledge both our cultural and colonial history. Such variables as knowledge of history, culture and contemporary contexts affect process and research outcomes. Research outcomes, in turn, affect policy, programming, practice and societal perception. Renewal in Aboriginal research processes and methodology requires strength and pride in self, family, community, culture, nation, identity, economy, and governance.

Locating self in research brings forward one's reality. Critical authors advocate doing so as a response to the crisis in representation where the objective neutrality of writing is no longer considered real (hooks, 1992, 1993; Miheesuah, 1998b; Monture-Angus, 1995; Monture-Okanee, 1995; Owens, 2002; Said, 1994; Smith, 1999; Tierney, 2002). These authors encourage writers to ‘get real’ and to see our own as an important element in the work of social science research, writing and representation (Tierney, 2002). A genre of writers both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal now choose to represent themselves in their

---

*The idea of 're-membering' as a research method and process facilitates a full reconnection. Reconnecting is also healing to our recovery process. Recovering stories, experiences, teachings, tradition and connections is what 'remembering' facilitates.*

writing and publications via storytelling, poems, or personal narrative and thus representing their own reality (Absolon & Willett, 2004; hooks, 1992).

Research is a bad word within Indigenous circles (Smith, 1999). Today we need to rename our processes for sharing and creating knowledge by using language that is congruent with our experiences and culture (Smith, 1999; Thiong'o, 1986). For example, research as a "learning circle" (Nabigon et al., 1998) is a process that generates information sharing, connections, builds capacity and seeks balance and healing. A learning circle also facilitates the remembering process and 're-membering' of individual experiences into a collective knowing and consciousness. The idea of 're-membering' as a research method and process facilitates a full reconnection. Reconnecting is also healing to our recovery process. Recovering stories, experiences, teachings, tradition and connections is what 'remembering' facilitates. Smith (2001) has identified twenty-five research projects, which exemplify Indigenous research methods.

1. Claiming
2. Testimonies
3. Story telling
4. Celebrating survival
5. Remembering
6. Indigenizing
7. Intervening
8. Revitalizing
9. Connecting
10. Reading
11. Writing
12. Representing
13. Gendering
14. Envisioning
15. Reframing
16. Restoring
17. Returning
18. Democratizing
19. Networking
20. Naming
21. Protecting
22. Creating
23. Negotiating
24. Discovering
25. Sharing

We encourage Indigenous researchers to contemplate these methods and to imagine new ways to seek out, to share, and to create knowledge. While these approaches should evidence innovative and diverse research possibilities, their frameworks must be ones that work for and with Indigenous communities.

### **Issues to consider in Aboriginal scholarship and writing**

There are a number of ethical, cultural, political and personal issues that can present special difficulties for indigenous researchers who, in their own communities, work partially as insiders, and are often employed for this purpose, and partially as outsiders, because of their Western education or because they may work across clan, tribe, linguistic, age and gender boundaries (Smith, 1999, p. 5).

Smith (1999) writes that Aboriginal research should "be more respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful" (p. 9). She goes on to state that Aboriginal research methodologies are as much about process as they are about substance. "Cultural protocols, values and behaviors... [are] an integral part of methodology" (Smith, 1999, p. 15).

The role of ethical Aboriginal research is basically threefold: first, to eradicate ethnocentrism in the writing of Aboriginal history and representation; second, to continue to actively dispute the imbalanced scholarship about Aboriginal peoples; and third, to be sensitive to cultural knowledge, honor its sacredness and not publish certain cultural ceremonies or rituals (Fixico, 1998).

As we (Aboriginal scholars) put our knowledge, experiences and worldviews into written text, we must do so in connection to our communities (whoever or whatever that may be). To write in the absence of connection to community or tribal group could be perceived and interpreted as vicarious writing or writing in a vacuum. We need to talk to

---

*At times, we need a hologram to illustrate the multiplexity, multi-dimensions and interconnection of all aspects of Aboriginal reality.*

other Aboriginal people and go beyond the library (Miheuah, 1998b). Library research and writing is not enough. We need to be coming from a context that is based on a current reality and reflect representations of that reality.

The extraction of Aboriginal knowledge is another sensitive issue. What can we put into text? Where are the boundaries? Who determines the standards? We need to be careful about what knowledge we put out there in text. Further research into these questions needs to be done. Since colonization Aboriginal resources have been extracted for the benefit of outside interests while Aboriginal peoples received little or no benefit for them. And Aboriginal people “have never been able to stop the traffic in distorted and sensationalized imagery” (Miller, 1998, p. 106). Today, Aboriginal scholarship plays a critical role in countering and critiquing such sensationalized representations.

### Conclusion

There are issues in writing in academia around the actual act of writing and use of the English language. For example, Kathy was socialized by an Anishnabe woman, her mother, whose first language was Ojibway. Cam was raised by a Nehiyaw mother whose first language was Cree. Although in both cases our first language is English, we have learned to speak and write through our mothers’ epistemological lenses. Therefore, English is like a second language to us perceptually. We have heard other Aboriginal people identify with similar experiences of thinking and writing. As we begin to explore the intricacies of Aboriginal languages, we can see the limitations of the English language. In written English, Aboriginal meanings can be misunderstood, misrepresented or extracted out of context. These issues we contemplate in our writing while constantly searching for terminology, language and words to formulate and reflect our worldview and experiences as

written expression.

We find encouragement in literature that reinforces other forms of writing and representation such as narrative, self-location, subjective text, poetry or storytelling. Smith’s (1999) decolonizing methodologies are validating and reflect diversity. Aboriginal reality is diverse and expressions of it demand diversity. We encourage Indigenous writers to access and utilize diverse methods in order to counter the fear they experience and to foster more natural and authentic expressions of self in written text.

We are both at Ph.D. levels of learning, yet continue to struggle over issues around putting our thoughts and ideas into written text that exist for us and not for non-Aboriginal writers. We know that Aboriginal knowledge and culture is ever flowing, adaptable and fluid; our socialization has taught us that. This is the power of ‘circle process’ and oral traditions. At times, we need a hologram to illustrate the multiplexity, multi-dimensions and interconnection of all aspects of Aboriginal reality. We know our ideas and perspectives will change and grow. Yet writing on paper seems one-dimensional, permanent and fixed.

Finally, representations are limited by worldview, socialization, internalization and perceptual lens. It is impossible to represent all Aboriginal people in research and one should not try to do so. It’s better to focus on specific areas of Aboriginal theory and research development than attempt to take broad sweeps with one brush. The images and representations we paint will reflect perspective and orientations. Thus, acceptance of our accountability for what is being written and shared is integral to recovering Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews responsibly. As we trail blaze in uncharted territories to recover our own research methods, representations and images in an increasingly diverse Aboriginal world, Deloria (1998) reminds us that “[t]here has never been an objective view of the Indian

---

*It is true that we have struggled. Yet through our ancestors and through our elders we have survived. We are still here. And we continue to thrive and evolve. Our histories, our traditions and our culture have always been inside of us.*

and there never will be” (p. 66).

Much of the work in Aboriginal/Indigenous research, we stated, calls for us to re-examine the process of seeking knowledge and knowledge creation. Undeniably, Aboriginal scholars are forging pathways and making positive contributions toward a reclaiming of our own knowledge production. It is our hope that other Indigenous scholars are validated and encouraged to continue developing and affirming methodologies and processes that strengthen Aboriginal peoples lives. We (Absolon & Willett, 2004) have suggested the following considerations in the development of Indigenous methodologies:

- 1) *respectful representations*: consider how you represent yourself, your research and the people, events, or phenomena you are researching;
- 2) *revising*: consider changing your methods, listen to the community and be flexible and open to processes that are culturally relevant;
- 3) *reclaiming*: consider asserting and being proud of yourself; trust in your traditions and cultural identity to inform and guide your process of sharing and creating knowledge;
- 4) *renaming*: consider ‘Indigenizing’ language by restructuring and reworking it to create meanings that are Indigenous;
- 5) *remembering*: consider journeying into the ancestral memory banks through ceremony, tradition and ritual in order to reconnect and remember who you are;
- 6) *reconnecting*: consider creating research processes that foster and maintain connections with community and with contemporary issues;
- 7) *recovering*: consider incorporating our histories, diversities, traditions, cultures and ancestral roots;
- 8) *researching*: consider innovative Indigenous methodologies, be a trailblazer, have courage, tenacity and faith.

The general discourse that is propagated in school is that Indigenous people are losing our culture, our

languages and our traditions. It is true that we have struggled. Yet through our ancestors and through our elders we have survived. We are still here. And we continue to thrive and evolve. Our histories, our traditions and our culture have always been inside of us. The spirit of Indigenous people transcends time and space. And Indigenous research has a role to play in passing our histories, culture, and language to future generations. As we take control over our own knowledge sharing and creation processes, we assert our rightful place in the ongoing education of our children and of our nations. We are proud that after so many generations of oppression and genocide we are able to remember, research and reclaim our beautiful heritage.

*Kinanâskomitinawaw. Miigwech.*

## References

- Absolon, K., & Willett, E. C. (2004). Putting ourselves forward: Location in Aboriginal research. In L. Brown & S. Straga (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Innovative, critical and anti-oppressive approaches to knowledge creation*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Allen, P. G. (1998). Special problems in teaching Leslie Marmon Silko’s “Ceremony”. In D. A. Miheuah (Ed.), *Natives and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians* (pp. 55-64). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Battiste, M., & Henderson, J. Y. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Saskatoon: Purich.
- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain; an ecology of indigenous education* (1st ed.). Durango: Kivaki Press.
- Cajete, G. (2000). Indigenous knowledge: The Pueblo metaphor of Indigenous education. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision*

- (pp. 181-191). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Churchill, W. (1992). *Fantasies of the master race: Literature, cinema and the colonization of American Indians*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press.
- Cole, A. L., & Knowles, J. G. (Eds.). (2001). *Lives in context: The art of life history research*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Deloria, V. J. (1998). Comfortable fictions and the struggle for turf: An essay review of *The Invented Indian: Cultural fictions and Government policies*. In D. A. Mihesuah (Ed.), *Natives and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians* (pp. 65-83). Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Ermine, W. (1995). Aboriginal epistemology. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 101-112). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Fixico, D., L. (1998). Ethics and responsibilities in writing American Indian history. In D. A. Mihesuah (Ed.), *Natives and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians* (pp. 84-99). Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Gilchrist, L. (1997). Aboriginal communities and social science research: Voyeurism in transition. *Native Social Work Journal*, 1(1), pp. 69-85.
- Gunn Allen, P. (1998). Special problems in teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony. In D. A. Mihesuah (Ed.), *Native and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians* (pp. 55-64). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Hampton, E. (1995a). Memory comes before knowledge: Research may improve if researchers remember their motives. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 21, pp. 46-54.
- Hampton, E. (1995b). Towards a redefinition of Indian education. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds* (pp. 5-46). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Henderson, J. Y. (2000a). Challenges of respecting Indigenous world views in Eurocentric education. In R. Neil (Ed.), *Voice of the drum: Indigenous education and culture* (pp. 59-80). Brandon, Manitoba: Kingfisher Publications.
- Henderson, J. Y. (2000b). The context of the state of nature. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 11-38). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. Toronto: Between The Lines.
- hooks, b. (1993). *Sisters of the yam: Black women and self-recovery*. Toronto: Between The Lines.
- Kincheloe, & Semali (Eds.). (1999). *What is Indigenous knowledge? Voices from the academy*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Mihesuah, D. A. (1998a). Introduction. In D. A. Mihesuah (Ed.), *Natives and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians* (pp. 1-22). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Mihesuah, D. A. (Ed.). (1998b). *Natives and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Miles, R. (1989). *Racism*. New York: Routledge.
- Miller, S., A. (1998). Licensed trafficking and ethnogenetic engineering. In D. A. Mihesuah (Ed.), *Natives and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians* (pp. 100-110). Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Monture-Angus, P. A. (1995). *Thunder in my Soul: A Mohawk woman speaks*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

- Monture-Okanee, P. A. (1995). Self portrait: Flint woman. In L. Jaine & D. H. Taylor (Eds.), *Voices: Being Native in Canada* (2nd. ed., pp. 109-117). Saskatoon, SK: University Extension Press.
- Nabigon, H., Hagey, R., Webster, S., & MacKay, R. (1998). The learning circle as a research method: The trickster and windigo in research. *Native Social Work Journal*, 2(1), pp. 113-137.
- Owens, L. (2002). As if an Indian were really an Indian: Native voices and postcolonial theory. In G. M. Bataille (Ed.), *Native American representations: First encounters, distorted images, and literary appropriations* (pp. 11-24). Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa, ON: Queens Printer.
- Said, E., W. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sinclair, R. (2004). *Participatory action research and Aboriginal/Indigenous epistemology: A really good fit*. Retrieved July 13, 2004, from <http://www.Aboriginalsocialwork.ca/parpaper.html>.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd.
- Stiffarm, L., A. (Ed.). (1998). *As we see...Aboriginal pedagogy*. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan.
- Thiong'o, N. w. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Oxford, U.K.: James Currey / Heinemann.
- Tierney, W. G. (2002). Get real: representing reality. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15(4), pp. 385-398.
- Voyageur, C. J. (2000). Contemporary Aboriginal women in Canada. In D. Long & O. P. Dickason (Eds.), *Visions of the heart: Canadian Aboriginal issues*. (pp. 81-106). Toronto: Harcourt.