

Running Head: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review: Traditional Indigenous Knowledge Preservation

Cindy M. Davidson

Submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for

ADED4F35

Research and Critical Reflection in Adult Education

Bachelor of Education in Adult Education Program

Centre for Adult Education and Community Outreach

Faculty of Education, Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario

James D. Pickett, CD, Ed.D.

19 March 2014

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Literature Review: Traditional Indigenous Knowledge Preservation

Crossing the Assiniboine River a chill passed over me, and a conversation with a Stoney Elder came to the forefront of my mind. I could hear his words, ‘let the spirits guide you’, and turning back to the river I let the word Assiniboine resonate within; intrinsically I knew who I was and where I came from right then. That experience fuelled my desire to reclaim my Indigenous identity, an identity stripped from me three generations before I came to be, when my grandparents opted to move from their ancestral lands in Saskatchewan to a new home in Ontario, leaving their identity behind to save their children and their children’s children from the grips of the Canadian government’s colonial assimilationist policy.

During my undergraduate studies in Adult Education, I had many opportunities to study the works of Indigenous scholars, and was exposed to various discourses in traditional Indigenous knowledge preservation. Catching my attention, the ideology of self-conscious traditionalism (Alfred, 2009a, p. 105; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005), the action of selectively choosing specific traditional knowledge to promote and preserve, congruent with Indigenous self-governance political discourse and initiatives, leading me to ask the research question: Should traditional knowledge preservation initiatives serve only the purpose of furthering Indigenous self-governance practices within the decolonization efforts in Canada?

### **Literature Search: Resources and Procedures**

The review process began with an initial internet search of the keywords ‘Indigenous knowledge’, ‘decolonization’, and ‘Indigenous self-governance’, utilizing the search engine Google to locate websites, web logs (blogs), periodicals, or youtube video as a means of ascer-

## LITERATURE REVIEW

taining a general overview of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge preservation in relation to decolonization discourse. Through the secondary source search, other discourse in Indigenous knowledge preservation surfaced, requiring the asking of the question: What defines traditional Indigenous knowledge and is there a standard it must uphold?; along with the question of defining decolonization from the Canadian perspective, prompting a Google Scholar search for resources using the keywords ‘Indigenous spirituality’ and ‘decolonization in Canada’ for additional generalized information. At this point a search of unpublished Theses and Dissertations was conducted using the James A. Gibson Library’s Digital Repository using the keywords ‘Indigenous knowledge’.

After the secondary sources were searched and read, a primary source search for peer reviewed articles and academic texts was conducted using both the Google Scholar search engine, and the database of Academic Search Complete, utilizing the keywords ‘Indigenous knowledge’, ‘Indigenous spirituality’, ‘Indigenous lost identity’, ‘Indigenous resurgence’, ‘Indigenous self-governance’, ‘Indigenous methodology’ and ‘narrative inquiry’. Primary sources in the format of scholarly writings and academic texts were also found in my personal library, consisting of writings on the topics of ‘Indigenous resurgence’, ‘Indigenous spirituality’, ‘Indigenous self-governance’, and adult education theory.

### **Emergent Themes: Discussing the Findings**

For the purpose of this literature review I will discuss my findings, linking them to my intended area of research by breaking down the topic into its key themes in order of importance and as they emerged in the course of the literature review process. As the literature was re-

## LITERATURE REVIEW

viewed it became obvious that many of the ideologies are interconnected, and follow the Indigenous medicine wheel teachings of the four dimensions of ‘true learning’: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual (Lane, Bopp, Bopp, & Brown, 2012, p. 29). Within this exploration, I have come to question the validity of my own research question, and opted to seek alternative research paths should my current path prove futile.

### **Indigenous Knowledge [IK]**

Defining Indigenous knowledge is virtually impossible without first a discussion of Indigenous identity, as most traditional knowledge is seen through the lenses of the four dimensions (Lane et al., 2012, p. 29), and is defined not as individual pieces of information strung together to form a larger concept, but as a way of being in and of itself that has been passed down from generation to generation in an oral tradition (Friesen, 2000, p. 9; Hoffman, 2013; Nee-ganagwedgin, 2013; Simpson, 2011, p. 40). Most of this knowledge is transmitted through the ancient stories and ceremonies, and often start with the spiritual stories of creation (McGregor, 2004; Simpson, 2011, p. 40), to position the storyteller relevant to the story, to her relationship to the listener, and to her relation to all things both human and non-human (Cruikshank, 2012; Enn, 2014; Friesen, 2000, p. 11). It is this way of being/way of knowing that is challenged within the discourse of Indigenous self-governance, as knowledge then becomes compartmentalized and scrutinized as to its importance relative to self-governance initiatives.

**Traditional ecological knowledge [TEK].** A coming together of Indigenous knowledge of the land and the environment in which Indigenous peoples live, using a mixture of oral storytelling and modern scientific practices of anthropologists and field scientists (Cruikshank, 2012)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

the concept of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) came in to fruition. There are numerous ways in which TEK is utilized, including conservation initiatives (Popova, 2014), including hunting and harvesting, and wildlife protection policy (Wenzel, 2004); environmental sciences (Cruikshank, 2012); land and resource management, which is also part of the self-governance discourse (Alfred, 2009a, p. 48; McGregor, 2004). Within TEK we see the emergence of area specific ecological knowledge and the socio-political discourses that accompany it (i.e.: self-governance discourse), such as Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit [IQ] (Wenzel, 2004). IQ differs from TEK in that it not only encompasses the ecological knowledge from the local Inuit tribal lands, it encompasses other other aspects of Indigenous knowledge affecting every day life of the traditional Inuit including language, social organization, culture and worldview (Wenzel, 2004). Though the similarity IQ holds with traditional Indigenous knowledge is apparent, IQ seems more of a political construct to differentiate and distinguish Inuit knowledge from Indigenous knowledge, the reasoning of which is beyond the scope of my research interests.

### **Self-conscious Traditionalism**

Alfred (2009a, pp. 104 - 113) discusses the concept of ‘self-conscious traditionalism’ as a focus on the traditional Indigenous knowledge that corresponds to social, political, and economic realities facing the Indigenous populace. It is discussed within the Khanewa:ke Mohawk culture; however the premise applies to any Indigenous community. By focusing on the values and knowledge base consistent with the decolonization ideology of Indigenous self-governance, other aspects of Indigenous knowledge, culture, and spirituality are diminished. This concept was originally published in Alfred’s first edition of *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*Manifesto* in 1999, and I was introduced to it while reading the second edition (Alfred, 2009a).

This ideology is what captured my interest and prompted my research focus, questioning the validity of this premise over the concept of traditional Indigenous knowledge preservation in its entirety, as a means of identity reclamation and cultural preservation. Interestingly, from 1999 to 2009, Alfred evolved his world view on the ideologies of decolonization and Indigenous self-governance, evolving with it his ideology of ‘self-conscious traditionalism’, bringing voice to the Indigenous resurgence movement (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; and Alfred 2009b, p. 139; Taiaiake, 2013, December 13). With this evolution we are seeing ‘self conscious traditionalism’ in relation to self and one’s Indigenous identity within his/her community, as opposed to limiting knowledge transfer or preservation for the purpose of social, political, or economic leverage for the community in relation to its place within a Eurocentric Canadian polity.

### **Indigenous Resurgence**

The main premise of Indigenous resurgence is its personal nature, whereby Indigenous knowledge is created and learned through the influence of self and moral living in a traditional context (Simpson, 2011, pp. 41-42). Coinciding with the four traditional dimensions of learning (Lane et al., 2012, p. 29), Indigenous resurgence initiatives become personal journeys through identity reclamation, spiritual fulfillment, and traditional knowledge acquisition and preservation by engaging in oral storytelling and Indigenous ceremony (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Simpson, 2011, p. 43; and Wilson, 2004). Decolonization discourse puts forth the ideology that Indigenous knowledge reclamation is paramount in the emancipatory action of reclamation of lost identity (Sherwood, 2009).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Research Implications

It is within the discourse of Indigenous resurgence that I see a valid research opening, in the exploration of Indigenous knowledge preservation for the purpose of reclaiming our lost Indigenous identities. There is an opening for healing the wounds of the ‘lost generation’ from both the perspective of the persons of mixed ancestry who were denied knowledge of their Indigenous status, thereby losing their identity, connection with their traditional Indigenous community, culture, and spirituality, and from the perspective of those scarred by generations of assimilation practices and the systematic destruction of their traditional ways of being and ways of knowing at the hands of the Canadian government. During the course of the literature review I found very little reference to persons of mixed ancestry, looking to reclaim their Indigenous identity, with only one example from an unpublished Doctoral dissertation highlighting the ideology of existing within both an Eurocentric Settler identity and an Indigenous identity with emphasis on finding balance in both worlds (Lafleur, 2014).

From an adult education standpoint I can envision linking the reclamation of Indigenous identity to Tisdell’s (2003) transformational learning ideology based in cultural and spiritual contexts to construct knowledge (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, pp. 141-142) coinciding with the Indigenous resurgence discourse for knowledge construction (Simpson, 2011, p. 43). Freire’s ideology of praxis as an emancipatory transformational learning experience (2000, p.60, as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 141) brings forth the critical reflection aspect of the adult learning experience, bringing further meaning to the research prospects of Indigenous identity reclamation within an Indigenous resurgence discourse.

### **Indigenous Methodologies**

As part of the legacy of colonialism, Indigenous knowledge has been systematically devalued. Common to all aspects of Indigenous knowledge is the decolonization discourse that attempts to distance traditional Indigenous knowledge from the Eurocentric colonial epistemologies, scrutinizing and questioning its validity within academic circles (Akena, 2012; Hoffman, 2013), prompting the use of Indigenous methodologies in academic research. Various scholars have created or validated different Indigenous methodologies for their research work in validating Indigenous knowledge within the academy.

Opting to pursue research in the areas outlined above, I will have to find a methodology that is academically valid and culturally relevant. Of the literature reviewed on Indigenous research methodologies, one framework stood out above all others; convergence Indigenous methodology, whereby Indigenous epistemologies are used in conjunction with participatory research methods (Ray, 2012). It is based on the relations between researcher and research subjects and can be thought of from the perspective of “research as ceremony” (Wilson, 2008, as cited in Ray, 2012, p. 91), building on the Indigenous relationships formed during ceremonies and other cultural experiences. Ray (2012) considers this methodology as convergence where “the term does not imply an amalgamation but instead makes reference to a junction or a place in which two things meet briefly, then carry on their separate paths” (p.92), implying that Eurocentric (Western) research methodology and traditional Indigenous values and ideology can meet and knowledge transference can occur in a manner respectful to both the Indigenous cultural

## LITERATURE REVIEW

practices and the academy for which the research is being conducted within. Instead of devaluing the Indigenous knowledge, it is given an opportunity for legitimacy within the academy (Hoffman, 2013), furthering the Indigenous resurgence movement.

Dependant upon the direction of my proposed research, whether it remains grounded in self and the concept of my own exploration and reclamation of my Indigenous identity in relation to my being as an adult educator; or as a generalized study of Indigenous knowledge preservation through the reclamation of Indigenous identity from the perspective of Indigenous resurgence, I have the option of presenting my findings as Narrative Inquiry (Atkinson, 2010; Munro Hendry, 2010), which lends itself to the oratory traditions of Indigenous knowledge transfer.

## Conclusion

This literature review has taken me through many aspects of and discourses on traditional Indigenous knowledge and its preservation. Decolonization efforts, along with my own family history were my main interests in starting down this research path. In the process I have taken steps to begin the reclamation of my own Identity as a Nakota woman (in colonial times we were considered the Assiniboiné tribe of the Sioux Nation), beginning with crossing the Assiniboiné River and remembering an Elder's wisdom.

I have been caught up with studying the ideology of Dr. Taiaiake Alfred, as I grew up very close to the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory (Deseronto, Ontario), and have learned most of my Indigenous spirituality from the Haudenosaunee culture that he so proudly belongs to. From the first time I came across the concept of 'self-conscious traditionalism' (Alfred, 2009a, pp. 104- 113; and Alfred, 2009b, p. 139), I felt need to challenge his assumptions as I felt so much of

## LITERATURE REVIEW

our collective Indigenous cultures had the potential to be seen as superfluous and lost in the effort to promote decolonization in Canada, prompting my research question: Should traditional knowledge preservation initiatives serve only the purpose of furthering Indigenous self-governance practices within the decolonization efforts in Canada?

Progressing through the literature review, I have come to witness Dr. Alfred's evolution of the concept of 'self conscious traditionalism' to fit within the Indigenous resurgence discourse (Alfred, 2009b; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; and Simpson, 2011) that has emerged from the decolonization discourses over the past decade. The focus has turned to the self and the inherent need for Indigenous identity reclamation for emancipatory purposes. The legacy of colonialism will be with us in Canada for more generations to come, and adult education is one avenue to explore Indigenous resurgence in an individual context. There are research opportunities existing within this realm, prompting me to reformulate a research question for future inquiry.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

## References

- Akena, F. A. (2012). Critical analysis of the production of Western knowledge and its implications for Indigenous knowledge and decolonization. *Journal of Black Studies*, 43(6), 599-619. DOI: 10.1177/0021934712440448
- Alfred, T. (2009a). *Peace, power, righteousness: An Indigenous manifesto* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Alfred, T. (2009b). *Wasase: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*. North York: University of Toronto Press.
- Alfred, T. and Corntassel, J. (2005). Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism. *Government & Opposition*, 40(4), 597-614. doi:10.1111/j.1477-7053.2005.00166.x
- Atkinson, B. (2010). Teachers responding to narrative inquiry: An approach to narrative inquiry criticism. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103(1), 91-102. DOI: 10.1080/00220670903323461
- Cruikshank, J. (2012). Are glaciers 'good to think with'? Recognizing Indigenous environmental knowledge. *Anthropological Forum*, 22(3), 239-250. DOI: 10.1080/00664677.2012.707972

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- Enn, R. (2014). Re-learning of traditional knowledge in times of modernity. *Campus Wide Information Systems*, 31(1), 14-23.
- Friesen, J.W. (2000). *Aboriginal spirituality & biblical theology: Closer than you think*.  
Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd.
- Hoffman, R. (2013). Respecting Aboriginal knowing in the academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 9(3), 189-203.
- Lafleur, G.S. (2014). *Ojibwe Elders' experiences of peace: To teach our well-being with the Earth* [Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation]. Brock University, St. Catharine's, Ontario.
- Lane, P., Bopp, J., Bopp, M., and Brown, L. (2012). *The sacred tree: Reflections of Native American spirituality* (4th ed.). Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press.
- McGregor, D. (2004). Coming full circle: Indigenous knowledge, environment, and our future. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3/4), 385-410.
- Merriam, S.B., Caffarella, R.S., and Baumgartner, L.M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Munro Hendry, P. (2010). Narrative as inquiry. *The Journal of Education Research*, 103(1), 72-80.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Neeganagwedgin, E. (2013). Ancestral knowledges, spirituality and Indigenous narratives as self-determination. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*,

9(4), 322-334.

Popova, U. (2014). Conservation, traditional knowledge, and Indigenous peoples. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 58(1), 197-214. DOI: 10.1177/0002764213495043

Ray, L. (2012). Deciphering the “Indigenous” in Indigenous methodologies. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 8(1), 85-98.

Sherwood, J. (2009). Who is not coping with colonization? Laying out the map for decolonization [Special Supplement]. *Australian Psychiatry*, 17, S24-S27

DOI: 10.1080/1039850902948662

Simpson, L. (2011). *Dancing on our turtle's back: Stories of Nishnanbeg re-creation, resurgence and a new emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.

Taiaiake. (2013, December 13). Being and becoming Indigenous: Resurgence against contemporary colonialism [Web log post]. Retrieved from: <http://taiaiake.net/2013/12/13/being-and-becoming-indigenous-resurgence-against-contemporary-colonialism/>

Wenzel, G. W. (2004). From TEK to IQ: Inuit Quajimajatqangit and Inuit cultural ecology.

*Arctic Anthropology*, 41(2), 238-250.

Wilson, W.A. (2004). Indigenous knowledge recovery is Indigenous empowerment. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3/4), 359-372.