

Anishinaabewin
An Epistemological and Research Method Framework
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Prior to the first meeting with my dissertation committee, I had given the Elder on my committee a paper copy of my chapter, while I had provided the remaining members with an electronic version. I felt nervous yet ready for some constructive feedback. Elder Leland Bell was carrying my written pages in a plastic grocery bag when he arrived at our first dissertation committee meeting. We gathered in a tight circle of five chairs in my dissertation co-supervisor's tiny office. Out of respect, we invited Elder Bell to speak first. He stood up. *Twack!* The bag and its contents of my precious writing slammed down on the floor in the center of our group. After a second of awkward silence as we stared down in amazement, he exclaimed, "Now, let's talk." We laughed hysterically and a most wonderful energy and way of Being¹ emerged.

Elder Bell's role and positive impact on our committee meetings cannot be overstated. The influence of an Elder at meetings resonates with the sacred humility of ceremony. Our human tendency to bring tangential focus as we arrive at a gathering with extraneous thoughts, feelings, and intentions dissipates when we engage in ceremony. The context and intent of ceremony creates space for higher shared consciousness. Elder Bell interrupted the narrow focus that each of us brought to that first meeting by waking us up to a transformative process rooted in mutual respect and relational ways that brings hearts and heads together. Over the two-year span of our monthly dissertation committee meetings, ideas were challenged and we did have disagreements. Humour was our medicine. Shared laughter erupted and traveled outward, transforming the university space.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the precarity of Being an Indigenous scholar in the academy and to present an Indigenous epistemological methodology to inform *Nendagikendajik* ('Indigenous scholars-yet-to-come')² about Indigenous research frameworks. In response to Judith Butler's (2013) idea that precariousness is unevenly distributed and applies itself to subjects that are not so easily normalized in the current order of things, I reflect on my embodied experiences as a subjected Other and my path of resistance and reclamation forward. My research framework involves living in the story as a critical thinker, action-taker, and reflective person on a journey that traverses the invisible borderland between the academy and *Anishinaabewin*, which is an *Anishinaabemowin* term that describes a belief in an *Anishinaabe* way of coming to know and philosophy based on *Anishinaabemowin*, while *Anishinaabemowin* refers to the *Anishinaabe* languages of the *Anishinaabek* people spoken by the Algonquin, Chippewa, Delaware, Mississauga, Odawa, Ojibway, and Pottawatomi people of the Great Lakes Region. In this way, I embody a way of Being that honours both worlds.

My journey of becoming an Indigenous scholar is one of critical awakening. I work to interrupt hegemony in the academic institution and to contribute to Indigenous scholarly discourses that stir the collective consciousness of Indigenous peoples and Canadian society. My personal responses to formal educational structures and socialization processes include experiences of being invisible and feeling alone.

***Anishinaabewin* and Academics in a Canadian Context**

My experiences of being schooled and my lifelong learning journey have informed my wakefulness or my awareness of being steeped in western European

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values that have been harmful to Indigenous Knowledge and language continuance. The lack of respectful relationship that has existed historically between Aboriginal³ and non-Aboriginal people in Canada includes a long, negative, and hurtful relationship between Aboriginal people and schooling. Aboriginal leaders, parents, students, and educators have lived experience with formal education institutions of marginalization and failure to provide an environment and educational philosophy that leads to Aboriginal student success (Battiste 1998; Dion 2009; Youngblood Henderson 2012). The residential school system is an artifact of racism and colonialism within the educational system, which reflects the privilege of Euro-Canadian⁴ knowledge and values (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). Aboriginal students, and all students in Canada, have historically experienced the null curriculum: absent representation and honouring of Aboriginal material, Aboriginal stories, and Aboriginal teachers in schools.

With the advent of calls for educational reform in Canada, combined with a movement toward decolonization and social justice through critical awareness, recent education policies and curricular revisions point to a variety of transformative possibilities (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015a; 2015b; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2008). Aboriginal people are diverse. Each Aboriginal culture possesses its own language and has a system of beliefs and values based on experience, which are articulated in the philosophy of the oral tradition. The potential to realize reconciled partnerships is a strong motivational vision for me, but even more close to my heart is a deep sense of responsibility to the next seven generations, which stems from family and community.

Aboriginal consciousness is central to fierce cultural perseverance and resistance to western societal forces of colonization and marginalization. The global concern for the environment and increasing awareness of Aboriginal cultural values and respect for *Aki*, the *Anishinaabemowin* term for 'Land,' command an authentic role for Aboriginal people and validation of Indigenous ecological perspectives. As new understandings facilitate resolution of historical trauma and strengthening of healthy relationships, we can collectively roll up our sleeves to do the messy work of rectifying problems related to environment, education, and more.

Framing My Work: An Indigenous Paradigm

Understanding the educational and research implications of working in the context of 'healthy relationships' requires turning our attention to the breadth and depth of educational issues from the perspective of an Indigenous paradigm, which puts community and family at the center and is counter to the tightly narrated western definition of knowledge, education, and research.

Indigenous cultural beliefs, values, and knowledge stem from our language, family, and community and our relationship with *Aki*. Indigenous knowledge is transmitted through Indigenous language, experiential learning, ceremony, and intergenerational learning. Stories hold relevancy and authority for ways of living in the world in which we find ourselves as *Anishinaabek*.

Indigenous Knowledge comes from the land. Each of us is situated in a specific place and Indigenous knowledge is a way of Being, Knowing, and Doing—a lifelong process that involves observing, listening, engaging in life activities, and developing skills modeled by family and community members. It means developing our gifts and sharing them to support our families and communities. Indigenous Knowledge requires a reflective process of deep meaning-making so that our stories and oral tradition stimulate remembering. When we retell stories, we contribute to knowledge transmission and new knowledge generation.

Experiences and coming to know from a relational way of Being are Indigenous Knowledge, which is storied forward in *Debwewin*.⁵ Mobilizing discourses about Indigenous Knowledge in the academy serves to challenge western discourses that invade my consciousness and allows me to experience a re-turning to *Anishinaabewin* that restores my human dignity.

Identity and language are foundational aspects of living within an Indigenous paradigm and engaging in an Indigenous research methodology. My identity and learning journey are grounded in *Odenong*.⁶ I grew up on the shores of Lake Couchiching, not far from an ancient gathering place at the narrows called *Mnjikaning*, ‘the place of the fish fence.’ My family and community consist of a broad kinship system and I am in a reciprocal relationship with the creation –the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, the winged ones, the finned ones, those that hop and crawl. My family relationships extend beyond blood relations to include sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers, in places on Turtle Island and beyond.

I am an *Anishinaabemowin*-learner. My father and paternal grandmother were fluent speakers of *Anishinaabemowin* and did not pass on the language within our family. This all-too-common legacy stems from a lived experience for several generations that lacked validation for the crucial impact of *Anishinaabemowin* on culture, thought and the acquisition of wisdom. Colonial violence has undermined Aboriginal ways of Being and promoted the belief that only English language and a formal education present opportunity for success in life.

The *Anishinaabemowin* terms used in this chapter evolved from philosophical discussions with my husband, Stanley Peltier, an Odawa Elder and Language Keeper from Wikwemikong Unceded Territory, Manitoulin Island. Stanley taught me the *Anishinaabemowin* concepts and principles that are foundational to Indigenous thinking and my research framework. Lived experience in my journey of embodying *Anishinaabewin* and becoming an Indigenous scholar creates awareness of temporal aspects of reflexivity, bringing me to a new state of awareness. Rather than seeing myself in a borderland on the outside of academia, I envision my space within institutional places and being in relationship with multiple epistemologies and methods, my home community, and the academic community. Navigating the philosophical and tangible institutional structures means that I traverse bridges in liminal space, living with *Anishinaabewin* alongside the parameters of a western institution.

My Doctoral Research Project: Ecological Relational Knowledge and Pedagogy

My dissertation research (Peltier 2016) was situated broadly in relation to the natural environment of the Great Lakes region and Woodland areas of Turtle Island, and more specifically within the context of northeastern Ontario, and focused on a case study to explore *Anishinaabewin* and learning about Anishinaabe ecological relational knowledge⁷ in an urban public school.

The creation of conceptual space for Aboriginal pedagogy and Indigenous knowledge was demonstrated in a grade 4/5 classroom through the social enactment of relationship in a culturally responsive educational paradigm. The classroom teacher and students (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) engaged with Indigenous Knowledge and *Anishinaabe* Ecological Relational Knowledge, in particular, through an Indigenous storywork Circle pedagogy. Within the Earth Teaching Lodge (school yard) I shared Teachings/stories and the students then selected a personal space on *Aki* for 10-15 minutes. Here they experienced being present with that Place, time for quiet reflection, and made written or drawn responses on a clipboard. After returning to the Circle, students shared and storied about what they thought of the Teaching and experience. Learning about

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the inner process of balancing the heart, mind, intuition, and body through being in-the-moment and journeying to the inner space of reflection and self-knowing are fundamental to self-development and exuding positive perspectives outwards to relationships with others. Understanding of and appreciation for Indigenous perspectives regarding inter-relationships and inter-connections with *Aki* and each other is fundamental to *Anishinaabe* Ecological Relational Knowledge.

My dissertation research contributes to understanding the *Anishinaabe* world view and the role of interconnectivity as it relates to our relationship with each other and *Shkagamik-Kwe*.⁸ The children's drawings and stories reflect *Anishinaabe* ecological relational knowledge and a growing sense of identity, belonging, and appreciation for life. Respectful space was created for *Anishinaabewin* in the school, and a transformative ripple effect was set into motion in the school community and beyond.

My Academic Journey Finding a Way Forward in Creating a Space for *Anishinaabewin*

Before I enrolled in a university PhD program, my life experiences and inquiry as I walked alongside academics in friendship helped prepare me. My path forward on a dissertation journey was based on an overarching burning question: "Is it possible to support societal and educational transformation through the creation of space for *Anishinaabewin* and respect for different ways of Being and Knowing?" This burning question grounded me, giving me a clear vision of what I wanted to investigate in the literature and strengthened my resistance to being swayed by professors' trajectories, while also enabling me to address new queries from enlightened dissertation committee discussions. With this focus, I arrived at the University motivated to learn and understand ways of incorporating *Anishinaabewin* into the established curriculum.

When I enrolled in an Interdisciplinary PhD program at Laurentian University, I was automatically assigned two Indigenous faculty members to provide me with mentorship and academic supervision. In my first year, course-work, completing two literature searches for my academic supervisors as a paid research assistant, and the pressures of keeping up with my job in a school board, meant that I experienced overwhelming exhaustion and a sense of isolation that was reminiscent of past school experience. I did not feel warmth when I interacted with my academic supervisors, and I felt unsettled for some time. Tuning in to my feelings and awareness of my situation motivated me to make a change.

I set out to form a dissertation committee with members who were knowledgeable of local Indigenous community and were supportive of my process for engaging in research. Over a four-month period, I visited a number of professors on campus. During the summer, two professors, Jan Buley and Darrel Manitowabi, invited me to visit their homes. We discussed common ground for learning and research interests, and I felt supported. Thankfully, they each responded positively to my request for them to be co-supervisors on my dissertation committee. I also visited and shared what I was experiencing with Elder Leland Bell who I knew from the community of Wikwemikong where my husband and I had raised our two boys. Elder Bell is a wise and most humble man. He is an *Anishinaabemowin* speaker and gifted artist who holds an honorary doctorate. I asked him for guidance and support to stay true to *Anishinaabewin* in my research journey and, according to protocol, offered him *Asemaa* ('tobacco'). Although he took some time to contemplate my request, he eventually accepted the *Asemaa* and agreed to join my dissertation committee. In addition, another professor, Kevin Fitzmaurice, who shared my interest in writing within an Indigenous paradigm, agreed to participate. The committee members seemed to appreciate

my maturity, educational and life experiences, and strong commitment to the research project and came alongside me in good ways.

The storying of my lived experiences along the path to becoming a scholar is a process centered on forward looking and visioning, being present in the living of sacred story, and critical self-facing to acknowledge what is in my bundle to inform knowing and doing *Anishinaabewin* in the academy. My engagement in the related research process required focused intent, planning, receptivity to guidance, preparing, and carrying out tasks. Participating in ceremony follows a similar process for me.

As I explored and reflected on the Indigenous methodology work of scholars and researchers over the course of my research journey, I developed confidence in my methods. The voices of Indigenous scholars guided me along my path: “Education is ceremony” (Ermine 1995); “Research is ceremony” (Wilson 2008). I especially thought about Lynn Gehl’s (2012) Indigenous research process of coming to know through a heart-mind connection, and Kathy Absolon’s (2011) understanding of methodologies guided by Indigenous ways of knowing our reality, in particular, *Anishinaabe* ways of coming to know. The words of Styres, Haig-Brown, and Blimkie (2013)—“peer down through the layers of earth to see the footprints of all those who preceded us on this land” (45)—were with me and I reflected on Skype discussions I had with Celia Haig-Brown in a recent reading course.

I shopped for materials and sewed in my kitchen to make a circular mat for the Teaching/Story Circles. I thought about aspects of *Anishinaabe* Ecological Relational Knowledge that were especially relevant to that time of year (June), location (in the urban school yard with mature trees surrounding our Place), and the interests and life experiences of 9, 10 and 11-year-old children.

The “story of my becoming” serves to inform Indigenous scholars of a way forward that means learning and accepting hard truths, being in relationship with academic mentors who understand academic structures and guide ways of being there, while at the same time honouring Indigenous Ways of Being to actively resist and, at the same time, bend in relationship within the academic world. A lived decolonization process is crucial to success. Immersion within a circular, interconnected re-searching process empowered me as an Indigenous scholar and demonstrated that shedding light on *Anishinaabewin*, rooted in Indigenous language, can create space for Indigenous scholars to not only survive the rigour of academic training, but to thrive in this context.

The ongoing process of decolonization is difficult although necessary work for an Indigenous scholar. A legacy of powerful and relentless destructive discourses about Indigenous peoples in Canadian society has left Indigenous scholars with the task of unravelling history and navigating intergenerational grief and loss, while at the same time being immersed in the academic literature and scholarly discourses. Indeed, the journey of learning about western knowledge systems and examining my shared history with colonizers stirred strong emotions within me.

Examination of the oral tradition and Medicine Circle framework provides a means of expressing a process of coming to know. *Anishinaabe* social work scholar Kathy Absolon (2011) illustrates the process of decolonization, education and returning to traditional values as a means of re-building our *Anishinaabe* identity and strengthening family and community relationships. Each individual is situated within the centre of the Medicine Circle, and we seek harmony and balance within the wheel as we relearn our history and the traditions that underlie our meaning and direction. Marilou Awiakta (1993) describes the process of “restoring harmony from the inside out, and of extending that concept from the individual to the community” (283).

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Facing the hard truth that the academy is a western institution that has contributed to the erasure of Indigenous Knowledge challenges my role and Place in the academy as an Indigenous scholar. Literatures and images in schools and media are powerful forces of Indigenous Knowledge subjugation. Capitalist ideological underpinnings fuel appropriation of Indigenous ways of Being and misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Permeating the Canadian consciousness are notions of the Noble or Savage Indian and Indian Princess of North American literature founded on the European exodus from oppression to settlement and freedom on Turtle Island (Deloria 1998). The grand narrative of the colonial hegemonic objective to re-create the western sense of entitlement and dominance over land here on Turtle Island permeates society. The following are examples of the discourse of erasure of Indigenous Peoples: living as slaves to the environment; roaming aimlessly on the hunt for food; worshiping gods inhabiting the Wind and Trees; failing to use Land resources for development; vanishing as a result of inferior civilization (Francis 1992); serving no useful purpose in the modern world; being an intractable social problem and occupying valued farm land; and interfering through mere existence with resource extraction. Constructs such as “Resistant Indian Warrior” (Deloria 1998) and “Dirty Skwa” (Acoose 1995) also reflect racist attitudes.

Understanding the colonial context of Place and being in the university led me to envision myself arriving at a crossroads. I brought my past experiences and sense of belonging to an awareness that I could continue on the path forward as I learned *Anishinaabemowin* and worked in community as a helper and educator; otherwise I would walk an arduous road as an Indigenous scholar within the academy. Seeing the enormity of the challenge where Indigenous peoples of the world share similar experiences in various contexts, I was moved to blend scholarly and community roles, and so I forged ahead in the rigorous world of academia. I was (and continue to be) fuelled by a sense of wakefulness and resolve to create space for *Anishinaabewin* in the academy and advocate for validation of Indigenous Knowledges in higher education.

Doing “Double-Duty” in Academic Work

In my interdisciplinary PhD course of study, I examined the fields of education, anthropology, and Indigenous studies and learned skills of “deep-reading” interpretation of texts and interdisciplinary research methods. I was expected to demonstrate mastery of “doing” academic studies. Engaging in this learning meant calling on experiences in personal and professional life to make connections to the topics and themes in coursework. Metaphor became powerfully supportive for my understanding of foreign concepts as I traversed the bridges connecting western academic disciplines and *Anishinaabewin*. I journaled, shared stories with my family and colleagues, and engaged in the storytelling process to generate new knowledge and understandings about the relevance of academic knowledge and skills to my personal context as an educator and my identity as an urban *Anishinaabe Kwe*⁹ (‘woman’). I engaged with *Anishinaabemowin* and Keepers-of-the-Language as a language learner and carried in my bundle *Anishinaabemowin* language concepts and world view.

The process of understanding was more important than that of defining knowledge. I spent time at camp to honour my relationship with Land and Lake: To BE with *Aki* and *Nibi* (water). My husband listened to my explanations of western knowledge and academic contexts and my quest to bridge these with *Anishinaabewin*. During long, in-depth discussions, he provided *Anishinaabemowin* philosophical grounding and taught me Indigenous language concepts and interpretations. My dissertation includes over twenty *Anishinaabemowin* terms.

Engagement in research is expected in the academy, and publishing details about research processes and findings is held in high regard. Living and critical self-reflection contributed to the development of a deep understanding of my personal learning and research process, which involved comparisons with western-based research processes and methods. I also took the opportunity to present my process of coming to understand from within an Indigenous paradigm in university classrooms, research symposiums, education conferences, and regular meetings with my dissertation committee members. The dissertation's written representations of the research method and data are shared respectfully in ways that align with the cultural paradigm, community, and research participant protocols. As an Indigenous researcher living within an Indigenous oral culture research paradigm, I present data that represents research participant voice in story, and I re-story to share my meaning-making. The research process is ceremony with ample preparation and care and attention to protocols. The research story is not entirely prescribed, which allows the reader to become part of the story through their own personal engagement in a reflective process of meaning-making.

I was inspired and motivated to make a contribution following upon the work of Indigenous scholars who blazed the trail for me. When my dissertation committee co-supervisor said, "Your writing sounds like we are back in the 80s," I decided to take the feedback as a compliment and strove to interrupt the ongoing Master narrative of the academy.

As an Indigenous scholar, I do double the work to meet expectations and succeed. The academy expects me to demonstrate mastery of academic studies by possessing knowledge of various disciplines and demonstrating exemplary skills with respect to teaching, research, and institutional service. In addition, I carry the responsibility to stay true to my *Anishinaabe* way of Being, Knowing, and Doing. Staying True means that I bump up against western conceptualizations of knowledge and must navigate hegemonic institutional structures. In my role, I push back when I sense (feel and believe) that choosing a conventional path would lead me to lose my integrity along the way. The academic rigour of Being an Indigenous scholar involves border crossing to live in two distinctly different worlds, devoting time to the liminal space of Story for reflection and deeper understanding, developing the skills to understand and articulate western knowledge as well as Indigenous Knowledge, and creating space so that Indigenous scholars can live Indigenous Knowledge in the academy.

A Precarious Place

Indigenous scholars who embody *Anishinaabewin* are on a challenging path that is riddled with ideological conflicts and can take them on detours from their envisioned learning and research goals. The academy is a colonial institution that seeks to reproduce itself by advancing the development of western theory through an analytical lens that often values complex relationships less than hierarchies and taxonomies.

An Indigenous approach to research serves culture by upholding Knowledge as lived experience. A personal story and interpretation from an Indigenous way of Being and Doing in research pushes back on irrelevant expectations in the academy. Indigenous scholars who are awake to their situation assume responsibility for the hard work of creating space for Indigenous Knowledge and ways of Being, Knowing, and Doing in the Academy. It is important to note that they also may face significant ongoing challenges in their Indigenous communities such as overcoming poverty, grief, lateral violence from imposed Indian Act governance structures, mistrust of and reticence toward government initiatives and research

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within their Indigenous community. Constantly grappling to demonstrate and receive respect in order to create bridges is a struggle.

Indigenous Knowledge is “un”-discipline and “un”-curriculum in the sense that Indigenous knowledge is nested within our communities here on Turtle Island. Within the context of western academia, disciplines of knowledge and educational institutions arose in Europe and came over here on the boat with the colonizers. Defining Indigenous Knowledge in the academy is futile because Indigenous Knowledge does not fit into the western conceptualization of knowledge (where culture is separate). Indigenous Knowledge has not emerged from the western context of disciplining knowledge and is not a static body of facts defined through scientific processes within specific fields. Indigenous Knowledge is rooted in Place and community and is not possessed by an esteemed individual who holds the answers to questions. The philosophy that knowledge comes from *Aki* is exemplified by “a broad sense of knowledge with a specific place and the pedagogy contained within the stories that were conceived within that place” (Kulnieks, Longboat, and Young 2010, 19)

Indigenous scholars who find space and re-story to move forward energize and transform the university context. Scholars from diverse academic and cultural perspectives have provided information about Indigenous Knowledge as a process situated within a context of relationships. As Mi’kmaq scholar and educator, Marie Battiste (2008) states: “no uniform or universal Indigenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge exist—many do” (501). It is not a uniform concept, but a diverse system of concepts that is spread throughout society in a number of layers. Indigenous knowledge is an animated process and experience. Indigenous Knowledges are interconnected within the people and their community. Cree philosopher Willie Ermine (1995) discusses Indigenous knowledge as an interaction of life experience, relational collectivity, and inner knowing (104). Such is the basis of *Anishinaabewin*—a belief in an *Anishinaabe* way of coming to know and philosophy based on *Anishinaabemowin* in relation to the Algonquin, Chippewa, Delaware, Mississauga, Odawa, and Ojibway and Pottawatomi people of the Great Lakes Region.

Indigenous inquiry is about giving back to individual and collective good. Living within an Indigenous paradigm supports the understanding that a relational research method is founded on respect for the topic and the people involved. It is also about being sensitive to people’s feelings about the research outcomes, where “[r]esearch in service of social and ecological justice is inseparable from this value” (Kovach 2009, 174). A relational research framework is a holistic epistemology that situates Indigenous Knowledge at the center.

Adam Gaudrey and Danielle Lorenz (2018) conducted a survey of Indigenous faculty and their allies across Canada. The researchers report that despite the widespread use of reconciliatory language, post-secondary institutions could have more impact when it comes to Indigenous inclusion. Gaudry and Lorenz call for “decolonial indigenization”: foundational, intellectual, and structural shifts in the academy, and the overhaul of academic norms to better reflect a more meaningful relationship with Indigenous nations (218).

Walking as an *Anishinaabe Kwe* within the academy means that I bump up against a system that erases Indigenous Knowledge. I am aware that it is my choice to be inside and to actively resist the violent benevolence of the academy. In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (2015b), universities have initiated work to Indigenize the academy. Every time I am physically in the institution, I wear my clan colors and speak *Anishinaabemowin* when introducing myself in a meeting. These acts remind me of my identity and support me to move forward with self-determination.

Embodying My Re-Searching Process

Engagement in an Indigenous research process means continually traversing the border between the academic bodies of knowledge and qualitative research methodologies and the socio-cultural realities of an Indigenous paradigm. I was inspired by *Anishinaabe* scholar Kathy Absolon's (2011) writing about her dissertation research journey and likened it to a process of re-searching. As I engage in a holistic process of embodying new knowledge, I do not consider the experience to be governed by a linear, sequential step-by-step process. The research journey is a process of change and movement that unfolds in cycles. I expand my own understanding in an integrated way of coming to understand and embody new knowledge as I "re"-search and "re"-vision in various physical places and ideological spaces in order to "re"-present ('make visible again') Indigenous Knowledge, and specifically *Anishinaabewin*.

The Medicine Circle provides a framework for conceptualizing the interconnections and interdisciplinarity of an Indigenous research paradigm. The Medicine Circle is an ancient symbol of Indigenous people on Turtle Island. Bopp et al. (1989) illustrate that the Medicine Circle provides a framework for understanding the universe reflected in our Being—visualizing oneself in the center, connected equally to all points. It is "a symbolic tool that helps us to see [the] interconnectedness of our being with the rest of creation" (Awiakta 1993, 41).

Synthesis is a touchstone for Indigenous ways of Thinking, Being, and Doing and is described as a transferring process.¹⁰ Within our ever-changing contexts of life and contemporary environments, adaptation to virtually any context is possible. Brian Rice (2005) makes the connection between the Medicine Circle and Indigenous ways of Being and Knowing: "Patterns of thought set out by a culture help define that culture. For many Aboriginal peoples, a circle represents the space in which we live [...] Circular patterns established by Aboriginal peoples help define us just as linear structures in western societies define those peoples" (4). According to Jean Graveline (1998), "learning and teaching in the Traditional way embraces the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of the individual, the family, the community, and Shkagamikwe [sic] as a whole" (54).

Lifelong learning involves developing self-awareness and balance among the aspects of oneself—the mind, spirit, body, and feeling/heart. Indigenous scholar and researcher Shawn Wilson (2008) explores the Indigenous way of Being-in-relationship and a relational understanding of reality. Knowledge within an Indigenous paradigm is not only approached with intellect, but also with the senses and intuition: "Knowledge is shared with all of creation [...] with the cosmos [...] the animals, the plants, and with the earth [...] It goes beyond this idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge" (74). Systems of knowledge in their context or in relationship (Indigenous epistemology) are further extended by Wilson to the perspective of "objects as the relationships we share with them [...] The concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them" (74). Relationships are "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" (76).

Figure 1 below represents the Indigenous Research process I came to know through my doctoral research regarding *Anishinaabe* Ecological Relational Knowledge and ways of knowing in school. As the researcher working within an Indigenous paradigm, I situate my inquiry process—wondering and discovering answers to questions—as focal to my life journey. I engage in the research process mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally.

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The light grey area (see Figure 1) represents the process of introspection and intuitive receptivity to the unseen to support new insights and vision. For example, in my role as the researcher, my introspective analysis of questioning educational pedagogical theory and social practices led me to envision a research methodology to honour alternative ways of Being and Doing as a researcher within an Indigenous paradigm. Western-European theoretical knowledge of relevant fields to my query are informed by my personal life experience and professional experience. These contexts are given voice to “talk back to me,” and, gradually, clarity regarding the research context and methodology in my study emerges.

Figure 1. Indigenous Research Process



The relevance of social contexts within research places in Indigenous research are illustrated in the dark grey area (see Figure 1). Here, commitment is lived. Relationships are foundational to my experiences as an educator and my lived experience as an *Anishinaabe Kwe*. Indigenous ways of Being-in-representation inform my views and practices of interaction as a researcher in a coming-to-know relationship with people in the research context who are referred to as “research subjects” in a western research context. I reach out to Elders for guidance and spiritual support and spend time with *Aki* to activate listening, observing and learning through experience and reflection. Time commitment for the building of relationships in the field is a crucial component of

Indigenous research. Authentic relationships within the research community ensure that in my role as the researcher I strive to understand problems with others and carry out research pertaining to relevant inquiries that make positive change for the people involved. I understand and respect relational ethics and responsibility to community and I honour cultural protocols. Relationships are nurtured and maintained in presenting insights, writing, and publishing from the shared experiences.

The black area of the schematic (see Figure 1) represents connection to *Gaaniniiganiijek* ('ancestors').¹¹ Here, the emotional responses, beliefs and values, and a relational way of Being interact. At times I am frustrated by the enormity and power of the literature and institutional research policy that echo western colonialism and perpetuate the subjugation of Indigenous Knowledge. I trust the power of re-awakening the human caring mode for each other and *Shkagamik-Kwe*. My vision and passion for creating positive change for the next seven generations of children and Indigenous scholars drives my focus and tenacity. The journey to the Wisdom of our ancestors, with awakening and intellectual realization of *Anishinaabewin*, is true to Being *Anishinaabe*. *Anishinaabewin* and *Gaaniniiganiijek* are honoured in my research framework and method.

My role as Indigenous researcher means storying the research experience. My Indigenous research methodology is grounded in Indigenous tradition and is centered in *Anishinaabewin*. Applications of an Indigenous story method and western narrative *inquiry* are demonstrated. The framing of my relationship, experiences and responses to interpret the research story as it unfolds, and the re-storying of it may be perceived by western researchers as "bias." The research story provides explanation of the research subjects' context (internal, external, temporal aspects) inspired by the narrative inquiry methodology work of Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000). My writing in a narrative style of perceptions, queries and reflections is shared in first person voice. It is significant that presentation of my Truth represented in story is credible from an Indigenous cultural, social, individual and communal sense of what is real and relevant to the Indigenous research paradigm.

A holistic knowledge system extends beyond cognitive processes to the kinesthetic, spiritual, and affective aspects of my Being. I engage in inward knowing through quiet reflection and critical awareness in response to readings and talk with family and colleagues. I focus to perceive and be receptive to the guidance of *Gaaniniigaaniijek* and the Creation. I live Truth in my experiences of where I come from, where I am, and where I am going. The scholars and *Anishinaabek*¹² who have passed this way before are part of me as I look back and carry forward. This is foundational to an Indigenous Knowledge paradigm where inward ways of knowing are part of knowledge creation, knowledge is experience and knowledge transfer occurs through story.

'Doing' Indigenous research is represented in the white area on the schematic (see Figure 1). The Indigenous research approach interfaces with life experience, and active information-seeking within various academic bodies of literature that are brought to bear on the research topic. I engaged with the academic literature in virtual libraries, at the library on campus, during visits to the offices of academic colleagues who loaned me books, and in face-to-face interactions with Elders and keepers-of-*Anishinaabemowin* over the course of the research project and beyond. In this way, a variety of phenomena, stories, theories, methods, and perspectives are brought to bear on the research topic. My role as participant-researcher provides experience in the field and my field texts illustrated observations, thoughts and queries. Western research methodological tools such as thematic analysis and grounded theory supported my work to build concepts of *Anishinaabek* Ecological Relational Knowledge from the ground up.

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The Indigenous research process that I use combines epistemology with method. As such, it does not document the final accumulation of experience and knowledge but stands to support my path forward into the future. A non-sequential, spiral interdisciplinary Indigenous research process continues for me as I re-vision, relate, re-learn and re-move to embody new understandings.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the precarity of Being an Indigenous scholar in the academy and illustrates an Indigenous research method as a process that counters the more tightly narrated western definitions of research. Reflections from my embodied experiences as a subjected Other have led me to acknowledge the pathways of critical thinking and a process of action and reflection as lived processes for me to traverse the invisible borderland of *Anishinaabe* ways of Being and Knowing and the western institution of knowledge and education. I acknowledge and respect my Indigenous colleagues who share the “double burden” in academia. We live in two worlds. Although we are faced daily with the violence of benevolence in the academy, we give positive energy and action to interrupt the erasure of Indigenous Knowledge and language.

This story of a PhD journey and Indigenous research process provides a glimpse of factors that shape the creation of conceptual space for Indigenous Knowledge, epistemology, and method in the academy. In line with cultural practices, this story is “given away” with the intention that the details are pivotal for students and colleagues to adapt to their world. It provides provocation of things to notice, reflect upon, and do.

The Traditions and stories of Elders continue to inform *Anishinaabe* identity and consciousness and continuance as discourse. As an *Anishinaabe Kwe*, what I bring forward is not neutral and my voice represents my experiences. An Indigenous learning journey and research paradigm provide me with opportunity for self-reflection and action—putting the new understandings into my sacred bundle. I acknowledge and show gratitude to *Shkagamik-Kwe* and *Aki* for a nurturing Place and for my mentors who walk alongside me and share the Knowledge and Language Bundles that they carry. I honour ongoing relationships and the making of new ones in community as I move forward along my learning journey.

I am particularly interested in demonstrating an alternative reality toward educational transformation and the promotion of Indigenous pathways to knowledge production. As I write this paper, I am a new faculty member situated in relationship with Indigenous Language-Keepers and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal academic mentors who provide guidance and on-going interest in my journey. Right now I am living the story of me working within the academy.

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Notes

- ¹ Being, and other words that are typically not capitalized appear in this chapter with a capital to denote an Indigenous voice and Indigenous perspective in the research story.
- ² *Nendagikendajik* refers to those who seek to learn, in this context: Indigenous scholars-yet-to-come.
- ³ The term Aboriginal is commonly used in Canada and is used here to refer specifically to the Indigenous people in Canada (Helin 2006). Aboriginal is the word used in Canada's Constitution and includes "Indians, Inuit and Métis."
- ⁴ Euro-Canadian refers to profit and person-centered societies that arose recently and are attributed to colonization.
- ⁵ *Debwewin* is an *Anishinaabemowin* term for truth.
- ⁶ *Odenong* is an *Anishinaabemowin* term referring to 'where the heart is' at the place of home in one's community of origin.
- ⁷ *Anishinaabe* ecological relational knowledge refers to ways of knowing inter-relationships and inter-connections with Aki and each other according to the Ojibway/Algonquin perspectives of this research project locale.
- ⁸ *Shkagamik-Kwe* is *Anishinaabemowin* and refers to the Earth as our Mother.
- ⁹ *Anishinaabe Kwe* means an Ojibway woman.
- ¹⁰ Elder Leland Bell in a discussion about honouring Indigenous Knowledge in the Academy and maintaining the meaningful connections from *Anishinaabemowin* based on the oral tradition, storytelling, and Elder mentorship for scholars (Sudbury, December 2, 2015).
- ¹¹ *Gaaniniigaaniijek* refers to our ancestors—those who have gone ahead and their legacy.
- ¹² *Anishinaabek* is the plural form of *Anishinaabe*.

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