

INDIGENOUS EDUCATION, MINO-BIMAADIZIWIN, AND THE FOSTERING OF
RELATIONAL SPACE THROUGH INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

This paper examines the varying impacts of Indigenous pedagogy and formal schooling on the learning path of the author. It focuses on the historical context of residential schools, the Indian Control of Indian Education paper of 1972, and the shifting control of schools to Indigenous communities. With a resulting increase in Indigenous administration, staff, and curricula, the time is opportune for discourse on Indigenous pedagogy to come to the fore. The author utilizes personal relationships with mentors, learning experiences in and outside of schools, and the process of learning regalia construction to identify their contributions towards *Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin*, the good life. The self-reflective examination documents their journey of coming to know Indigenous pedagogy as *Anishinaabe*.

Introduction and Protocols: *Who am I?*

Being *Anishinaabe* I am obliged to introduce myself to you, as this is a protocol of my nation. It precedes my intentions and comes before I can share why I am here. I am fortunate and privileged throughout my life to have had opportunities to listen to Elders speak, to attend traditional ceremonies, powwows, and other cultural gatherings in my community where these types of protocols are practiced. I've come to observe many traditional knowledge keepers that echo each other and even echo

themselves through repetition of their stories and teachings. One of the stories I've heard several times talks about the importance of knowing who you are and where you come from. Learning about one's self is a deeply personal and important journey that one of my traditional teachers, Sylvia Maracle (Mohawk), talked about through a medicine wheel teaching. I'd like to briefly share this wheel as it helps identify markers on my own learning path and offers a framework for this paper. Starting in the Eastern direction, the wheel asks "Who am I?" The Southern direction follows with "Where have I come from?" The West asks, "Where am I going?" Then to the North, "What are my responsibilities?" There was a time when I wasn't sure of the answers to these questions and introducing myself, my *Anishinaabe* name, clan, territory and family was difficult. Today when I introduce myself in this way, you will quickly learn my *Anishinaabe* name, you'll hear who I'm related to, and you'll know what responsibilities to my community I carry from my clan. I would argue that knowing one's self and coming to understand the protocols, the teachings of your nation, are intertwined. Much in the same way a traditional knowledge keeper, an Elder, or a storyteller might share who they are and where they've come from, I too will intersperse who I am and my own story within this paper. I do this not from a place of ego, but hopefully from a place of humility to reflect on my path through

Indigenous pedagogy and towards understanding *Anishinaabe* ways of knowing and being.

I've heard stories where Elders talk about the introductions at large gatherings such as powwows or seasonal camps taking days for each family to be introduced. Even in contemporary urban settings, when one Indigenous person meets another it won't take long till you hear the question uttered, "So... where you from?" For Indigenous people in Canada knowing your origin or your place matters. I wouldn't say that it's everything, but for myself it certainly helped find a sense of belonging within my family, community and nation. What Sylvia and other Elders have taught me is that I needed to know not only who I am, but also where I come from, in order to understand where I am headed. It is my intent to discuss and explore how understandings and awareness of self can enable thinking about Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology. But I am getting ahead of myself, let me begin by telling you my name, my clan, my community, where I live, and my nation in the

Anishinaabemowin I carry. *Boozhoo, Waasayabin ndishinikaaz.*

Waabshenshenh ndodem miinwaa Wasauksing ndoonjibaa. Toronto ndoonjiinh. Anishinaabe nini ndow. Now that you know these things about me, let me tell you about my story, how I came to know myself as *Anishinaabe* and in turn how this led to furthering my knowledge of Indigenous pedagogy.

Growing up, my siblings and I attended many ceremonies, powwows, feasts, and community gatherings. I remember as a child sitting in my cousin's naming ceremony for what seemed like hours on end: watching the smudge being brought around with its blue smoke curling towards the ceiling, observing the pipe ceremony and its preparations, the water drum carefully being tied to its base, listening to the songs being sung for the water and the ancestors, the feast food being brought in, and of course the prayers as each direction was acknowledged in *Anishinaabemowin*. Even when they used English the Elders spoke so softly I could hardly hear or understand what they were saying.

Many of my earliest teachers were my uncles, aunts, cousins and extended family members. Later in life my circle of teachers would grow to include Elders from other nations and communities, my peers at ceremonies, powwow dancers, and crafts people who mentored me in creating regalia and beadwork. As I reflect more and more on these teachings and experiences I have come to realize I began to accumulate not only a base understanding of protocols and ceremonies, but also how the exchange of information, teachings and stories can occur within an *Anishinaabe* or Indigenous context. I am *Anishinaabe*, but I would be remiss to say that *Anishinaabe* people and its culture are the only

teachers in my life as I am also a product of the mainstream public education system in Ontario, Canada. My ideas, values, and perceptions are very much shaped by both of these experiences, differing, similar, intertwined and inseparable. Even the ways in which I relate to others has been influenced by my formal school experience. Raising my hand to answer questions, lining up to go outside, speaking out in class to receive praise. Today I find myself writing a major research paper within one of Canada's largest education institutions. One could say that mainstream schooling has served me well. It has afforded me employment and learning opportunities; it even allowed me to access my language through an Ojibway language instructor in elementary school, yet through all the schooling something about my experiences differed from the ceremonies I knew at home. Unlike many of my peers who struggled with identity, not knowing who they were, or where they came from, I was privileged to know as much as I did – yet it was only a small piece. As a child I learned how to learn in both of these settings, yet the hours input into one outweighed the other until much later in life.

My mom and dad had always taken us to powwows growing up, but I was mostly interested in playing tag and eating sconedogs with my brother and my cousins. There were not many dancers in my family and I never had the opportunity to learn until later in life. After finishing my undergrad in my early 20s the desire to learn more, to go back to

ceremonies and my culture, took hold and I searched out mentors who could help me connect the pieces I knew. I put together tobacco ties and approached some of these mentors purposefully, whereas others came into my life in unexpected ways. I want to say that I learned what I set out to find, but what I actually found wasn't what I thought I needed to know. I describe these glimpses of my childhood and upbringing because they all had a role in shaping my relationship to Indigenous pedagogy. By looking back, I can look forward in order to frame my research. For the first time in my life the learning strategies I had been taught and used with great success within institutions of formal education were actually undermining my learning within a cultural context. My mentors were willing and capable of teaching me: that wasn't the problem; in fact I've come to see that the barrier was internal. Getting to know more about the responsibilities of dancing, of beadwork and regalia construction challenged what I thought I knew about learning. The pedagogy of my *Anishinaabe* teachers, as well as those from other Indigenous nations, was familiar from my childhood. It asked me to be self-reflective, to take my time, and to accept my own responsibilities in the pedagogical process. My point of inquiry is to ask: why was learning from *Anishinaabe* teachers so difficult, yet familiar, after spending the majority of my years in formal schooling? I have yet to communicate how instrumental powwow dance, beadwork and regalia making were in

coming to know more about not only Indigenous pedagogy, but also myself as *Anishinaabe*. This is the work I endeavor to acknowledge, explore and honour. It is one more step in my path in this world.

Historical Context: *Where have I come from?*

As a young adult I had heard it many times before, but for some reason when Sylvia presented her medicine wheel teaching it engaged me to really start thinking about who I am as *Anishinaabe*. Within the introduction I provided some context of who I am, yet in thinking about where I have come from, I look back to the experiences of my family and my ancestors. Below is an excerpt of my story, one of my personal experiences that I use to reflect upon my path in coming to know Indigenous pedagogy.

In my life I have been impacted twice by the non-Indigenous education system. The first point of impact took place before I chose my parents and agreed with Creator to be born into this world. My late mother, Peggy (Miller) Hupfield – *Biidasaage Kwe*, was a residential school survivor who until the age of 6 grew up living with her family and speaking her first language *Anishinaabemowin*. That same 6-year-old girl was removed from her family, community and culture, taken several days' travel away to Brantford's residential school, called 'mushhole' in reference to the overcooked oatmeal they were fed everyday. She left the mushhole in

her early teenage years unable – or perhaps unwilling – to speak her first language anymore and very silent about her schooling experience. I can only guess what she encountered at that school; whatever it was it influenced her to only teach my siblings and me little pieces of what it was to be *Anishinaabe*. Her reticence was the first disruption the education system incurred on my learning path.

...unless a child learns about the forces which shape him; the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being. Indian culture and values have a unique place in the history of mankind. The Indian child who learns about his heritage will be proud of it. The lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience, should reinforce and contribute to the image he has of himself as an Indian.

ICIE 1972 Policy Paper

If there is one thing this quote makes me ponder it's whether or not things have changed for 'Indian' education in the 40 years since the National Indian Brotherhood first drafted these words. While a common approach might be to cite statistics to review the problematic of Indian education in Ontario, I call upon Indigenous scholar Eber Hampton to frame the issue through the oft-cited quote. "Statistics show the inroads of winter. Just as counting the dead plants is an inadequate measure of the life of the seeds, so counting the deaths, the alcoholism rates, the suicides, the murders, and the dropouts is inadequate to measure the vitality of Native life" (1995, 35). Indeed, there has been much focus on the deficits

of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students within Ontario's education system. It is not my intent to quantify, measure, or analyze from a numeracy standpoint. This approach is prevalent enough as seen by the Auditor General's words in *A Solid Foundation: Second Progress Report on the Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (People for Education, 2013). Within this report, based on academic methods of measurement and student achievement, the term "achievement gap" was coined to describe the academic disparity "between Aboriginal students and all students" (2013, 28). When I read studies and reports that focus on the quantitative measures of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students it is akin to comparing apples and oranges. I would posit that to this point in time the majority of Indigenous students are made to learn within a system that is unflinchingly non-Indigenous. I would further argue that if a non-Indigenous student sat down with an Elder to learn within an Indigenous context, they too would struggle to 'achieve.' Dion (2010) further critiques the notion of the 'achievement gap' and points to the complications that arise from non-Indigenous educators' own 'knowledge gap' in terms of delivering FNMI curriculum. Is it the students who are at fault or the educators and the system they work to implement? But perhaps I am getting ahead of myself again.

The Indian Control of Indian Education policy paper of 1972 demonstrates an attempt at reconciling non-Indigenous education with

Indigenous approaches. The project of Indigenous education is what contemporary scholars, school boards, ministries, educators, and Indigenous communities across Turtle Island are continuing to strive towards. Much had come before and much has come after the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy paper, which I will be outlining further in the coming sections of this paper. The ICIE policy paper was very much a response to a system created by a non-Indigenous system, which I will be referring to as 'Indian education.' Marie Battiste has talked about this system and its power to reproduce and perpetuate the culture, language and values of those that created it – a non-Indigenous government and society which set out to colonize the land and its peoples (1998). If the values and beliefs of the colonizers are perpetuated through the education system, then they have largely come at the expense of Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. Much attention is given to Indigenous students' lack of academic success, yet this occurs within a system that has historically ignored, undermined, and even assaulted Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. I will endeavor to set out three significant phases of *Indian Education* that map a shift towards the indigenizing of education: the first phase is characterized by state run non-Indigenous schools; the second phase is identified by increasing Indigenous control of schools; and the third phase begins to see Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing as central tenets of the

education model. These phases are important markers in framing what I would call the transition from *Indian Education* – the system controlled by the non-Indigenous state, its inherent values, and ways of knowing – towards the possibility of *Indigenous Education* – a system controlled by Indigenous communities that reflects cultural ways of knowing and life paths. Outlining these historical antecedents is vital in contextualizing my own search for knowledge and how it is that I came to search for and know powwow dance, regalia, and Indigenous pedagogy as *Anishinaabe*.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I can say that as a student of elementary, secondary, post-secondary and now graduate schools in Ontario, I find these institutions rarely “reinforced and contributed” to my understanding of being *Anishinaabe*. I was fortunate to attend Ojibway language classes from grade 2 thru to grade 8 in lieu of French – you are not allowed to take both – however I came out of those classes unable to converse in the language. Language is often acknowledged as an important marker of culture, yet due to the manner in which I was taught, through repetition, written assignments and fill in the blank activities, I did not glean any of the cultural protocols I now attribute to Indigenous pedagogy. My own experience in mainstream schools conditioned me to

learn in a certain way, even when the content was supposed to be Indigenous. This is the second point of impact within my learning path. My apologies, I am getting ahead of myself one more time, I like to talk in circles.

As stated earlier the education system affected me before I was carried for nine months and given life by my mother. This timing is what makes it very difficult for me to write about the possibility of Indigenous Education without acknowledging the impacts of residential schools. With its roots in the 'civilizing' work of the late 1800s, whereby churches and missionaries acted as purveyors of education to Indigenous communities, this 'civilizing' work very much served as the foundation for Indian education and continues to linger today (Archibald 1995). Much of this early education work was associated with introducing Indigenous peoples to bible based literacy projects. As Indigenous languages were originally communicated orally, a major project was undertaken to begin alphabetizing Indigenous languages such as *Anishinaabe* and *Mushkegowuk* through the creation of syllabics (Maclean 1890). By the time the Canadian state made Indigenous peoples Wards of the State via Indian Act legislation in 1876 there was already an educational foundation for the state to build upon. By 1920 new amendments to the Indian Act made attendance at missionary and state-run day and

residential schools compulsory for Indigenous children and youth which triggered a spike in attendance as well as community resistance (Friesen 2005). With churches and religious groups already involved in Indigenous communities the Federal government increased funding to these pre-established institutions and began the construction of more schools. The Indian Act provided the legal framework for residential schools to put to an end to what 1920 Indian Affairs minister Duncan Scott coined as the 'Indian question' (Haig-Brown 1988, 31). This assimilationist approach was to be achieved through 'Indian' education wherein agricultural, industrial and menial skills could be taught to Indigenous students in order for them to obtain jobs in non-Indigenous communities and move away from life on reserves (Archibald 1995, 293). Perhaps the most pervasive impact these schools had on students was the attack on their cultural ways. As the Elders say, traditional teachings and culture offer the foundations for students to learn 'who they are', 'where they come from', 'where they are going' and 'what their responsibilities are' and this connection was now being targeted.

For many residential school students their culture was severed via a two-fold process: the first coming from the forced removal from family and perhaps more importantly traditional knowledge keepers and Elders. These were their first teachers, the language speakers, and knowledge holders in their community. The second aspect was the banning of

cultural practices and languages within the schools themselves (Haig-Brown 1988). In a radio interview on Wawatay news program *Wachay Hour*, an Indigenous radiobroadcaster in Northern Ontario Elder Babii Friday from Kashechewan spoke in Cree about her experience in residential schools which is translated as follows, "I was brought to the boats when I was 10 years old, I didn't know where we were going, they took us to Moose Factory...in the school the nuns would hit us if we spoke in Cree, they made us eat our vomit if we got sick from the food that had gone bad, they hit us if we talked to our siblings, they were not holy people they were devils..." (Wawatay News Radio 2015). The resulting physical, mental, emotional and spiritual abuse from these schools led to the fracturing of family structures, rampant self medication, alcohol and drug abuse, and most salient to my inquiry, the disruption of Indigenous pedagogies and transmission of cultural knowledge. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recently described the effects of the residential school project as 'cultural genocide' (2015), yet this term fails to put to rest the deaths of many Indigenous students as demonstrated in the Canadian government's own Bryce Report in 1907 that found a mortality rate of nearly 24 percent in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (Sproule-Jones 1996). The ongoing effects of the traumas suffered in these schools lives on today through the transmission of intergenerational trauma to younger generations (Wesley-Esquimaux &

Smolewski 2004) wherein dysfunctional behaviour and unhealthy coping mechanisms are observed by and also practiced by younger generations. While the residential school system has been formally ushered out and its impacts acknowledged by the 2010 federal government apology and the recent findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, I find myself again reflecting on Eber Hampton who stated that the cultural genocide framework and its effects, while less overt than before, still remains (1995).

The first phase of Indian education began to shift into the second phase of Indigenous education whereby Indigenous communities enacted greater autonomy and control. In 1969 the second phase was ushered in when then Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chretien tabled the infamous 'white paper' (Battiste 1995). This legislative paper sought to dismantle the Indian Act and more importantly strip any treaty rights away that were associated with Indian Status, such as tax exemption, access to education, and healthcare. The response Chretien garnered was probably not what he expected as the National Indian Brotherhood, since renamed the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), responded with their own 'red paper' that called for an end to the paternal relationship between Indigenous and Canadian governance structures, in particular the school system. This vital step of advocacy turned to the reclamation of education and schools through the drafting and submission of the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy paper (Battiste 1995). It was important

that students not only graduate from an Indigenous run school, but that “educational processes of Indian education should strengthen First Nations languages and cultures, build upon the strong foundations of ancestral heritage and enlist the invaluable assistance of Elders” (Battiste 1995, 11). When the federal government agreed to begin relinquishing control over schools to First Nations communities the transition did not come without its own set of difficulties. Lack of administrative capacity and staff posed a problem for many communities who opted not to take control of the schools until a later date. Many schools emulated what Marie Battiste calls, “cognitive imperialism” whereby Indigenous cultures and languages are denied through the maintenance of mainstream language, culture, and framework (2000, p. 198). Even though the schools were increasingly in control of Indigenous communities, the pedagogy, operations, and curricula remained couched in Western models.

When I was attending high school in Parry Sound, a small non-Indigenous community that bussed in local Indigenous students from five nearby First Nations, there were no cultural activities to participate in aside from *Anishinaabemowin* language classes. There were no public displays of Indigenous culture within the school, whereas today I am invited yearly to dance at the school's powwow that is organized entirely by the Indigenous student body. Indeed change is happening in measured

steps. Where the first phase of Indigenous education took away culture, language, and expressions of self there is restorative work underway in schools, which is more attuned to Indigenous ways of knowing and cultural frameworks.

Through the identification of the historical antecedents we can begin to understand where Indian education has come and where it might go. Graham Smith (2000) has talked about the need for Indigenous knowledge and education to not dwell on the colonizers but focus on the inherent qualities of Indigenous education by using Indigenous teachings to enable transformative thoughts and actions in learners, thereby serving to improve Indigenous living conditions. Jo-Ann Archibald (1995) identifies the shift within Indigenous education from Battiste's "cognitive imperialism" towards an examination of "what" Indigenous students are being taught as resistance to Indian education's inherent assimilationist qualities. At Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon traditional practices and ceremonies – such as powwows, drumming, dancing, ceremonies, and smudging – are as much a part of the school landscape as announcements, national anthems, assemblies, and recess bells once were (Haig Brown 1997). With increased Indigenous control of the education system, there is opportunity not only for the curriculum, staff, and schools to become Indigenized, but also for the ways Indigenous

peoples learn and teach to be reconstituted. Indigenous pedagogy has an important role to play in the ongoing developments within Indigenous education. Much work has already been done in academia to identify Indigenous approaches to learning such as land-based models, experiential learning, medicine wheel frameworks, storytelling, ceremony, language, song, dance, and dreams. As Sylvia would say, "The list is as long as there are stars in the sky." It is for this reason that I believe the pathway of Indigenous education should continue to ask not only 'what' is being taught within schools, but also 'how' it is being taught.

Methodology: *Where am I going?*

The positions of Taiaiake Alfred (2013) and Graham Smith (2000) have been instrumental for my own thinking. Both argue for Indigenous communities to operate from the inherent qualities and values of Indigenous epistemology and no longer be solely framed by colonizing structures and lines of thought. Decolonization plays a role in this process (Smith 2012, Kovach 2009, Absolon 2011) and the question of how Indigenous peoples might move forward through seemingly contradictory – non-Indigenous education systems – and difficult processes (Grande 2004) is important to reflect upon. I am starting to see the pendulum swing away from the paternal relationship of 'Indian' education and towards what I have described as 'Indigenous' education wherein the container

(schools, administration) and content (curricula) is owned and operated by Indigenous communities as well as the teaching (pedagogy).

This text is heavily influenced by three teachings that come from different medicine wheels. The first I described in the introduction of this paper. The second is the 'all my relations' wheel also taught to me by Sylvia Maracle, Mohawk from Tyendinaga. By placing teachings about

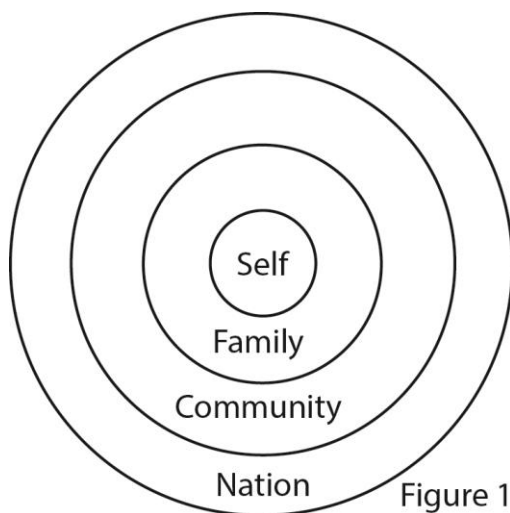


Figure 1

self, family, community and nation within four concentric circles (Figure 1), this teaching visually represents the inter-relationships of these spheres.

Without interpretation this wheel could be misconstrued as a 'self-centred'

model for interaction, however I have observed the opposite to be true. This teaching is important because it emphasizes the importance of knowledge of self in relation to the other. The manner in which I approach my work is always going to start with self, my story, and learning path is always present and will frame interactions with those around me. My Elders talk a great deal about humility, and while my own story is what I choose to honour in this paper, it should not be mistaken for ego. Certainly my motivations for research into Indigenous pedagogy may benefit myself, but they are also for my family, community, and nation – or as Sylvia's wheel based teaching talked

about, all my relations. Margaret Kovach describes Indigenous scholarly work whereby, “(p)reparation assumes self-awareness and an ability to situate self within the research” (2009, 109). There is a current body of knowledge being created that speaks to the methodology of self within an Indigenous framework. As seen by the all my relations teaching the importance of relationship amongst self, family, community and nation is a significant organizing principle within my research.

In endeavoring to operate from *Anishinaabe* teachings, values and ways of knowing I also draw heavily on the concept of *mino-bimaadiziwin* presented by Brent Debassige in his Ph.D. dissertation (Figure 2).

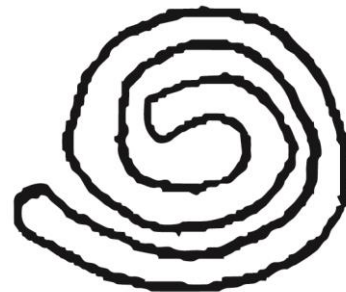


Figure 2

Presented as a wheel, this petroglyph comes from Minnesota where the Anishinaabe use it as a teaching tool and pneumonic device. Citing Brent's use of anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell (1955), the term *pimadaziwin* was described as “a relationship to living respectfully throughout one's life, which is vital to maintaining the gifts received by the spirit” (2012, 39). In reference to personal teachings I have received from Elders, working towards a good life is what I understand as an English translation of *mino-bimaadiziwin*. I envision my own search for a good life as mirroring the path of this petroglyph. I choose to start in the centre point at 'self' and spiral outwards as time and my own learning

progresses. The *mino-bimaadiziwin* wheel is the second organizing mechanism of my research and is based on my own personal inference of this wheel. I do not intend any disrespect to my ancestors if it is incorrect.

Through the course of my life there have been several learning incidents that vary greatly from my experience in mainstream school settings. Focusing in on my recent journey to start grass dancing and make my own regalia, I revisited five learning incidents by writing thick descriptions to document each. These thick descriptions represent the first *mino-bimaadiziwin* spiral outwards from 'self' (Fig.3). Upon completion of these thick descriptions, an

initial analysis was undertaken with assistance from my supervisor, Dr. Susan D. Dion (Lenaape and Pottawotami), to identify the pedagogical

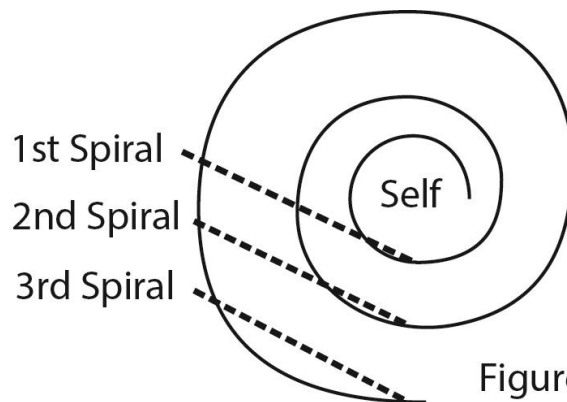


Figure 3

implications of each incident. I shared the story of each incident verbally, which engendered a second reflection on the learning that occurred. Orally speaking through an experience challenges further self-reflection and meaning making to occur. This is the second spiral of the *mino-bimaadiziwin* wheel, which builds upon the first and helped frame my approach for the interviews. Following the verbal reflection with my supervisor I prepared tobacco and decided to approach two of the

mentors from these incidents to speak further about these experiences. A Human Participants Review and Informed Consent form was submitted and approved via York University's Ethics Review Committee. Agreeing to be recorded and transcribed the individuals were asked to revisit their stories and experiences based on the thick descriptions I had written and submitted for their review. This is the third spiral of the wheel outward from 'self' that enabled the last layer of meaning making and reflection. It is through this demonstration of reciprocity that a relationship may be forged and/or strengthened with the knowledge keepers who I worked with. I do this in line with my own teachings, yet have seen other congruencies with Indigenous scholars Graham Smith and Margaret Kovach who talked in her book about *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts* "(g)iving back does not only mean the dissemination of the findings; it means creating a relationship throughout the entirety of the research" (2009, 149). With each spiral of the wheel complete and relationship underpinning each step – written thick descriptions, oral reflections, and conversational interviews - I can move into the analysis of these incidents with assistance from Indigenous education and pedagogy literature. It is from this self-reflexive process that my approach can be described as an *active critical self-inquiry informed by Indigenous methodology*. The following section describes each critical incident as well as corresponding reflections based on

discussions with my supervisor. A critical incident refers to a personal experience that contributed greatly to my understanding of Indigenous pedagogy.

The more time I spent with my teachers, the more I realized storytelling and oral teachings play a significant role within my work. Through the interviews with mentors, storytelling became a common method of sharing and learning. As such, I have endeavored to utilize my own story within the structure of this paper, as seen in the introductory 'who am I?' section. For those unfamiliar with the concept of an embroidery stitch, it is a process of stringing the beads, tacking them down, and then reinforcing them by travelling in reverse and back through the already fixed beads. The principle is that in order to move forward with your project, you must also travel backwards in order to retrace your path and this cycle is done every time you lay down new beads. It is this process that strengthens the piece and ensures minimal breakage of the beadwork when it is put under the strenuous activity of dancing. I liken this process of 'retracing your path' to what is occurring in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. Many are looking back to their teachings and traditional ways of living to strengthen what exists already today. If short cuts are taken and this retracing is not done, the community (or beadwork) will not endure stressors (or wear) and must be repaired often. For my purposes herein my own narrative is woven in and

out of this text much in the same way an embroidery stitch is used in beading. Each story is meant to strengthen the fabric of the text and draw out further meaning and understandings of self in relation to Indigenous pedagogy.¹ In this manner I hope to continue to interpret and strengthen my own understandings of what encompasses *Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin* through regalia and beadwork and Indigenous pedagogy.

Incident 1: 1st Spiral

Bev Koski (Anishinaabe) and Katie Longboat (Mohawk) were the first to teach me how to bead. I began working with them when I was 18 years old while participating in arts programming at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto's youth program in downtown Toronto. They would bring supplies to the drop-in space and teach groups of Indigenous youth through the use of diagrams and demonstrative instruction. In one of the sessions they presented what I now know as the embroidery style of beading. This method is a fundamental requirement for creating larger projects such as medallions and pieces of a dancer's regalia.

Bev and Katie would talk through the process and get students to try it out for themselves. I remember the learning being difficult, but the structure allowed for self-discovery and self-directed learning to occur.

¹ Inputting self into my writing is not intended to be narcissistic or to contradict *Anishinaabe* teachings about humility; in fact the opposite is intended, to say that all I have earned the right to speak of are my own experiences

We could progress as fast as we wanted once the basic technique had been observed. They encouraged the beading of different shapes and *Anishinaabe* floral-patterns to gain control over where the beads and thread can go. I progressed very quickly, finishing my first medallion in two hour-long sessions and soon began beading outside of these sessions. I was new to beading and wanted my first projects to be perfect. By perfect, I mean that no spaces between the beads could be seen and not a single bead was out of place. The third medallion I made was a larger piece with text in the middle and florals on the edge. As I worked I noticed that the surface of the beads I had been tacking down was lumpy and uneven. I didn't know what I had done wrong, why weren't the beads lying flat? I finished the project but was unhappy with the result. It wasn't until later that my partner wore it to a powwow and one of her friends told her I had beaded the medallion too tightly. My desire to make the project perfect, to fill all the gaps and control the outcome, resulted in the complete opposite of what I wanted.

Incident 1: 2nd Spiral

I shared this story with my father, John Hupfield Sr., a woodworker who restores and builds wooden boats, and even though he does not bead he immediately understood what I was talking about (personal communication). He talked to me about steaming wood for the gunnels of a boat and explained that sometimes he couldn't get the curve he

needed for a project. He said that he needed to learn to let the wood do what it needed to do. If he pushed too hard to make it fit than he risked breakage and would have to start over. I wasn't steaming and bending wood, but what my dad was acknowledging through his story was the need to be attuned to the materials that you are working with. Perhaps there is a requisite trust or comfort needed that allows the materials some agency in guiding the creative and constructive process. This could be thought of as a relationship between inanimate objects and myself, yet coming from an *Anishinaabe* worldview the beads, thread, and materials are living, active players in the learning process. The beads were teaching me something, but was I listening carefully enough? Perhaps imposing myself onto the materials, seeking perfection, a desire for control, was literally constricting my beadwork.

Incident 2: 1st Spiral

When I first started dancing at powwows and wanted to invest in my own regalia I approached a senior grass dancer who lived in Toronto, EJ Kwandibens, for help. EJ is Loon Clan from Treaty 3, where his family lived in a now non-existent CN track community called Willet, Ontario, but since relocated to Armstrong, adjacent to their home First Nation community Whitesand. I put together a tobacco tie and offered it to him one day while he was running out the door at our work. He didn't take it at first and asked what it is that I specifically wanted help with. I asked him

for teachings about dancing and if he would be able to show me how to make an outfit to which he replied yes and accepted the tobacco.

After meeting with him the next day, where he showed me examples of his regalia and the work he's done on other's people outfits, EJ invited me to attend a men's regalia making program he was delivering at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. Every Tuesday night from 6:00pm to 8:00pm I would travel through the slush and snow of winter to work with him in the creation process of my first grass regalia. He advised that before anything else I put tobacco and water out for four days and request guidance on my journey. The colour choices of the outfit, even dance styles are not always chosen by the person, often these can come in the form of a dream or as a reflection of their Anishinaabe name. At the end of the day though, whichever dance style speaks to the spirit of that person – lifts them up – that is the one most likely to be chosen.

Our first meetings had no fabric, no sewing machine, not even a pair of scissors. We started with stories about grassdancing, powwows, and what pieces go into a grass outfit. He shared stories of his own dancing, the styles he learned from the older dancers in his community and his relationship to them. These individuals modeled a style of outfit that resonated with EJ and informed his own regalia choices. Even their dancing style played a big part in how EJ created his own outfit. Yarn

fringe was a popular choice at the time, compared to the broadcloth and ribbon used by many dancers today. He talked about the respect he had for the senior grassdancers and after years of dancing they asked him to join during a particular grass song, which was a big acknowledgement of the work EJ had put into his outfit and dancing. These types of stories were common during our sessions working together and were usually sparked by whatever piece of the outfit we were working on at the time.

EJ also taught me through the stories of his own learning. He shared stories of how his mother taught him to sew and construct regalia. EJ's mother, Elsie Kwandibens, was always working on projects in the house and the main way he learned was through observation. He told me that his mother never let him touch the materials or the sewing machine until he had observed the process multiple times. She said by the time he was allowed to construct the regalia, he would know what was needed and in what sequence.

Using pen and paper he drew out the components for grass regalia: fringe, shirt, pants, front and back breechcloths, side drops, cuffs, belt and harness. With roughly an hour and a half of work time each week, he did not entirely forego his mother's teaching method, but condensed it. Each step of the process was demonstrated to me with the context provided verbally. After I had watched the step he would get me to try it as well.

This approach differs from the conventional Western classroom where abstract diagrams and written instructions are the norm. I was the only regular attendee and I realize I was fortunate to have this time with EJ. Whereas EJ's mentorship took years as a child and youth, my learning as an adult was accelerated. That being said, I was eager to dance and wanted an outfit right away. I would often push EJ to teach me more than he intended, but he would rebuff my efforts. As I realized the amount of work and time ahead of me before I could don my regalia, I asked him one evening if he had an older outfit that I could borrow or buy. He was respectful in declining, but was very clear that I needed to put work into this process if I was serious about my commitment to dancing.

Incident 2: 2nd Spiral

When I talked about this experience with Dr. Susan Dion (May 2015) she told me a story about her experience as a teacher and the anxiety that can come from working with new students. Dr. Dion spoke about not knowing the students in her classroom, their needs, what gifts they bring to the classroom nor how they interact with their peers. By the time she comes to know more about students in her classroom, when the basic knowledge has been imparted and they are ready to take the discussion further, the class comes to an end. Through our discussion the question of 'How do I know the student?' came to the fore, which spurred me to consider what the basis of a learning relationship between knowledge

carrier/teacher and knowledge seeker/student might be. When I worked with EJ, before anything could begin, he asked me to go home for self-reflection through prayer and offering of tobacco. After carrying out this task and talking to him about it I thought we would move straight into the grass regalia construction phase: instead we talked and I ended up sharing stories of my experiences and what I hoped to learn. I was pushing to get on the machine to learn how to sew, what components of the grass regalia were needed, anything and everything to get me moving from point A to B so I could start dancing. EJ could have relented and gifted me regalia when I asked for one, but this concession would have been a disservice to cultural protocols and the *Anishinaabe* pedagogy he carries. Entering our relationship I thought I knew what I needed, but I didn't know what I didn't know in terms of grass regalia and powwow. By taking time to talk, listen and really hear, following cultural protocols, and sharing stories, EJ was able to find out the information I didn't know and from there determine how to best support my learning.

Incident 3: 1st Spiral

Karen J. Pheasant, *Anishinaabe*, is from Wikwemikong Unceded territory on Manitoulin Island. She is a jingle dress dancer in powwow country and carries many teachings and responsibilities for this style of dance. I have known her for years through my wife and life partner

Deanne Hupfield. Karen² emailed me a description of herself leading up to our interview:

She is the mother of three adult children, who she raised as a single parent and credits her powwow life, giving her the resilience and support needed to raise her children with an Indigenous worldview, with a balance of western worldview – or at least an attempt at it. LOL

Karen is working in the field of Indigenous education and earning her PhD at the University of Alberta. During the summer of 2014 we were both in attendance at Chippewa of the Thames powwow in Southwestern Ontario. It is common at powwows for visiting, informal discussions, and stories to be shared amongst those in attendance. It was during an intertribal song that I approached Karen and asked about her studies and research. I shared my own story of schooling that included my interests in Indigenous pedagogy. Karen had a story that she shared with me during those intertribals.

Manitoulin Island, and Wikwemikong in particular is world renowned for its porcupine quillboxes and quillwork. When she wanted to learn quillwork in her home community she approached a woman in Wiky well

² I've chosen to write about these individuals on a first name basis. This is not meant in disrespect to their positions or titles, but as a reflection of our previous relationships, relationships which enabled this paper to take form.

known for her expertise – the late Josephine Bondy. Karen went to spend time with Josephine to be mentored and learn about her quillwork techniques. At one of their sessions, Karen had been watching the process of her mentor as she prepped each quill for her project. The quills were placed into a basin of water to keep them pliable and from splitting when worked with. This process is done because once the quill is removed from the body of the porcupine it begins to dry out and can deteriorate, thereby making the bending of quills that goes into quillwork impossible. Karen learned through observation as her mentor demonstrated the techniques in how to attach the quills to the birchbark. Having felt Karen was ready to try the process, Josephine suggested she attempt it herself. Karen reached into the water basin to pull out some quills, but before doing so she stopped and asked how many she should grab. An outburst of laughter from her teacher was the only reply she received. Karen was startled by this response. After calming down, her mentor went on to explain that one simply reaches in and grabs as many as needed. This wasn't exactly the response that Karen expected and I did not think to ask how this response made her feel within the learning experience. Karen went on to tell me that she was 'educated' by the dominant Western school system and the mistake she made in that setting was to try and quantify the work at hand. She referred to this frame of mind as a "conditioning."

Incident 3: 2nd Spiral

I talked about this incident with Dr. Susan D. Dion and she said, “heaven forbid” that in a Western educational setting a teacher might laugh at a student for making a mistake (May 2015). Karen talked about a different approach to learning within an *Anishinaabe* context and that sometimes our performance for the Western schooling environment can complicate the pedagogical process within an Indigenous context. Susan encouraged me to consider the laughter further, to speak to Karen about this incident and determine what conditions enabled it to occur.

Incidents 2 and 3: 3rd Spiral

Although it was my intent to interview each of the individuals involved in the critical incidents, this kind of approach is beyond the scope of my MRP. Moving ahead with the next phase of my model I arranged interviews with EJ Kwandibens in person at his studio in Toronto and over the phone with Karen J. Pheasant from her home in Edmonton. As mentioned in the first spiral of my process, both Karen and EJ are powwow dancers who are highly sought for their stories and the knowledge they carry. The conversations ranged in topics from powwows, to Indigenous protocols, to mainstream education, while being grounded in the discussions we'd shared in the past. It should be noted that the majority of the examples provided herein are reflective of an adult

learning experience and context. After sitting with the transcriptions of these two interviews I noticed that many of the points of discussion were very similar and in fact reinforced or overlapped each other. The dialogue that emerged added another layer to my understanding of what an Indigenous pedagogy is and how it might begin to manifest.

Karen talked about coming to learn quillwork from late Elder Josephine Bondy, "She was my sister's mother in law, so I used to just go visit her all the time and she'd be there doing that (quillwork). I was having tea with her, and then it evolved into a – what I would call a creative session. The goal was never 'I'm going to learn to do quillwork'. As we were visiting she was doing that, so then I inquired. Even my time with the jingle dress, my numerous visits to Lake of the Woods just going up there and investing in that time and sitting down and having that tea and having those visits before I would ask. And you know, I don't know how I know that, I just know that's the way to be." Talking about how he learned regalia construction from his mother, EJ shares a similar experience, "I had to spend a lot of time observing. I'll give you an example... I asked my mother, 'Can I do this?' and her words were 'No, you sit and you watch' and that's how she taught. You sit and you watch. And it didn't mean just sitting and watching two or three times: it meant sitting and watching all the time." EJ later described this process as visual learning, wherein a task is observed multiple times before trying it. This visual learning is noted in

Karen's story as well, with quillwork being observed during her visits with Josephine, but it was not the main purpose of her visit. The notion of time is also brought to the fore. What Karen describes as "...investing in that time... having that tea and having those visits," is a vital component for learning to take place. When asked about this process of spending time with an Elder, teacher or mentor EJ reflects, "What I think was going on was, it was an opportunity to have information sharing to talk, to spend time... I think when you look at our culture and you look at our teachings, yes, there is an exchange of knowledge and teachings, but it's also a bonding time where there is a social element of having tea, or a snack or food or something. It's about understanding a person on a human level... I don't think it's a system or way of learning, it just happens." Both of these stories talk about the importance of fostering a relationship as instrumental in the learning process, something that will be discussed further below. This process of relationship building and visiting does not come without its own difficulties though.

EJ talks about his efforts to learn as a young person often being rebuffed by Elders. "I always reflect on the times that my mother and I would talk, and not necessarily my mother, but other older people – my mentors. They would say the same thing over and over again. 'Would you like to have a cup of tea?' 'Would you like to have a bite to eat?' and I'm thinking to myself as a young person, 'What the hell? I want to make this.'"

When I reflect back onto my own experience of learning how to make a grass outfit, I also wanted to expedite the process. At one point I asked EJ if there was a grass outfit he had that I could borrow in order to practice dancing. He smiled and kindly said no. When I brought this up again in our interview, "Oh I remember this. [laughter] Yes, I did say that. 'No I don't have an outfit for you to use and borrow because you don't loan your outfits out.' The only time you loan your outfits out is when you are giving it away as a gift, you're giving it away because you're grieving and a family member has died, or you are being buried in your regalia. The moment you loan a piece of your outfit, that item is gone. Knowing all the knowledge, the teachings, the time, the beading, because you prize your outfit, right? Would you give it away?" At the time of my question, I was eager to dance, I was eager to finish my outfit, but I didn't know the responsibilities of dancing and the preparation required. This question came early in our time working together and to put it simply, I didn't know what I didn't know. Today when I look back I realize I was asking for something out of place, I did not know my responsibilities as a learner and as a result had overstepped my boundary. I was trying to bypass the relationship and extract the knowledge like I might have in my non-Indigenous schooling and was fortunate that EJ kindly corrected me. Karen offered further insight to the responsibilities of the learner within an Indigenous context.

As a highly respected jingle dress dancer Karen is often sought out by Indigenous communities, arts organizations, and schools for her knowledge and teachings. She says, "A lot of people they walk up to me and they want to know the story, and I might share a quick story, but at the end of the day I tell people you need to go to where that story comes from and sit on the land and sit with the storykeepers. It's the same with anybody who wants to powwow." Karen is cognizant in her role as a teacher and reminds the learner that they too have responsibilities in forging the relationship, not just to herself or a knowledge keeper, but to the origins of that knowledge – in this case the story, place, and context of the jingle dance. While not everyone may be able to travel to Lake of the Woods, Ontario, where the jingle dress originates from, it's still implied that the dancer accepts the responsibility of investing the time into becoming a dancer – forging a relationship. EJ works with many individuals who wish to start dancing and mentioned that some decide not to invest in the relationship and responsibilities of becoming a dancer at that time. They may go away after learning the bit that they did, and come back to it later. Whether sitting in ceremonies, or working with Elders later in life, this pedagogy is not meant to be bypassed. Like Karen said earlier, "I don't know how I know that, I just know that's the way to be." I've come to see that as a learner seeking knowledge of regalia or dance teachings that you must respect what the teacher has to share with you

at that time. If you push for more, based on the relationship formed with that knowledge keeper (or lack thereof) they might not think you're ready for it, or they'll only give you a small piece of information then send you away. When asked about the responsibilities of the learner EJ responded, "I'll reflect on what my Elder would say. 'You just give people a little bit of a tease, get them to be interested, and get them to go away and to absorb it.'" Coming to know regalia and dance is a self-reflective process, whether that reflection is done through ceremony, talking to other people, dreams, or offering tobacco and water as EJ encouraged me to do, this is the responsibility of the learner. As with any relationship, it is not one-sided and the knowledge keeper has responsibilities to uphold as well in this exchange.

As a learner, understanding the context of the dance style and the responsibilities of being a dancer in general is a significant responsibility, however the knowledge keeper also carries responsibilities to the information and how it is shared. EJ talked about his approach in teaching me, "It's not about putting on the moccasins and dancing in a circle; it's about understanding the process that leads up to that circle, right? So you spent a significant amount of time, reflecting, understanding where you are, where you're coming from, what your intentions are. Anybody could dance, anybody could sing, but understanding those teachings behind singing and dancing are two different things. So my role

was to get you to understand that responsibility and to prepare you." At the time he was teaching me I did not understand, let alone realize, the pedagogical processes at play. At times it was even frustrating, but by spending time to share the foundational teachings, the responsibilities of being a dancer, EJ was teaching me much in the same way he had been taught by his Elders.

Karen talked about the time and space working with Elders as a "zone of relaxing" that enables learning to take place. "Just being in that zone of relaxing, that same zone... with numerous talks and teas and numerous visits with Josephine Bondy, and she's just doing her quilling, and I just say, 'Oh can I try?' I would just never have the audacity to say, knock on the door, walk in and say, 'I want to learn how to quill.'" It was only through this relational space they shared that Karen felt comfortable to ask Josephine to teach her how to quill. Because a certain amount of trust had been built Josephine was able to laugh at Karen after she asked how many quills to pick up. Karen goes on to add, "Going back to that comment about the laughter. I was thinking at what your professor said 'Oh we would never do that,' when you realize that is so Western based. Josephine is sitting there raised to do this (teach quillwork)." It is because of the numerous visits, the talks and teas, where Josephine has come to know Karen and forge a relationship, foster trust between each other, that

they are able to laugh at mistakes and it strengthens the pedagogical process.

Using our previous work together as an example EJ identifies the responsibility of the teacher in coming to know the learner. "One of the teachings I received from my mom is it's fine and dandy to have an exchange of information, but the learning process is greater than that. It's really about getting to understand the person, not necessarily the content of what you're conveying. And so what that means is, Who is John? What is John all about? What kind of teachings does he already have? What skill sets does he have? So there's a foundation for me to work with." The foundation of knowledge that the knowledge keeper comes to know about the learner frames the pedagogical process. It is through an intimate relational space that Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers pass on the stories and teachings. In some cultural contexts Elders and knowledge keepers will describe ceremonial items, particular stories and teachings as sacred. The English term sacred is used to try and convey the value cultural knowledge carries, or that it is held in utmost regard, placed up high. In some cases there is concern about Elders withholding the teachings and stories, with fear of them being lost forever when they pass onto the spirit world. Knowing a little bit about how they came to acquire this knowledge though, spending a lifetime investing time and forging

relationships, I can begin to see why they may be particular with whom and in what ways their teachings are shared.

Going back to the beginning of my paper, I began with an introduction in my language, a common protocol within *Anishinaabe* territories. Not unlike the word 'sacred', the term 'protocol' is another word borrowed from the English language that has become contentious to many Indigenous people. EJ talks about his mother Elsie Kwandibens rolling her eyes whenever the word 'protocol' was mentioned in reference to cultural practices. Her disdain for the word stems from its implied rigidity when relating to one another, which as described above is antithetical to the fluidity and relational space of an Indigenous pedagogy. It is worth noting that there is a recurring theme of tension observed when words from the English language are used within an *Anishinaabe* context. EJ regularly addressed this tension and would tiptoe around use of certain English words such as the term protocol. He went on to say, "I don't know if there is a right way or wrong way to ask a question, but I guess the foremost 'good way' is by offering your tobacco. And then there is an understanding that the person receiving the tobacco will either accept it or not accept it. How you approach people for information in northern Ontario, versus say the south, might be very different. I think we need to be very careful, if you are wanting to obtain information you should have a conversation and see what – I hate to use the word

protocol – but see what the protocol is in that region, and with that person, and whether they will accept whatever they need to accept.” In this situation the onus is put on the learner to determine how cultural protocol works within their context. Without fulfilling this responsibility the learner may have difficulty engaging with the knowledge keeper. Karen describes, “I get offended. You don't walk up to an Elder and say this is what I need to do. My ability, I put it wholeheartedly, holistically, comprehensively, and it's a gift bestowed to me by none other than the universe, the Creator, therefore I revere it, I honour it in whichever way I decide. Therefore each one of us earned that position to get to that place (of knowing). So that one who is coming to you asking all those questions, they are asking, treating me as a commodity.” Whether one agrees with the term protocol or not, coming from a cultural standpoint, as an *Anishinaabe* person there is a manner in which individuals conduct themselves when approaching others. Introductions are just one piece of the protocol. Karen echoes the importance of introductions and getting to know someone before asking for knowledge from them when she talked about not having the audacity to “just come out and ask how to do quillwork” from Josephine Bondy. She goes on to say, “Relationality is key, key, and that's the one thing that people don't realize about powwow.”

Analysis: What are my responsibilities?

Pueblo scholar Gregory Cajete (2000) describes the need for Indigenous students to find their 'face,' which can only be achieved by examining who they are, where they come from, and their own unique character. Cajete's writing closely mirrors a teaching I received from Sylvia Maracle which is outlined in the intro and frames this paper in asking: 'Who am I', 'Where have I come from', 'Where am I going', and finally, 'What are my responsibilities'. By utilizing my own journey of coming to know my 'self' or in Cajete's words, my 'face,' I was able to engender a pathway to examining Indigenous pedagogy through personal experiences learning about regalia and grass dancing. Looking to other Indigenous education literature, Willie Ermine has written about Indigenous epistemology and the premise of looking inward to understand one's place within the world (1995). Ermine describes the problematic of failing to locate one's self whereby an individual may rely on external agents – media, mainstream, dominant culture – to frame themselves which he argues can result in a “fragmentary self-world view” (1995, p. 102). This fragmentary self can impact an Indigenous student's capacity for holism and culturally based understandings of who they are. Gregory Cajete identified a very similar phenomenon through his discussion of the Pueblo teaching *pin geh seh*, translated into English as 'split head' (2000, 187). Not unlike my own experience written in the 'Who

am I?' introductory section of this paper, a "split head" student is one who must learn to learn in two different cultural contexts – Indigenous and non. Cajete describes *how pin geh seh* plays out when students are not feeling honoured within a non-Indigenous learning environment, wherein they may express different 'selves' for each setting. He goes on to suggest that *pin geh seh* is a damaging process to Indigenous students and advocates for ways to heal this split. In this manner many facets of Indigenous education have begun to focus on the 'healing' journey of students as much as the 'academic' journey (Haig-Brown 1997, 43). While Ermine and Cajete are writing to provoke thought on the importance of Indigenous student wellbeing and holism through the process of cultural self-reflection and learning, I believe this type of learning is impossible without the relationality described earlier by Karen J. Pheasant.

Lawrence W. Gross (2010) has written about his own *Anishinaabe* perspectives on Indigenous pedagogy through examining and reflecting upon working with his Elders. He provided a lengthy list of 19 elements that go into 'Indian' pedagogy, some of which are reflected in my own writings and discussions with Karen and EJ, these include: relationships, storytelling, sense of place, oral tradition and observation. Coming out of the three spirals of my inquiry, I posit that 'relationality' or relationship to the 'other' – be they Elder, knowledge keeper, peer, or ancestor – is the critical key that unlocks pathways to Indigenous ways of knowing and

being. In their book, *Teaching Each Other: Nehinuw Concepts and Indigenous pedagogies*, Linda and Keith Goulet utilize the Nehinuw/Cree language, to identify types of relationships that the knowledge seeker encounters. Three forms of Nehinuw teaching-learning processes are identified: *kiskinaumagehin* (teaching another), *kiskinaumasowin* (teaching one-self), and *kiskinaumatowin* (teaching each other) (2014, 65). Even though these are conceptually Nehinuw, traits of these concepts were observed within my own learning incidents. According to Goulet and Goulet *Kiskinaumatowin* (teaching each other) is based in equality and interaction, both of which were present within the beading circles where I first learned embroidery stitch. Despite their statement I do not believe the knowledge keepers were absolved of their pedagogical responsibilities. For Bev Koski and Katie Longboat they had to ensure they were prepared to impart knowledge, not too much and not too little in order to maintain group dynamics. They also would bring tea, snacks, and share stories with everybody which I equate to the fostering of a relational space wherein learning not only the context, but about each other could occur. My learning progressed and I was able to take the knowledge of beading into *kiskinaumasowin* (teaching one-self) through my own projects at home. As mentioned in my first spiral earlier, the medallion I took home and worked on by myself went awry and I quickly learned that striving for perfection – filling every gap – actually makes the beads

disjointed and uneven. I was able to take this information back to Bev and Katie in order to receive further guidance as needed. As already discussed, the end result was the opposite of what I was striving for yet I learned the implications of imposing my expectations onto beadwork. I am reminded of a teaching I was given about beadwork, wherein master beadworkers – the one's who make immaculate projects and carry a wealth of knowledge – will purposely put a wrong-coloured or out of place bead into their project. While the reason they do this was not explained I understood that I was responsible for making my own meaning. I now believe the practice of a purposeful mistake in beadwork is about teaching humility, to putting aside ego and like the gunnels of my father's canoe allowing the materials to fall into place how they need to. If our Elders say that Creation has a positive and a negative side to create balance in all things, then why must we always strive for perfection within our work?

The third *Nehinuw* learning process is *kiskinaumagehin* (teaching another), which is observed through the time Karen and EJ spent with me sharing their stories and teachings about dance, powwow, and the construction of regalia. Where *kiskinaumagehin* (teaching another) and *kiskinaumasowin* (teaching one-self) identify times when individual and group learning take place, I believe that learning primarily occurs in relation with 'other.' As demonstrated within my inquiry 'other' can refer

to a person (knowledge keeper, family, peer, Elder), a story, or even the materials we work with yet I am certain there are other types of learning relationships less tangible. The need for balance between self and other in the relationship is key, with the key tenets of self-determined action including “independence, responsibility, autonomy, and authority over oneself” (Goulet & Goulet 2014, 62). These traits described by Goulet and Goulet were communicated in several of EJ and Karen’s stories wherein the onus of responsibility often fell to the learner. Within a cultural learning context, there are particular conditions to be met in order for teaching and learning to occur. Whether it’s engaging in cultural protocols or ensuring time is invested in the learning relationship, the learner must familiarize him or her self with that knowledge keeper’s pedagogical process. It should also be noted that no two knowledge-keeper’s conditions for learning are the same, there is a multitude of diversity amongst Indigenous nations, communities and teachings. Even though the learner carries these responsibilities, they still have agency to choose what content to engage with and reflect upon. EJ communicated a similar approach to learning through his Elder Iggy Kwandibens’ words “Keep your mind and your heart and your eyes open to everything, everything around you. Pick and choose the information, bring it home and let’s talk about it and see how it applies to us in our region” (Treaty 3, Whitesand First Nation). The learner carries autonomy to make meaning

for themselves and the process of self-reflection, or reflection with an Elder or mentor are important aspects to keep in mind within *Anishinaabe* pedagogy. EJ went on to add, "Who are we to say that we are the masters or hold that knowledge so clear to us that we own it? We don't. Information, knowledge and teachings are very fluid: they come and go as they are and it's our responsibility as the people receiving the knowledge to apply it or not." Even though EJ acknowledges his role in the process of knowledge sharing, he too is responsible for how it is shared, whom it is shared with, and how that exchange of information or teachings will occur.

Without the foundations for what I've described above as 'relational space', the exchange of knowledge within an *Anishinaabe* context may be impeded. If the learner is unaware of their expected role in the relationship – fulfilling protocols, fostering relationship, making time to visit – the knowledge keeper may offer only partial teachings, or send them away for further reflection. In a non-*Anishinaabe* context being sent away after requesting knowledge from someone may be perceived as rude or self-centred behavior, however I would argue the opposite is true. Karen talked about strangers asking her for jingle dress teachings at powwows and other events, EJ wanted to learn the details of regalia construction from his family without sitting for tea and first observing, and I tried borrowing a grass outfit to dance before completing my own. These

are all examples of efforts to expedite, or bypass entirely, the relationship building process. Goulet and Goulet describe a similar *Nehinuw* term, “(p)ehegenimisowin, which literally translates as ‘number one thinking,’ signifies a form of excessive individualism, that someone is self-centred, with the negative connotation that one will not share with others” (Goulet & Goulet 2014, 62). As indicated above, there are times when the knowledge keeper may be perceived as displaying *pehegenimisowin* and is unwilling to share with the learner; however, I would argue that it is not the teacher but the student who exemplifies this “number one thinking” by not sitting and sharing who they are first. They are not making an effort to observe their own roles and responsibilities in the learning process and therefore treating knowledge and the person who carries it as Karen said, as a commodity.

Karen had a story about a male quillworker in Wikwemikong that helps illustrate the importance of relationships. This quillworker, whose name I shall omit, did amazing quillwork for regalia such as medallions and spreaders for porcupine roaches. Karen and her family would wear his work and it garnered attention all over powwow country. Other dancers would ask where she got the work done so she facilitated meetings for several dancers from Western Canada to meet the quillworker, come to a verbal agreement, and commission work to be done for their outfits. After a period of time the work had not been

completed and he wasn't answering calls from the dancers out West. Karen does not know his reasons for certain, but she contrasted it to an experience her son had with the same quillworker. Rather than requesting an order immediately Karen's son visited and spent time getting to know the quillworker and perhaps more importantly, the quillworker got to know him. She spoke, "I can't recall how many times he went to go and visit. But the importance of sharing that tea and conversation is pivotal. And so, my son asked, the quillworker agreed, and within one week it was ready and at the fraction of the cost he normally charges." Without talking to the quillworker directly, one can only speculate why he did not complete the work for the dancers from out West, yet one can observe the more positive outcome when her son took his time to use appropriate cultural protocol. EJ echoes a similar sentiment when reflecting on Indigenous pedagogy, "I understand now that there was a common thread, and that common thread was understanding the person. I think when you are approaching someone to request something, whether it's an outfit, or medicines or ceremony, there's always that element of understanding where that person is coming from first. And I think that is a very consistent behavior in our teachings, at least in the northern Ojibway woodland region where I come from."

It is hard not to notice the element of storytelling that goes into each of Karen and EJ's pedagogies. As noted in the second learning

incident, working with EJ and learning how to construct regalia involved each of us sharing who we were and where we came from. Before I sat down to interview EJ a pre-existing relationship was in place so I already knew his Elders and teachers, his mother Elsie Kwandibens and his uncle Ignace Kwandibens. The same is true of how Karen Pheasant talks about her own experiences learning about powwow and quillwork. My questions for Karen about regalia, powwow, and learning from knowledge keepers would often lead to a story from her own experiences. For both Karen and EJ, the knowledge they shared almost always came from their own experience, and if not, it was coming from the experiences of those closest to them. I would describe this type of sharing as a personal storytelling narrative and believe it is an integral part of fostering an Indigenous relational space for learning to occur. This type of storytelling, wherein a question is asked and a story is provided in response, is also described in Greg Sarris' biography of Pomo healer, storyteller and basket weaver, Mabel McKay (1994). Coming from an Indigenous framework in her work, Mabel often found herself challenging Sarris to engage with her stories and asked him to stop trying to structure them into a larger narrative. Jo-ann Archibald's seminal book *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit*, based on relationships and interviews with *Stó:lō* storytellers and Elders, also talked about a varied approach to the act of 'listening' to stories. Archibald argued that stories

require not only auditory and visual senses, but an engagement of the mind, emotions, and perhaps most importantly patience (2008). I can personally attest to the importance of patience in the listening process. From years of obtaining knowledge through formal education settings, where direct questions often led to direct answers, I now found myself having to reflect upon the stories and teachings of my Indigenous teachers. I had to set aside ego, practice humility and re-learn how to learn in the multi-faceted manner Mabel and Jo-ann are talking about. In terms of stories, Goulet and Goulet suggest that a particular set of stories – legends and myths – have taken over the discourse of Indigenous storytelling and this shift has come at the discredit of *Nehinuw achimostatowina*, or “the stories we tell to each other” (2014, 65). They advocate for care to be taken not to trivialize individual oral histories, or present oral stories without acknowledging their diversity, purpose, and intent. When considering an Indigenous pedagogy, there is inherent value in sharing these types of narratives, experiences, and events of self with another through everyday interactions. The teas, the visits, the intertribal songs at powwows, the sharing of meals, all these have potential to foster relational space and elicit learning within an Indigenous context.

Closing: Coming full circle

Growing up through my formal school experience, many of my Indigenous peers either graduated later or not at all. The same friends I ran around the powwows with playing tag and eating sconedogs. Each of their stories – like my own – is unique to their context and experiences but still I can't help but wonder if a different outcome were possible for them? Would the formation of a relational space with their teachers have helped? Why is it I had to search out Indigenous pedagogy later in life? But I am getting ahead of myself, I like to talk in big circles, getting where it is I'm trying to go.

In *Look to the Mountain* Gregory Cajete describes Indigenous education as “an art of process, participation, and making connection. Learning is a growth and life process” (1993, 24). Through all my discussions and reflections, with my father, Dr. Susan Dion, Karen Pheasant, and EJ Kwandibens I believe what set apart my experiences in learning beadwork and powwow teachings from formal school was the fostering of a relational space. I am starting to see efforts for this type of engagement in many schools, with Indigenous staff, counselors, educators, Elders and community members being brought in. Other efforts to integrate Indigenous cultures into the schools – language, teachings, stories, drumming, dancing, powwows, ceremony, the list goes on and on

– is important, but I would posit it's not only the 'what' or 'where' that matters as much as the 'how' it is taught and with 'whom.' Does the educator have a relationship with the learner? Do they know who they are? Where they come from? Where they are going? What their responsibilities are? If these questions cannot be answered then learning, especially within an Indigenous context, may be impeded.

I was taught that there is no word for 'art' in *Anishinaabemowin* and so I tell people that I am a beadworker. As a grass dancer I have beaded nearly every piece of my outfit with my own hands. When I first set out to dance and start my regalia, EJ taught me that I should strive to do as much of my own work as possible on the outfit. After spending time with that knowledge, it was important for me to honour that teaching as much as I could. I can only begin to approximate what dancing and powwow do in contribution to my own 'good life'. Beadwork itself has enabled a stronger relationship to my culture and taught me more than I anticipated about ceremony, prayer, sacred items, and preparation of regalia. Yet it is not just the tangible applications of crafting and creating, but the relationships I formed with mentors, teachers and friends that became a way of forging a stronger bond to *mino-bimaadiziwin* through Indigenous pedagogy. "Elder Ken Goodwill from the Dakota First Nation of Standing Buffalo saw human (and spiritual) development as learning about your place in the world – finding out who you are, including who you are in

relation to the world, discovering the gifts you have, developing those gifts to make your contribution in this world, and assuming the responsibility for the use of those gifts" (Goulet and Goulet 2014, 78). In the opening I described how my mother's experience in residential schools disrupted my path to knowing my self, *mino-bimaadiziwin*. The second disruption came during my own attendance at schools where I was rarely given the opportunity to further my knowledge of being *Anishinaabe*. What is documented herein is a collection of stories, reflections and discussions that show the third disruption within my learning journey. Except this time the disruption was not affecting my pathway to *mino-bimaadiziwin*: it was the Indigenous pedagogy that disrupted my formal schooling. I had to un-learn how to learn, by thinking back to what I had observed and already known in pieces of from my childhood. This process was deeply personal but infinitely beneficial on my path as *Anishinaabe*.

Epilogue

I was at a powwow this past weekend with my family in Rama First Nation, about two hours north of Toronto. It was a beautiful weekend nearing the end of summer when the humidity had dissipated and the autumn air had begun to move in. I had finished grass dancing for the weekend and was tired from chasing my three-year-old daughter Niimin around the powwow after two days. Towards the end of the powwow on Sunday afternoon the committee announced they were going to hold a

'snake dance' to be led out by a senior Chicken Dancer. I had heard of this dance before, but never had the opportunity to participate or watch. When the song started I asked Niimin if she wanted to go watch the snake dance and she agreed so we went to sit on a nearby rock just on the edge of the dance arbor. As the powwow's Master of Ceremonies (MC) explained the dance, its origins, and its purpose, I was relaying this information to Niimin and answering her questions of "but why daddy?" The MC explained this was a ceremony – meaning it has purpose and teaching behind its actions. The dancers formed a line behind the lead dancer as he lead them winding around the dance arbor all while the MC talked about the life journey of the snake. It seemed as though the Chicken Dancer was leading them all over the place, back and forth, meandering and winding clockwise and counter-clockwise around the dance arbor. I told Niimin that the dancers were supposed to be like a snake and she nodded in agreement. As the song continued the dancers began to wind inwards forming a tightening circle, what the MC called the coiling of the snake. When there was nowhere left to go in the centre the dancers stopped and the MC said that this part of the dance teaches us about renewal, when the snake coils into a tight ball and then sheds its skin. The song started again and the dancers started to wind out of the centre of the circle and continued the dance. While I sat there watching with Niimin I saw the same spiral that I had first encountered in Brent

Debassige's dissertation, the *mino-bimaadiziwin* wheel. I came to realize that during the past two years of my Masters degree I was the snake. In the beginning of my studies I was winding all over the place, unsure of my research focus. I didn't know it until days before my summative discussion that the research methodology I described within this paper was my snake dance. I had coiled around my own knowledge of Indigenous pedagogy, passing by each experience, story, discussion, and interview multiple times. I didn't know when the coiling was supposed to end until after the discussions with my supervisor, my father, my interviews with two of my mentors Karen J. Pheasant and EJ Kwandibens. When I finally began to wind my way out and write the words of this paper, I may not have shedded my skin like the snake in the song, but something had changed or been renewed.

Since I've initiated my research I have begun to see the *mino-bimaadiziwin* spiral everywhere around me. I've seen the spiral on dancers regalia and sacred items. I've seen it in beadwork, and of course, in the snake dance. I remember presenting the progress of my MRP to my peers early in the second year of my studies and one of the students said that the *mino-bimaadiziwin* wheel was similar to a wheel she had seen in Aotearoa that comes from the koru, or fiddlehead of the fern. She described the pathway of travel moving from the outside of the circle inwards to the centre. At the time I disagreed, I believed you started from

the centre (self) and travelled outwards with each spiral passing and unfolding more knowledge on your journey. I've come to realize that both of us were wrong. After witnessing the snake dance with my daughter I now see that our learning travels both ways on the wheel. It can coil and look inwards, it can unfurl and spiral outwards, there never really is a start or finish point. In this way Indigenous pedagogy is perpetual, cyclical and we are constantly being renewed.

I also wanted to acknowledge my daughter for sitting on that rock and sharing the snake dance with me on that sunny day in Rama. There are many things I wish I knew more about being Anishinaabe, many things I didn't realize I already carried. Miigwech for teaching me and reminding me of my responsibilities. I am certain that one day, sooner in your life than in mine, you too will assert who you are, where you come from, where you are going, and what your responsibilities are. That is my hope for Indigenous education. Miigwech.

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