

Indigenous Thought, Appropriation, and Non-Aboriginal People

Celia Haig-Brown
York University

In this article, I explore the question, "What is the relationship between appropriation of Indigenous thought and what might be called 'deep learning' based in years of education in Indigenous contexts." Beginning with an examination of meanings ascribed to cultural appropriation, I bring texts from Gee on secondary discourses, Foucault on the production of discourse, and Wertsch on the deep structures underpinning discourse into conversation with critical fieldwork experiences extracted from years of research and teaching. Ultimately hopeful, I conclude the article with direction from Indigenous scholars on appropriate cultural protocol in the use of Indigenous knowledges by non-Aboriginal people in educational contexts.

Key words: cultural appropriation, deep learning, discourse, Indigenous knowledge

Dans cet article, l'auteure pose la question suivante : « Quelle est la relation entre l'appropriation de la pensée autochtone et ce qu'on pourrait appeler *l'apprentissage en profondeur* basé sur des années d'expérience en éducation dans des contextes autochtones? » Après avoir analysé les divers sens attribués à la notion d'appropriation culturelle, l'auteure présente des textes de Gee sur les discours secondaires, de Foucault sur la production du discours et de Wertsch sur les structures profondes du discours et fait le lien avec des expériences décisives sur le terrain tirées d'années de recherche et d'enseignement. Gardant au fond de l'espoir, l'auteure conclut l'article en présentant le protocole d'appropriation culturelle recommandé par des universitaires autochtones lors de l'utilisation de savoirs autochtones par des personnes non-autochtones dans des contextes pédagogiques.

Mots clés : appropriation culturelle, apprentissage en profondeur, discours, savoir autochtone.

This is Indian Country, land that was occupied by ancient Indians and colonized by the ancestors of other North Americans. The encounters between Indians and Others are etched into the cultures of Canada and the United States, where they express narratives of struggle that nurture friction between each other and conflict among themselves.

Gail Guthrie Valaskakis¹

Interpretation can be a kind of respectful listening or it can be a kind of appropriation, and we always have to raise the issue that what we hope has been the first may in fact have been yet another example of power disguising itself as benevolence.

Margery Fee²

As I have been taught by First Nation people in what is now called British Columbia, I want to begin by acknowledging the Mississauga people of the Anishnaabe Nation on whose lands in what is now called Toronto I do my current work. I want also to acknowledge all those First peoples who have shared this hunting, fishing, and agricultural land over the years.³ Only with such a beginning do I make sense of how our feet each new day, layered on those footprints of the First Nations peoples of the past, bring us to our places of work and the places we call home. In this article, I explore a particular question related to doing fieldwork for almost 30 years as a white woman in Aboriginal⁴ contexts. That question:

¹ Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005), 1.

² Margery Fee, "Reading Aboriginal Lives," *Canadian Literature*, 167, no. 4 (Winter, 2000): 2.

³ "The contemporary Toronto land base is part of the extensive migratory routes of Indigenous peoples, and was over time shared as a hunting, fishing, and agricultural ground, principally by Hotinonshon:ni people, Wendat-Huron, Neutral, Seneca, Cayuga, and later the Anishinaabek." (William Woodworth *Raweno:kwas*. Iroquoian Condo-lence Practised on a Civic Scale. In Lynne Davis (Ed.), *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010, p. 32)

⁴ As always, terminology is complex and shifting even as I write. You will see the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native, Indian, First Nation, Métis, Inuit, as well as reference

“What is the relationship between appropriation of Indigenous thought⁵ and what I can only think to call “deep” learning⁶ particularly in light of current understandings of cultural appropriation?” I am an ethnographer and my attraction to fieldwork,⁷ the work of ethnography, arose from

to specific nations such as the Secwepemc and Sto:lo used at different points in this article. I give one example to demonstrate the shifting significance of these terms. In Ontario, the Métis Nation has been very clear that they prefer the terminology First Nation and Métis to the term Aboriginal as they feel that the latter masks their presence. On the other hand, in some locations, the term Aboriginal is seen to be more inclusive than others in particular its relation to the term First Nation(s). Many First Nation people resist this term as it, too, is seen to collapse difference. For anyone planning to work in the area, it is important to familiarize oneself with the names that the people involved prefer to call themselves.

- ⁵ For a brief discussion of Indigenous thought, see Celia Haig-Brown “Working a Third Space: Indigenous Knowledge in the Post/Colonial University.” *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 31, no. 1 (2008): 253-267. Briefly, “For a working definition of Indigenous Knowledge, I draw on the writing of Maori scholar, Makere Stewart-Harawira (2005). While resisting any essentialized, fixed notion, she focuses on enunciating a contemporary global Indigenous ontology or way of being. Attributes that she ascribes to a global Indigenous knowledge arise from ‘broadly shared beliefs about the meaning of meaning and the nature of interrelationships (p. 35).’ These include beliefs that interrelationships between and among all things are fundamental to sense-making; that knowledge is sacred; that it cannot be found in a ‘codified canon,’ but in life itself; and that it is holistic in that it always already acknowledges four dimensions—the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. In sum, a refusal to divide and compartmentalize in any reductionist way is accompanied by adherence to recognizing all things existing in relation to one another.” (2005:35)
- ⁶ I use the term “deep” learning in opposition to “shallow” learning which can lead the most well-intentioned person to violations of cultural protocol and demonstrations of cultural insensitivity. See p. 946 of this manuscript for one such example of a First Nation person’s account of a “stomach-churning” incident of the dangers of “shallow” learning.
- ⁷ Fieldwork, headwork, deskwork: all these terms may be associated with the work of ethnography. Recently some anthropologists have been heard to exclaim, “I am committed to theory” when faced with the results of a person’s time working and thinking outside the libraries and offices of academe. An underlying assumption to such a claim seems to be that somehow the work done outside these walls is second-rate compared to the esoteric work of the academy and that it is, inescapably undertheorized or even untheorized. The possibility that theory may be developed and/or refined in contexts outside text appears to be diminished by such thinking.

its toleration for, in fact its insistence on, continuing my already established approach to life and to making meaning in that life – with extensive refinements, of course. Focusing on the meanings that arise from being in a place with the people; learning the language of the people; watching, listening, and maybe eventually doing as ways of learning (fragments of) an additional culture; perhaps even learning a secondary discourse⁸ are all integral to the work of ethnography. Being curious about fellow human beings and their/our webs of meanings is key. Despite all the problems anthropologists have encountered and created in their endless search to document/interpret/explain and participate in varied culture(s) and imagined cultural contexts, ethnography continues to hold great potential for respectful research. Although this article does not allow time for the rehearsal of all the auto-critique that anthropologists – including women, people of colour, Aboriginal people – have engaged in as they continue to re-imagine ethnography, the organic aspects of the approach and the commitment many have to emergent design interrupt theory as usual and provide endless opportunity to question our labours as academics. Perhaps even to make a difference in our relationships in the world.

CONSIDERING (CULTURAL) APPROPRIATION

For several years, growing attention to cultural appropriation, particularly of Indigenous artifacts, voice, and knowledges, has led me to formulate this small treatise on its relation to learning. The dictionary provides a conceptual starting place only as one heeds Elizabeth Costello's warning, "The words on the page can no longer stand up and be counted, each proclaiming 'I mean what I mean!'"⁹ For the word "appropriate," the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) gives two pronunciations and parts of speech: appropriate as an adjective with definitions ranging from "annexed" to "attached or belonging as an attribute, quality or right" and

⁸ James Paul Gee, "Discourses and Literacies." Chapter 6. In *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1996): 122-148.

⁹ James M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (London, UK: Vintage Books, 2004), 19.

appropriate as a transitive verb from the French “approprier” to “render one’s own.” For the verb, the dictionary includes, “1) . . . to make (a thing) the private property of any one, to make it over to him as his own; to set apart; 3) to take possession of for one’s own, to take to oneself; and 8) to make, or select, as *appropriate* or suitable to, to select.”

These entries remain ambiguous – mere words arising from and preceding discourses. Without context provided by sentences and specific events, interpretation of the word, distinctions between thieving and using something rightfully and properly – or appropriately – remain unclear. Even with the accompanying references, many Biblical ones, the relation of this word and its accompanying action to structure and agency to power relations or to historical events remains unclear. One can hardly expect an (old) English dictionary to do such work.

From the tried and “true” text that Costello reminds us, “used to stand beside the Bible and the works of Shakespeare above the fireplace, where in pious Roman homes the household gods were kept,” let us see where a new god takes us. The trendy, ever-shifting Wikipedia provides another point of access to meaning making. Almost immediately the word “cultural” is brought to bear on appropriation, gesturing to the social and personal angst that partially inspired this article.

Cultural appropriation is the adoption of some specific elements of one culture by a different cultural group. It can include the introduction of forms of dress or personal adornment, music and art, religion, language, or behavior. These elements are typically imported into the existing culture, and may have wildly different meanings or lack the subtleties of *their original cultural context* [italics added]. Because of this, cultural appropriation is sometimes viewed negatively, and has been called “cultural theft.”¹⁰

This exposition gets us closer to the object—and the questions—at hand. When and how does learning a secondary discourse become cultural theft? Can it ever be anything else?

¹⁰ Cultural appropriation. Accessed December 6, 2010 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acculturation>

POST-MODERN QUOTATION AS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Peter Shand¹¹ writes of three types of cultural appropriation in his examination of copyright law and First Nations visual arts: (a) commercial exploitation, (b) modernist “affinity,” and (c) post-modern quotation. Commercial exploitation, from the use of Aboriginal art or images in advertising or team names to the use of genetic material from people’s bodies or from traditional food or medicine plants, are blatant forms of such appropriation. The Taiwan Aboriginal Rights Web page dedicated to the First Nations of Taiwan documents the use of Aboriginal people’s images in tourism advertising framed by the comment “Aborigines go better with Coke.” The site also points to biopiracy making available Aytal and Ami Aboriginal lymphoblasts and DNA for genetic studies as a form of cultural appropriation.¹² Shand’s primary example of commercialism briefly recounts the negotiation between a swimwear line and a particular Maori individual representing one community whereby partial royalties would be paid to the community for the use of a culturally significant symbol. Each example raises questions of its own, but these examples are not the focus for this article.

Shand’s second form of cultural appropriation, modernist “affinity,” refers to the use of Indigenous images in the hands of non-Aboriginal artists as the “equivalent of colonial occupation of indigenous art and design.”¹³ Citing Gaugin as an obvious example, he points out that as the source form is dislocated from its initial cultural context, “specific mean-

¹¹ Peter Shand. “Can copyright be reconciled with First Nations’ interests in visual arts?” A Paper for *Protecting Knowledge: Traditional Resource Rights in the New Millennium*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, organized by the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, February 2000. Accessed February 2, 2010 from <http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/Resources/conferences/PK.htm>

¹² Since I began working on this article a number of years ago (2006), the web site I first visited has disappeared and current websites available on Indigenous peoples of Taiwan tend to be lovely tourist tales including exotic photos of fearsome headhunters. Only in the translated song lyrics and poetry is the loss of land and assault on culture articulated. Accessed October 5, 2008. <http://www.indigenouspeople.net/taiwan.htm>

¹³ Shand, 5.

ings are erased and cultural significances shift and slide."¹⁴ Not only within the arts does such colonial occupation recur. What does it mean and what happens when one (attempts to or) does occupy culturally-based concepts, beliefs, values, and thought processes for purposes other than what may have initially been intended by the originators? What is the significance of original intentions and the world unfolding in unanticipated ways? And as the work of Homi Bhabha suggests, an originary culture is only ever imagined in its re-creation in the current context.¹⁵

Closely related, although perhaps subtler and more insidious, Shand's third form is post-modern quotation. It "reflects a pervasive sense of contingency and dislocation, in which all forms, regardless of their original cultural context are available for re-inscription."¹⁶ This articulation brings to mind another text now nearly three decades old. In Audre Lorde's *Open Letter to Mary Daly*, she asks, "Mary, do you ever really read the work of black women? Did you ever read my words or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already-conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us?"¹⁷ In Shand's terms, this decontextualization emphasizes the significance and implications of who is speaking and who is listening. The severing of the language from its specific meaning has the potential to and does effect real harm for indigenous people, their ancestors, and descendants. He also points to the (Draft) *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Article 29¹⁸ which calls for the recognition and full ownership, control, and

¹⁴ Ibid, 4.

¹⁵ See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁶ Shand, 5.

¹⁷ Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly." In Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (Eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), 94.

¹⁸ The declaration was adopted by the UN on September 13, 2007 with only four negative votes, significantly Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Note the recurring colonial theme in the nationhood of the resisters. Accessed March 9, 2008. <http://www.iwgia.org/sw248.asp>

protection of cultural and intellectual property. Although one cannot help but note that this declaration arises out of liberal notions of rights, it may be the best one can do within the continuing colonial moves now accomplished in the name of global markets and international studies.¹⁹ These two forms, then – modernist “affinity” and post modern quotation – inform the continuing exploration of the earlier question: What is the relationship between appropriation of Indigenous thought and “deep” learning?

STARTING FROM DISCOURSE

Let us move our considerations to notions of discourse starting with one of Foucault’s deliberations. In outlining his Repressive Hypothesis, he focuses on the production of discourse that repression of an existing discourse incites. Although his focus is on sexuality in the seventeenth century and the control of particular language and practices related to it, the resonances with the repression of Indigenous languages and cultures in colonial Canada are striking. In the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, one of the primary goals of the residential schools was to stifle Indigenous thought instituted through severe punishments for speaking a Native language or practising what was designated the devil’s work, Native spirituality. The architecture and other surveillance structures of the institution allowed monitoring of language use among the pupils. To paraphrase Foucault, as if in order to gain mastery over Indigenous thought, (materially speaking also over the people themselves, their lands and resources), it was necessary first to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present.²⁰

¹⁹ Gayatri Spivak (lecture to York University, March 1, 2006) tells us that solving the public-private divide using the letter of the law exacerbates the problem. Such may also be the case with documents such as human rights legislation but, as indicated, it seems to be the best we can do now.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (Robert Hurley, Trans.). (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 17.

Although this argument is worthy of a paper of its own, for this article, a couple of points regarding the repression of language parallel his arguments related to sexuality. Silence became one protection for outlawed Indigenous discourse. Within the silence, language could continue to exist if only in people's heads, always ready for the circumstances that would allow it to resurface as a speech event.²¹ Resistance to English as a replacement allowed still other discourses to proliferate. First Indigenous thought and discourse persisted in certain contexts and between certain peoples; there was "control over enunciations . . . in which circumstances, among which speakers, and within which social relationships. Areas were established, if not of utter silence, at least of tact and discretion. . . ." ²² In Aboriginal families, although adults may have continued to use the original language among themselves once out of sight of the monitors, they often used English with their children to keep them from punishment in school and ostracization in the larger society. And even as these silences in Indigenous discourse were effected, other discourses emerged. "There is not one, but many silences and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses."²³ I want to posit that some of these emerging discourses were variations of English,²⁴ new forms, each one intensely and foundationally influenced by Indigenous thought as expressed by the specific discourse community involved (and silenced). In Foucault's terms, "It would be less than exact

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation* (John B. Thompson, Ed. & Trans.). (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981). In distinguishing between language and discourse, Ricoeur posits that the sign is the basic unit of language while the sentence is the basic unit of discourse. "[D]iscourse is realised temporally and in the present." It is an event. "[L]anguage is virtual and outside of time" (133).

²² Foucault, 18.

²³ *Ibid*, 27.

²⁴ I responded vehemently the other day upon hearing that a professor had suggested a particular community of First Nation people were fluent in no language because none would claim "confidence in English" or "fluency in an Aboriginal language." The ability of a unilingual speaker to determine exactly what is involved in a particular discourse community is, of course, extremely limited and in all likelihood, culturally located.

to say that the pedagogical institution has imposed a ponderous silence on [Indigenous thought] in children and adolescents." Or that potlatch laws and others forbidding gatherings to discuss land claims have imposed silence on their adult relatives. "On the contrary, since the eighteenth century it has multiplied the forms of discourse on the subject; it has established various points of implantation for [Indigenous thought]; it has coded contents and qualified speakers."²⁵

Many Indigenous people in Canada are within one or two generations of having a First Nation language as their first language and their primary discourse. Linguist John Dunn, working with the Tsimshian people in northern British Columbia and teaching a seminar in 1995 as part of a Master of Education program in the territory, argued that (and I paraphrase here from memory) primary discourse structures persist even in second and third generations of people who have moved from a First Nation language to English. In his presentation, he graphically demonstrated his argument was the case with certain pronunciations and people's ability to distinguish between and therefore articulate certain sounds.²⁶ I want to extrapolate from this point to suggest that not only do the physical manifestations of languages persist but so too do deeper discursive structures that allow some speakers new to English either to resist full acquisition of standard English, which itself is always in flux, as a primary discourse and instead to learn it in such a way that pays homage to older language patterns and usages and to co-create and develop fluency in this intermediary (new) discourse. Tied up with such hybridization or creolization is the potential to maintain some (unconscious perhaps) allegiance to the foundational language, discourse, epistemology, and worldview.

²⁵ Foucault, 29.

²⁶ Needless to say such insights have significant implications for teachers who are working with young children learning to read and write, "Sound it out and then spell it," are common instructions in those classrooms. His examples included the words seep and sheep which for a Tsimshian speaker are indistinguishable sounds, just as sound of the "p" in pin and in spin are indistinguishable to English speakers. If you are not sure about the difference, hold a paper in front of your mouth as you say one and then the other and observe the result. Clearly the sounds are not only different from one another, they are made using entirely different parts of the mouth and breath.

What, then, are the possibilities that a person from outside this complex discourse community can learn that discourse? I argue that it is possible – never easy but possible – and the two words “deep learning” are my effort to make sense of learning what, most recently, James Gee in his work in socioliteracy studies²⁷ has called a secondary discourse.²⁸ In his consideration of literacies and discourses, he begins from the perspective that a fulsome definition of literacy leads quickly away from simply speaking of proficiency in reading, writing, and language to a broader conceptualization of literacy as proficiency in social relationships and social practices.²⁹ He goes on to consider Discourses – with a capital “D” – which he sees as “a sort of ‘identity kit’” and defines as “ways of being in the world, or forms of life that integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes.”³⁰ Taking his claims a step farther, I would add a proficiency in the epistemology from which these relationships and practices arise and which they in turn inform. He further divides the concept into (although with malleable and permeable boundaries) primary and secondary discourses. Primary discourses he tells us “. . . constitute our first social identity, and something of a base within which we acquire or resist later Discourses”³¹ Secondary ones are “. . . those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socialization within various local, state and national groups and institutions outside of home and peer group socialization. . . .” Finally he distinguishes between acquisi-

²⁷ “Were it not so cumbersome, it would be better to call the field something like integrated-social-cultural-political-historical literacy studies which names the viewpoint it takes on literacy.” James Paul Gee, “Discourses and Literacies” Chapter 6. In *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (2nd ed.). (London, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 122.

²⁸ I want to acknowledge the students of the doctoral seminar at York’s Program in Language, Culture and Teaching 2005-2006, especially Trish Byers for introducing me to the work of James Gee.

²⁹ Gee, 1996, 137.

³⁰ Ibid, 142.

³¹ Ibid, 137.

tion and learning. The former is the way we learn our first language, our primary Discourse, through a process that could be likened to osmosis; the latter, in contrast a conscious process, involves knowledge gained through direct teaching – and not necessarily in schools. In his later work, resonating with the concern of this article, he further refines this distinction by dividing the process into instructed and deep learning. What happens in a course (say physics) is instructed learning; deep learning on the other hand involves a cultural process (say, becoming a physicist). He writes, “. . . it is clear that deep learning works better as a cultural process than it does as an instructed process.”³² What do these notions of discourses and learning offer to the topic at hand? What have they to do with distinctions between cultural appropriation and “deep learning”?

As an Anglophone fieldworker/teacher/program developer, I go into a world of varying degrees of unfamiliarity with a primary Discourse firmly ensconced. I see the world from that framework and, despite all efforts at phenomenological bracketing, I still frame what I see out of these deeply held beliefs about the world, what some of us might call my culture. As the days go by, there are moments in the field when a radical epistemic disjuncture indicates something that requires my focused attention. A moment of unexpected laughter from the people with whom you are working; a passing comment about white people—“Oh, of course we don’t mean you”; or an event that leaves a question rustling almost inaudibly in your brain with the words just out of reach. When such an incident recurs and if the researcher/learner is paying close attention, s/he may begin to adjust behaviours—what s/he is saying, how s/he is saying it, what s/he is asking, what s/he is doing, even what s/he is wearing. . . . First s/he may experiment and then s/he may learn. We fieldworkers may make such moves consciously and sometimes unconsciously: trying things on, noting what continues to disrupt the flow of life around us, and adapting accordingly. We learn, taking tiny baby steps into a secondary discourse.

³² In this text, Gee also writes of understanding in a deep way. James Paul Gee, *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13.

Blumer told us years ago that things have meaning, that the meaning a thing has for us "arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows," and that meanings are modified through an interpretive process.³³ As a corollary, one might expect that meanings can change as one's social group, one's "fellows," changes. If one is a student (of the field), hungry for understandings of the world and of life that "make sense" – no matter how difficult that knowledge may be; no matter how contradictory that sense-making becomes – one has the potential to take up and produce new interpretations of the world for oneself and perhaps for others. Learning happens. When one encounters increasingly larger roadblocks to understanding and is open, even anxious, to question fondly held assumptions; when one spends time paying particular attention to what people are saying to each other and to you, learning depends. Within this conscious process of learning a new discourse, a secondary one in the case of a fieldworker whose primary discourse is not of that place, another deeper process affects the fieldworker at a much less conscious level.

Interacting with Aboriginal people for whom persisting deeply held beliefs and knowledge structures continue to shape their discourse, non-Aboriginal people may begin the process of learning what for them are secondary discourses, even eventually finding their fundamental world view affected. Over time, a secondary world view may be unconsciously acquired sometimes leaving the primary one fundamentally and irreversibly altered, even alienated.³⁴ Sometimes, depending on circumstances, non-Aboriginal people may find themselves talking of their dreams while doing fieldwork. They may cautiously begin to speak of living life in a good way and see relationships as fundamental to all that they do. They may ponder what other dimensions of a new epistemology are shaping their thoughts.

³³ Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. (Toronto: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1969), 2.

³⁴ In earlier work, I quoted a non-Native person as she talked of her life changes in working with First Nation people. She said, "I am becoming a social misfit. . . . I become less and less tolerant of my own social group . . ." Celia Haig-Brown. "Border Work." In William Herbert New (Ed.), *Native Writers and Canadian Writing* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), 239.

If this potential for “deep learning” exists for those who are doing fieldwork over time, what does it mean for cultural appropriation: how and when does it differ from learning, or do the two always exist in direct relation to one another? Perhaps it is what one does with the knowledge and how it is done that raises questions and generates problems. Perhaps it has something to do with who is speaking and who is listening to what has been learned. How does acknowledging one’s teachers (the oral equivalent of citation) affect the idea of cultural appropriation? What of intellectual property and entitlement? Where do appropriate protocol and cultural sensitivity come in? What if one of the aspects learned, one of the teachings, includes the responsibility to pass on to others what one has learned? In ethnography and in cultural relations, context counts and power relations figure prominently.

TO THE “FIELD”

Three examples of the use of cultural things in my own work (modernist affinity or post-modern quotation?) provide the focus for this interrogation: (a) the circle as a symbol; (b) the notion of “land”; and (c) a fundamental tenet of Kaupapa Maori, a Maori agenda, arising from the Treaty of Waitangi, articulated by Graham Smith and others, and translated as “chiefly control.” I work constantly in places with people for whom these words and the things they represent have real meaning, cultural value, and spiritual connections. Their misuse can and does cause pain: real harm.

Starting with the circle: It could be any circle but it is not. This one came into my consciousness first as a spiritual sign, primarily from the Plains peoples, that as a white person from British Columbia, I would not think of using in my own work, that I resisted even thinking about. I knew about cultural appropriation. Over the years, its use as a fundamental organizer recurred in my interactions with various First Nations teachers, students, research associates, and friends. Sto:lo scholar and the University of British Columbia’s Associate Dean for Indigenous Studies Jo-ann Archibald used it to organize her talks: I have watched her do just that in our joint presentations. My deepest lessons came during fieldwork at Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon where the sacred sharing circle is an integral part of the daily life of the school. As I struggled with

the draft of the ethnography of this First Nation-controlled school, I was forced into a moment of heightened consciousness.

In my on-going effort to be a respectful and ethical fieldworker, with my co-authors, I presented drafts of a manuscript we had written to the people who had participated in the study, the staff, some students, and representatives of the Parent Council. I had deliberately worked references to the circle and other spiritual aspects of the school subtly into the text, not wanting to seem presumptuous in what I had learned. To put it mildly, what occurred with the people involved in reviewing that day was one of the most intense learning experiences I have ever had. People responded to the drafts of chapters relevant to their work in the school with very direct, mostly good humoured feedback on everything from my writing style to the overall structure of the text. Most significantly in light of the questions for this article, I was forced to confront my own hesitations about writing overtly about Native spirituality, including the significance of the sacred circle. That day, the study participants, who had taken the time to review the manuscript with us, made it clear in no uncertain terms, that an acknowledgment of the centrality of Indigenous spirituality in the school *had* to frame the resultant text. They insisted that I must write a first chapter laying out its significance to and presence in the school. I returned to the work now drawing on my own experiences with sweetgrass circles and sweat lodges. I sought additional guidance from First Nations authors such as Huron philosopher Georges Sioui and Cree educationalist Verna St. Denis. I again sifted through the transcripts and other school-related documents that addressed Native spirituality directly. I paid closer attention to what people had been telling me. With a push from the people involved, I wrote what was in their eyes essential to this text. As I wrote, I felt the constant presence of the critics who were also my support. It was a serious lesson in the responsibility to listen, to pass on what had been learned, and to be respectful of how people see themselves and choose to be represented. My initial resistance to making spirituality an explicit part of the text arose from my fear of an accusation³⁵ of cultural appropriation.

³⁵ I continue to be interested in who the people are that articulate such accusations. Over the years, I would say that the majority of concerns come from non-Aboriginal particularly those who are recently coming to an awareness of cultural appropriation.

Since that time, I have used the circle to think through the relations among aspects of a topic; I use it for planning, for organizing, and I appreciate its explanatory power every time. Although always acknowledging my teachers, I may not talk explicitly about its spiritual dimensions, I never separate myself and my work from those understandings.³⁶ The circle animates relationships and cycles. It is a central aspect of the primary Discourse of many Indigenous people. It interrupts the assumptions of those other heuristics, the line and the box, dualities and binaries: It is an epistemological tool, albeit translated³⁷ into a language foreign to its worldview and transported to contexts foreign to its origins although never removed from the land.

Which brings me to my second example of appropriation or learning: "the land." For me, the meaning of the concept of land is embedded in the title of a Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs video *The Land is the Culture: A Case for BC Indian Land Claims*. Growing up in a family of conservationists, long before such orientations to the world and British Columbia in particular were *de rigueur*, I have always had a grasp of interrelationships: logging erodes the hillsides, the soil washes into the river, the salmon eggs lying beneath the aerated gravel are smothered, and the cycle is endangered. Or more simply, dam the Columbia River and exterminate entire salmon runs. Protect the Fraser River to avoid repeating this tragedy. These are my childhood memories: battles won and lost to protect the rivers and their banks. We have a responsibility to

³⁶ Note this sleight of the pen trick whereby I do acknowledge the spiritual dimension without providing any detail. This is one of the ways I try to deal with knowledge that should not and cannot (really) be written (by me).

³⁷ The limits of this article do not allow me to take up the lovely challenge of translation outlined by Gayatri Spivak during a lecture at York University (March 1, 2006) as she responded to questions on her comment that "translation is fully contaminated." However her distinction between translations relegated to text and those conjured up in simultaneous translation were salient and provocative with implications for the discussion at hand. What constitutes official translations of documents (her example was a Constitution translated from an Indian language to English) is too often revealed as a colonizing move (not her words) if and when the actual relation between the ideas expressed in the two texts is investigated fully with those immersed in one or both of the languages as primary Discourses.

care for the land, the rivers, and the air. From that place to understanding the significance of land to First Nations people has seemed a relatively short trajectory to me.

That being said, I remain forever indebted to Professor Emeritus Marlene Brant Castellano of the Mohawk Nation and Trent University who called me on my use of the word – the concept “land” – in a keynote address I was giving. Throughout the talk I slipped between a materialist – still conservationist – conception and something much closer to a conventional Indigenous understanding. From an Indigenous perspective (as it was explained to me), the spiritual³⁸ is inseparable from the physical: for example, the river is a living being with feelings and responses. And as former student Pat Wilson of Haisla Nation said in science class one day, “My people believe even the rocks have souls.” To think of a river or the Great Lakes as animate beings who respond according to the treatment they experience makes perfect sense although it may not coincide directly with or translate seamlessly into Western scientific understandings or positivist interpretations of the meanings of life.

I find myself thinking of one of my father’s first books, a novel published in 1932³⁹ in which the River, based on one flowing through his chosen home on Vancouver Island, is the central character, an animate and spirited being. For the purposes of this article, I want to claim that he was, in part at least, appropriating new-found First Nations conceptions. Having lived at the time in the Pacific Northwest and on Vancouver Island for a few years, he constructed his narrative around the woman, Tashish River. Where did he learn this characterization? Did the people of the Nimpkish Valley and the north island teach him to think this way? What did he teach me, inadvertently (unconsciously?) or intentionally, as a direct result of First Nation people educating him? How were his views of land and rivers translated or transformed by this education layered on his earlier understandings based in fly fishing, hunt-

³⁸ I use the word “spiritual” in a way that does not remain stuck in any particular conception of “god/s/God.” Rather it moves to a much more complex area related to an acknowledgement of the limits of human knowing.

³⁹ Roderick Haig-Brown, *Pool and Rapid, The Story of a River*. (London, UK: A. & C. Black, Ltd., 1932).

ing, and caring for his maternal grandfather's privately owned land and rivers in his native England? Acculturation is reciprocal.⁴⁰ As England – never the mythical monolith – pushed onto Aboriginal lands, the land and the people pushed back. He learned and he taught his family.

My third example moves to much shakier territory in terms of my knowledge and experience with specific people in a specific place. It also raises the question of global Indigeneity and knowledge relations among Aboriginal peoples across geographical and political borders. On a recent sabbatical, I spent time in Aotearoa (New Zealand) with some Maori colleagues and friends thinking through one of my unending questions related to protocol for work between universities and Aboriginal communities, "Do ideas travel?" I was immersed in a project that Professor Russell Bishop of the University of Waikato was working on and saw in action, Kaupapa Maori, the Maori agenda, as it served to inform the project. One concept in particular spoke to me: "*tino Rangatiratanga*" loosely translated as "chiefly control." For the purposes of his work in mainstream schools, Bishop combined this Maori understanding with the work of the late Iris Marion Young, of the University of Chicago, and refined the concept to "self-determination in a context of interdependence." Self-determination is a concept with which many Canadians are somewhat familiar. If I were to characterize the tendencies of governments to respond to First Nation moves toward self-determination, I would put it this way: "You want to self-determine, go ahead, go over there, do it and best of luck." Because no settlers are leaving and there really is no "over there," the idea that this self-determination will always be in a context of interdependence may be obvious to many First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people, but is something the rest of Canada has not yet grasped fully. In Bishop's work, building on collaborative narratives, teachers experience intense professional development within a Kaupapa Maori framework to improve the achievement of Maori students in mainstream, public schools. Funded by the national Ministry of Education, it never loses sight of Kaupapa Maori and is entirely in the control of Maori scholars. At the same time, both Maori and non-Maori teachers

⁴⁰ See John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008) for further development of this thought.

work together to make this program the best possible approach to address Maori students' achievement, to produce adults who are self-determining while recognizing the tenets of the Treaty of Waitangi that their control lies within a context of interdependence with the other signatories of the treaty, the Pakeha.

Since returning to Canada, I have found the concept *tino Rangatiratanga* informing my thinking on a regular basis: (a) as the focus of an invited address to the Indigenous Education Conference at Walpole Island, Bkejwanong; (b) in my courses, *Foundations of Education* and *Models of Education*, preparing students to be self-determining teachers; (c) in working on approaches to supervision of these same teacher candidates in their practice teaching; and (d) in various other contexts. It works for me in all its translations: it provokes thought; it shifts understandings. But even as I find it doing such good work, I wonder how this postmodern quoting is doing injustice to the concept, to Maori understandings of the concept and what such decontextualizing means. Does it matter who is doing the speaking and who is doing the listening? Are there moments when the speaking is good and moments when it is disrespectful? Is harm being done? I am speaking: would it matter if there were Maori people listening?⁴¹ First Nations people? People of European ancestry? Matter to me? To them?

These questions have come up several times but most recently when non-Aboriginal participants in a teacher education workshop asked me for references for the principle. It is one thing for me to take the idea out of the context in which Maori teachers had carefully guided me to some understanding of it, very likely based in some demonstration of "deep learning" related to Indigenous knowledge, but what are the ramifications when someone who has never seen or heard the idea in its original context decides to "run with it"? In my use, am I contributing to disrespect for its origins, severing the language from its specific meaning and proper protocol? Or does the transposition from one place to another in some ways strengthen its place in the world, in a sort of reverse coloniza-

⁴¹ At the University of Alberta where I delivered a version of this article, Maori scholar, Makere Stewart-Harawira thanked me for my use of what I had learned and for the questions I raised.

tion of thought? Is it possible that teacher educators are learning from Maori teachers through me? Is ventriloquation at work? Accompanying the articulation of the words is a constant refrain: "A little learning is a dangerous thing/Drink deep or taste not of the Pyrean spring." Is it appropriate/appropriating to use the concept in the Indigenous Education Conference where there may be some assumptions of shared deep structures of understanding, acquired Discourses among Indigenous people and their allies? Who is listening/reading? Then? Now?

I find myself writing to my Maori friends to see what they think. Margery Fee's words resonate, "Without a conversation with living First Nations people about what they think and feel about their writing, their culture, and their lives, the likelihood that we will have produced bad interpretations arises, as we make ourselves the experts, and them into the mute subjects of monologic expertise."⁴² Despite the original conversations with Maori scholars, I do not feel secure enough in the knowledge to be sure I am using it respectfully. Even as I send off my e-mails, I know that no one can answer this question for me. I know that I have to find a place of acceptance myself or make a decision not to use the concept. Do I pretend I never learned it? Do I decide to take responsibility for/appropriate the concept myself and claim it as my own, not referring to my teachers because I may have got the lesson wrong? Do I follow what I have been taught to recognize as my responsibility to pass along what I have learned? Have I really learned anything? If I make clear who I am and where I speak from, is that enough?

I find some solace in the work of James Wertsch. Focusing on a sociocultural approach to the mind, Wertsch seeks "an account of human mental processes that recognizes the essential relationship between these processes and their cultural, historical, and institutional settings."⁴³ Wertsch gestures to deep structures that underpin discourse. Even as the words change, the deep structures, fundamental understandings (Might one say, world view?) persist and change. Constantly re-creating these

⁴² Fee, 2.

⁴³ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 6.

deep structures in a contemporary context, I argue, is central to the discourses of Indigenous peoples worldwide. They are based in traditional understandings of relations to land and water and air – not just the material of these things but their spirits as well – and they maintain much consistency with one another through the times of colonization particularly that most recent one that, by the 1930s, had the world 84.6 per cent covered by European colonizers in their greed for resources, labour, and markets.⁴⁴

Those of us who work as allies with First Nation people are immersed in these Discourses and over time, begin to work out of the understandings they contain and create. As Wertsch has written, drawing on Vygotsky and Bakhtin, “. . . human communicative practices give rise to mental functioning in the individual . . . the term *voice* serves as a constant reminder that mental functioning in the individual originates in social, communicative processes.”⁴⁵ I am never Indigenous to a particular place in Canada, but I am often in a social situation that allows a potential for some proficiency in a secondary Discourse, secondary only in terms of learning it in relation to the one we learned at our mothers’ knees. I have found as I moved from Secwepemc Territory in British Columbia to those of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaune, much of what I had been taught had currency, served as a form of cultural capital that has allowed at least some First Nation people in those new places to recognize and accept me. My lessons from Canada do travel and do inform the way I take up Maori concepts. Some of my proficiency has to do with the words, but as much has to do with other discursive elements, all those little nuances picked up over the years: a turn of phrase, a response to a joke, even a tiny bit of an accent on some words, and of course an appreciation of historic and social context. Deep learning or cultural appropriation?

⁴⁴ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 15.

⁴⁵ Wertsch, 13.

CONCLUSION

There are no answers or perhaps myriad answers to the questions I have raised in this article and which I raise with myself each time I engage in fieldwork in Indigenous contexts (Of course, every nation exists within an Indigenous context in one way or another). Returning to Wertsch, we are reminded, "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he *appropriates* [italics added] the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention." The manner in which this appropriation takes place is central to our question. First one must never lose sight of the half of the word that will always remain someone else's. Jo-ann Archibald responds to a "stomach-churning" incident hearing a non-Native woman ignorant of cultural protocol telling a First Nation story: "If non-Native teachers and Indigenous teachers are to use and tell Indigenous stories, they must begin a cultural-sensitivity learning process that includes gaining knowledge of story-telling protocol and the nature of these stories."⁴⁶ Canada Research Chair, Métis scholar, Judy Iseke-Barnes tells curriculum scholars, "The challenge for educators, parents and librarians, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, is to find ways to engage with Indigenous texts so that they are understood not in simplistic and stereotypic ways but as *deep knowledge* [italics added] understood in complex relations to context."⁴⁷ Gayle Guthrie Valaskakis of the Chippewa Nation writing of ". . . the prophecy of the Seventh Fire, predicting a time when we will return to traditional ways, relationships, and responsibilities," tells us:

Some Elders say that this prophesy decrees that only Native people will be among the "New People," the Seventh Generation, who will return to the cultural teachings of Indian traditions. Other Elders say that non-Natives, too, are

⁴⁶ Jo-ann Archibald / Q'um Q'um Xiim, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 150.

⁴⁷ Judy Iseke-Barnes, "Unsettling Fictions: Disrupting Popular Discourses and Trickster Tales in Books for Children." *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 7, no.1 (2009), 50. Please note - [italics added] - inserted in article.

among those who will recognize the cultural ways that honour the earth and its people....⁴⁸

And as Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham (in Smith 2004) tells us:

*It is necessary that,
With great urgency, we all speak well and listen well.
We, you and I, must remember everything.
We must especially remember those things we never knew.*⁴⁹

In the words of these Indigenous scholars lies hope for the possibility of all people to learn. There is nothing simple in seeking ways to think about the question on which this article has focused, how to think about the relationship between cultural appropriation of Indigenous knowledge and “deep” learning.⁵⁰ At the same time, we may come to recognize a responsibility and a potential in posing the question, never allowing ourselves the luxury of inertia in the face of no easy answers.

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⁴⁸ Page 257 – 258

⁴⁹ Valaskakis, 257-258.

⁵⁰ As this article closes and in response to an anonymous reviewer, I want to make clear that I am not talking about gaining “deep knowledge” but rather engaging in the never-ending process of learning, in this case, striving for “deep” learning that disrupts and interrupts business as usual.

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Celia Haig-Brown is a Professor at York University. Her research interests include decolonizing practices related to research methodology and pedagogy. Her recent SSHRC grants have focused on protocol for work between universities and Aboriginal communities as well as the place of education broadly defined in the regeneration of language and culture in First Nation communities.