

# Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues

## 31 An Indigenous Storywork Methodology

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## 31 An Indigenous Storywork Methodology

Jo-annArchibald (Q'um Q'um Xiiem)

I have stood in many different circles of people, praying for guidance from the Creator, to help us make a better world for younger and future generations. I speak from the heart, and from the teachings and experiences of the Coast Salish peoples of British Columbia, in particular the Sto:lo of the Lower Fraser River.<sup>1</sup> Sto:lo means “river.” We are strongly connected to the river systems in our traditional territory and to the resources of the river. My Indian name is Q'um Q'um Xiiem, which means “strong clear water.” I am named after a particular place.

The teachings that I speak of have persisted since “time immemorial” and were vibrant when contact with non-Indigenous peoples occurred 500 years ago in Canada (Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 36). In many of the aforementioned circles, the Elders of the Indigenous<sup>2</sup> communities share their perspectives, knowledges, and insights gained from many years of learning, teaching, and reflection.

I am an Indigenous educator who values the power and beauty of our stories to educate and heal people. I have had the privilege of learning from Indigenous Elders for over 30 years. In this chapter, I highlight some important understandings that I gained from Indigenous Elders about an Indigenous storywork methodology. I talk about Elders and [p. 372 ↓ ] their teachings as examples of Indigenous traditional, ecological, and cultural knowledges. Then I introduce the concept of *storywork* and an important Indigenous character, the Trickster, and show the relationship between Indigenous teachings and storywork. Stories of working with Indigenous Elders and learning *Indigenous Storywork* comprise a substantial part of this chapter. The Trickster gets the last word.

# Indigenous Elders: Teachings about Traditional, Ecological, and Cultural Knowledges

Indigenous Elders possess wisdom and insight gained from their traditional, ecological, and cultural knowledges (TEC) and lived experience. Age is not the sole determining factor for achieving Elder status. Usually, people who are not Elders determine or name individuals to Elder status. Elder Ellen White, from the Snuneymuxw First Nation (around Nanaimo, British Columbia) Coast Salish Nation, said this about Elder characteristics: “To be an elder you first have to be accepted, listened to and not laughed at. You have to be a good speaker. ... You always know where it's [knowledge] going to be in your memory, in your mind” (cited in Neel, 1992, p. 107). Elder Beatrice Medicine (1987) of the Lakota/Sioux Nation says: “Elders are repositories of cultural and philosophical knowledge and are the transmitters of such information” (p. 142). As noted in Ellen White's definition, respect from others and possessing cultural knowledge are critical characteristics.

I have heard Indigenous people say that what matters is how an individual “carries” her- or himself. They mean that an Elder must treat TEC knowledges respectfully and demonstrate responsibility or care in the process of sharing or teaching these forms of knowledge. *Traditional knowledge* is a timeless type of knowledge that includes values and philosophies that have been transmitted from generation to generation. *Ecological knowledge* relates to place-based knowing and environmental knowledge. *Cultural knowledge* focuses on ways of living and combines contemporary with traditional ways of knowing. These three forms of knowledge are interrelated and shaped by Indigenous language. They are not the only Indigenous ways of knowing.<sup>3</sup> Elders have various knowledges or “gifts” to pass on to others. These include knowledge about spirituality, healing, medicine, history, storytelling, and language.

The term *teachings* includes the notion of combining forms of knowledge with values such as respect and responsibility. In this chapter I talk about Elders who live their

good traditional teachings and carry on the tradition of compassionately and mindfully teaching others. Not all older people live good traditional teachings; therefore, they are not Elders.<sup>4</sup> Gregory Cajete (1994), a Tewa Indian from the Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, provides a definition of the “goodness” I am promoting:

The Indigenous ideal of living “a good life” in Indian traditions is at times referred to by Indian people as striving “to always think the highest thought.” ... Thinking the highest thought means thinking of one's self, one's community, and one's environment richly. This thinking in the highest, most respectful and compassionate way systematically influences the actions of both individuals and the community. It is a way to perpetuate “a good life,” a respectful and spiritual life, a wholesome life. (p. 46)

I am fortunate to have learned from Elders who have upheld and “carried” their cultural responsibility by passing their teachings to others in ways that are heartfelt [p. 373 ↓ ] and mindful of traditional, ecological, and cultural knowledges, cultural protocols, and oral tradition. In the next section I introduce Indigenous storywork and the tribal Trickster, who will journey along with us.

## Introducing Indigenous Storywork and a Tribal Trickster

During a Sto:lo cultural gathering, one of the organizing speakers tells the guests, “*My dear ones, it is time to start the work.*” When these words are spoken, it is time to give serious attention to what is said and done; this is the “cultural work.” The words *story* and *work* together signal the importance and seriousness of undertaking the educational and research work of making meaning through stories, whether they are traditional or lived experience stories. Seven principles comprise storywork: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity,<sup>5</sup> wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 1997).

The four Rs of *respect*, *responsibility*, *reverence*, and *reciprocity* are traditional values and teachings demonstrated toward the story, toward and by the storyteller and the listener, and practiced in the storywork context. The other three principles of *wholism*, *interrelatedness*, and *synergy* shape the quality of the learning process. Indigenous wholism comprises the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual domains of human development. Wholism also addresses the relationships among the self, family, community, wider world, and the environment. Effective storywork grows out of the actions of interrelatedness and synergy formed by the storyteller, the story, the listener, and the context in which the story is used. A transformative learning experience occurs by working with Indigenous stories and these seven principles. Storywork is also an Indigenous research methodology.

The research process of learning to make meaning through stories reminds me of a basket weaving experience. Sto:lo women weave cedar root baskets with their own trademark designs. During the basket making process, the pieces of cedar sometimes stand alone and sometimes they lose their distinctiveness and form a design. Similarly, the processes of research and learning to make story meaning are distinguishable as separate entities and sometimes they seem bound together, losing their distinctiveness. The basket designs that relate to research are the four Rs of *respect*, *reverence*, *responsibility*, and *reciprocity*.

The Trickster character helped me appreciate each of the storywork principles through an experiential approach of learning by feeling, thinking, and doing. In British Columbia, Aboriginal cultures have Trickster characters such as Raven and Coyote. In our stories, the multifaceted Trickster changes form and shape. The forms may range from human to any element of nature to a more sacred form. The Trickster often gets into trouble by ignoring good teachings such as sharing, caring, taking responsibility, and being fair and letting negative emotions such as greed and envy take over. Trickster's separation from cultural teachings and emotional connectedness to family, community, land, and Nation provide many life lessons as Trickster tries to reconnect to these teachings. Trickster is usually in motion, traveling and learning life lessons. Once in a while, Trickster surprises by using supernatural powers to help others. It is important not to be fooled by thinking that Trickster will use obvious "tricks" to get his/her/its way. I have learned to value Trickster's humorous learning ways and the process-oriented nature of teaching and learning through Indigenous stories.

Gerald Vizenor (1987) of the Minnesota Chippewa Nation also helped me appreciate the role of the tribal Trickster. He said that the Trickster is a “doing, not an essence, not [p. 374 ↓ ] a museum being, not an aesthetic presence” (p. 13). The notion of Trickster as a “doing” rather than a “being” fits with how I have come to appreciate the process of learning through Trickster stories. Trickster as a doing can change and live on through time as people interact with Trickster through stories. One does not have to be too concerned about what the Trickster looks like if he/she/it is a doing rather than a being. This notion of the tribal Trickster lets me interact with him/her/it. Coyote, then, helps me to reflect and gain understandings. He challenges and comforts me just like a critical friend.

Eber Hampton, Oklahoma Chickasaw Nation, told the following story to a gathering of researchers to whom he was talking about the relationship between research motives (why) and research methods (how). During his story and subsequent talk, I sensed there was much more to storytelling, and I knew that I had to rethink how I was going to find a meaningful place for stories in educational systems. Eber gave me permission to use this story and encouraged me to adapt it for storywork purposes.<sup>6</sup> I renamed the Trickster “Old Man Coyote” because Coyote, in all its forms, has become my Trickster of learning. The name “Old Man Coyote” called out to be named in this story.<sup>7</sup> In the background, we hear one of our Elders say, “*My dear ones, the work is about to begin.*”

Old Man Coyote had just finished a long hard day of hunting. He decided to set up his camp for the night. After supper, he sat by the fire and rubbed his tired feet from the long day's walk. He took his favorite moccasins out of his bag and noticed that there was a hole in the toe of one of them. He looked for his special bone needle to mend the moccasin but couldn't feel it in the bag. Old Man Coyote started to crawl on his hands and knees around the fire to see if he could see or feel the needle. Just then Owl flew by and landed next to Old Man Coyote and asked him what he was looking for. Old Man Coyote told Owl his problem. Owl said that he would help his friend look for the bone needle. After he made one swoop around the area of the fire, he told Old Man Coyote that he didn't see the needle. Owl said that if it was around the fire, then he would have spotted it. He then asked Old Man Coyote where he last used the needle. Old Man Coyote said that he used it quite far away, somewhere in the northern direction, to mend his jacket. Then Owl asked him why he was searching for the needle around

the campfire. Old Man Coyote said, “Well, it’s much easier to look for the needle here because the fire gives off such good light, and I can see much better here.”

I have behaved like Old Man Coyote many times, wanting to stay close to a cozy fire, wanting to continue to think, feel, and act in ways that are comfortable, familiar, and easy. But mentors like the Owl or the Elders come into my life to make me seek the bone needle—perhaps a solution for improving Indigenous education or finding a culturally appropriate research methodology. The search for the bone needle may mean going back to knowledge territories established by the Ancestors to gain clearer insights or find effective ways to bring heart and mind together in a modern-day educational context. Maybe the bone needle symbolizes something that could become a useful research tool. With the story Eber made me think and raise questions about the purpose and benefit of research. I challenged myself to find a culturally relevant way to carry out inquiry in order to make intellectual space for Indigenous methodology in academe. I also turned for help<sup>8</sup> to three Coast Salish Elders: Simon Baker, Vincent Stogan, and Ellen White. They taught me important research lessons about the four Rs of *respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity*.

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## Taking Direction from Elders: Chief Khot-La-Cha, Dr. Simon Baker

I have known Simon Baker since 1985 but have known about him for many more years in his role as Chief of his reserve, speaker for the Squamish people and ambassador for First Nations.<sup>9</sup> When I became the Supervisor of the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at the University of British Columbia, our group invited Simon Baker to speak to students on many occasions. He eventually became our NITEP Elder. Simon carries out his Elder teaching responsibilities with humor and life experience stories about cultural, political, social, and economic survival. My relationship with Simon took on a different teaching and learning dimension when he became one of my research advisors.<sup>10</sup>



I invited Simon to breakfast one day in the winter of 1990. We talked for quite a while. He spoke about his past life experiences. He always talks about his Ancestors and what they have taught him. Our talks are often like this. He readily agreed when I asked him to be one of my research advisors. I talked to Simon Baker many times from 1990 until his death in 2001. In the earlier years, I voiced my concerns about story representation and appropriation of stories. He helped me work through this concern by teaching me to appreciate the cultural concept of reciprocity. In the beginning stages of the research process he also helped me to conduct a pilot interview and data analysis. His guidance led me to use a storytelling interview approach.

Simon's determination to mentor others and to ensure that First Nations' cultural knowledge and values continue has helped me deal with "guilt" feelings associated with academic research. These feelings have not entirely disappeared, but now I am able to make space in academe to deal with ethical research issues and actions. Simon's latter years of life were devoted to sharing and teaching cultural knowledge that brought healing and good life to people. I have come to believe that bringing together cultural knowledge and research can create a better life for us and future generations.

Even though I am First Nations and have some initial understandings about various First Nations cultures, I become like an outsider when I use the "tools" of literacy to record my research observations and reflections on oral traditions and practices through fieldnotes and now through this publication. One of my journal entries states

I felt tension in doing my first ethnographic observations at an Elders' gathering for a fieldnote exercise. Tension/uneasiness because I had to record people's behaviours, their words in key phrases, the physical setting, the chronological order of events, which is antithetical to the way I normally participate in this type of cultural gathering. Even if I hadn't taken notes during the event, I viewed everything with different eyes. Tension/anxiety because I had to become and see like an outsider. To do this, I visualized the event within a circle, and I stood outside it and I looked in. The act of writing notes also made me feel like an outsider. Tension/resistance because I knew I would eventually be writing for others about what I had seen and interpreted,

thus transforming myself and culture. (J. Archibald, journal entries, May 27, June 20, and July 5, 1991)

The legacy of disrespectful research methods of early anthropologists, linguists, and health academics still looms over Indigenous communities. Community members are often skeptical of any researcher who comes to the community. Their concerns include the [p. 376 ↓] appropriation of Indigenous stories, knowledge, and even DNA (Menzies, 2004; Smith, 1999; Wuyee Wi Medeek, 2004). My affiliation with a research-intensive university shadows my First Nation identity and position. Simon helped me realize, though, that taking time to establish trusting relationships with research participants is critical. Once he illustrated the ethical issue of appropriation with an example of a time when someone used his words and knowledge without acknowledging him:

In my den, I have many tapes in there. A lot of them say, “Why don't you let us use it?” I say “No, unless you people invite me to do something. I'll be glad to do it. But I'm not going to give you what I got so that you can use it and say I did this.” That's what [so and so] did to me. Oh [so and so] sure used me. I don't mind it if you come, like you did. I gave you permission, that's good. I respect you for that and I know a lot of it will come out for good use. That's very good. (S. Baker, personal communication, February 18, 1992)

When Simon said those words, I felt very honored that Chief Simon Baker had agreed to be my guide and teacher. I also understood the importance of the responsibility that research should “come out for good use.” From these anxious ponderings, I began to realize that respect and responsibility must be an integral part of the relationship between the Elder and the researcher: respect for each other as human beings; respect and responsibility for the power of cultural knowledge, and respect and responsibility for cultural protocol, for honoring the authority and expertise of the Elder teacher. The principles of respect and responsibility include trust and being culturally worthy.

Floy Pepper, an Elder of the Choctaw Nation and one of my mentors, read an early draft of this chapter and told me that she was tired of reading about my anxious feelings and that what she thought I meant was that I was not feeling worthy and ready to receive the Elders' cultural knowledge and teachings. Her point was well taken and, upon reflection,

I agreed that not feeling culturally ready or culturally worthy was another dimension to the complex ethical feelings that I experienced. Now I understand that being culturally worthy means being intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually ready to fully absorb cultural knowledge. Getting ready in this wholistic way is like participating in a “cultural protocol” that Walter Lightning (1992) describes:

That term, protocol, refers to any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by ancient tradition that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request. The protocols differ according to the nature of the request and the nature of the individuals involved. The actions and statements may be outwardly simple and straightforward, or they may be complex, involving preparation lasting a year or more. The protocols may often involve the presentation of something. It would be a mistake to say that what is presented is symbolic of whatever may be requested, or the relationship that it is hoped will be established, because it is much more than symbolic. (p. 216)

In addition, the researcher must trust and have patience that the Elder is guiding the learning process in a culturally appropriate way. The Elder must also be culturally trustworthy. When I talk about trust, I do not mean that one should have “blind” trust, but one must know when an Elder is also worthy of trust and respect. In the background, I hear Old Man Coyote asking for the easy answer to how one knows.

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## Telling Stories as a Way of Interviewing

*Sit down and listen, and that's the thing, our Ancestors used to say.*

—Chief Simon Baker (personal communication, February 17, 1992)

Sources of fundamental and important Indigenous knowledge are the land, our spiritual beliefs and ceremonies, traditional teachings of Elders, stories, and our

lived experiences. Knowing the values and interrelated actions of responsibility, respect, reverence, and reciprocity are essential to understanding Elders' teachings. Understandings and insights also result from lived experiences and critical reflections on those experiences. Many Aboriginal people have said that, in order to understand ourselves and our situation today, we must know where we come from and know what has influenced us. The historical and intergenerational effects of colonization and assimilation still affect our people and communities today. Elders' life stories can show how we, as Indigenous Peoples, can keep our cultural knowledges intact.

In my early interviews with Simon, I used a reflexive approach—as discussed by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983)—to explore issues that bothered me. I wanted some general direction about how to start the research process. I wanted to ask Simon's advice about whom I might approach and how I should start my research work. I also needed to discuss ways of getting people to work with me and to discuss ethical concerns about research such as appropriation of cultural knowledge.

As I continued to work with Simon, our talks (interviews) moved from an issues-based process to “research as conversation” to “research as chat” (Haig-Brown, 1992, pp. 104–105) and then to “research as storytelling.” Research as conversation is characterized as an open-ended interview with opportunity for both sides to engage in talk. Research as chat occurs when the researcher is very familiar with the participant(s) and they interact on a frequent basis. As I reflect upon the interview process many years later, I characterize the talking process as one during which Simon, the Elder, maintained control over the knowledge he wanted me to know. But he also was interested in what I thought about various matters and what issues I was concerned about in my role (at the time) as Director of the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia. On many occasions, Simon told life experience stories to exemplify leadership and political strategies that had implications for me: thus, research as storytelling.

I stopped using the taperecorder early on in our research relationship. Instead, I took written and “oral and heart memory” notes after discussions. Leilani Holmes (2000) realized the importance of blood memory and heart knowledge in her research work with Hawaiian Elders: “As I listened to the *kupuna* [Elder], it seemed as if through them, knowledge lodged in the heart of the listener, memory flowed through blood lines, and

the land was given voice and agency” (p. 40). For me, the experience of taking oral and heart memory notes has similar meaning.

Simon stressed the importance of living honorably and showing respect to everyone because “in time,” he said, “that respect could be returned to you” (S. Baker, personal communication, February 17, 1992). Simon's teachings guided me to seek out those Elders who continue to practice and pass on their cultural teachings. The cycle of reciprocity and reverence toward the spiritual are more dynamics of storywork.

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## Tsimilano, Dr. Vincent Stogan, Musqueam Elder: Tsimilano's Teaching of Hands Back and Hands Forward

*My dear ones, form a circle and join hands in prayer. In joining hands, hold your left palm upward to reach back to grasp the teachings of the Ancestors. Hold your right palm downward to pass these teachings on to the younger generation. In this way, the teachings of the Ancestors continue and the circle of human understanding and caring grows stronger.*

During the process of learning about interviewing, I experienced similarly valuable lessons about respect, responsibility, and reciprocity between teacher and learner from another respected cultural teacher of the Musqueam people, Dr. Vincent Stogan, Tsimilano, which means “A Great Man.” I also learned more about the principle of reverence. Vincent Stogan is a Spiritual Healer who works with many people across Canada and the United States. He and his wife, whom everyone calls “Mom,” carry on the traditional healing and spiritual work passed down to him by his relatives. One day he told me how they got this important responsibility.

A lot of Elders wanted me to take my grandfather's place. ... He was a great healer, that old man. He was blind but he said when I was little. ...

“You are the one that's going to take my place and do this kind of work.” I never thought of it until I was old enough. ... I was about 45 years old I guess when we [Mom and I] noticed that our Elders were going fast, so we made up our minds that we had better do the work they want us to do.

We put our minds to it and then started the healing work. (V. Stogan, personal communication, August 16, 1994)

Vincent Stogan's relatives trained him in the spiritual ways. The spiritual dimension of the wholistic paradigm I mentioned earlier became more evident with my interaction with Elder Vincent Stogan. I had known Vincent since 1990 and watched him work at numerous gatherings, until his death in 2000. He was also an Elder Advisor to the students, staff, and faculty of the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia where I worked.

I started my conversations about oral traditions and began a research learning relationship with Vincent Stogan in 1991. In our first session, Vincent immediately became the teacher and I the learner (similar to the relationship between Simon Baker and me). Sto:lo cultural ways guided our teacher–learner relationship. I approached Vincent Stogan, a respected keeper of the culture, because I wanted to learn about a topic I did not know very much about. As an insider of the culture, I observed a cultural learning protocol: The Elder determined where we should meet, I ensured that there was sharing of food and tea, and I created unhurried time and talking space so that we could get to the topic of discussion at the “right” moment. It would have been disrespectful to ask my questions immediately. During breakfast we talked about many things. I told Vincent about my research interest in our oral traditions. I also spoke about the kinds of things I wanted to know, such as the way people learned to be storytellers and how people learned from stories. As he began to talk, he assumed the role of teacher and I understood that he was agreeing to teach me. His comments show how he intended to direct the learning process:

Another way that I can help you get to know these things—it won't be just like [p. 379 ↓ ] us talking now, it'll take time. I can go just so far and maybe we carry on some other time ... because this is the teaching

that we got that we can't hurry everything. ... Well, I think knowing you this long, I know your parents now, where you're from, I'm willing to help you. I trust you and I know you're our kind. (V. Stogan, personal communication, May 17, 1991)

When Vincent talked about knowing my parents and knowing where I am from, I understood him to mean that our culture bonded us together in important ways. He felt responsible to help me because of our cultural bond. His decision to help me by becoming my teacher, and our subsequent talks made me realize that, as a learner, I too have responsibilities. Our relationship as teacher and learner had to be based on respect for each other and respect for the traditional cultural ways of teaching and learning, and reverence for spirituality. I also realized that reciprocity was essential to our working together. As learner, I needed to listen carefully and think “hard” about the meanings in Vincent's personal stories and his words. I could then check my knowledge and understandings with him to ensure their accuracy. Vincent carried out his Elder responsibility by teaching and also ensuring the correctness of the learning. My part then included acquiring and validating my understandings and eventually sharing them and becoming a teacher to others. This reciprocal action has a cyclical nature that is embedded in the “hands back, hands forward” teaching noted earlier.

Vincent also carried out important spiritual cultural work. He opened gatherings with prayer and sometimes song. He taught the “younger” ones the spiritual ceremonies in Sto:lo territory. The importance of addressing spiritual needs and asking for spiritual guidance from the Creator became an important teaching for me and continues to guide my work. One time Vincent told me: “We always pray first to the Creator. ... I think in your kind of work using [spirituality] will help you a lot. It's no shame to pray to the Creator” (V. Stogan, personal communication, May 17, 1991).

Elder Vincent Stogan provided me with guidance about how to conduct story research, and he taught me more about traditional spiritual teachings and cultural knowledge. He often telephoned me or dropped by the First Nations Longhouse to ask how things were going, or to say that he and Mom were going traveling. He called me his niece, although we are not directly related by kinship. I stopped taping and interviewing him and followed, for a while, the research as chat approach. I then switched to a traditional approach of learning from Tsimilano, as he first directed me: learning pieces at a time

and not hurrying the learning. I watched him speak many times and at many different gatherings. We shared many private talks. What he taught me is in my oral memory and an important part of my heart knowledge and my spiritual being. His teachings are reflected on the pages of this publication and often guide my interactions with others.

Vincent Stogan also made a significant impact upon the work of the First Nations House of Learning by teaching us the importance of beginning our work, especially events, with prayer. He often opened many of the general university gatherings with prayer. His prayers said in the Halq'emeylem language helped to create a respectful atmosphere in which to interact. Tsimilano's teachings about the importance of the spiritual for learning continue in various forms throughout many First Nations learning and research environments today.

Establishing relationships within the storywork research context has become a way of establishing and sustaining lasting friendships with deep caring and endless stories [p. 380 ↓ ] and talk. Learning to listen with patience, learning about cultural responsibility toward the oral tradition, learning to make self-understandings, continuing the cycle of reciprocity about cultural knowledge, and practicing reverence are some of the lessons I experienced with Chief Simon Baker and Elder Vincent Stogan. These lessons and others are inherent in my relationship with Kwulasulwut, Elder Ellen White, who is from the Coast Salish, Snuneymuxw people. Kwulasulwut means "Many Stars." Elder Ellen White is my mentor, teacher, and dear friend. Ellen helped me gain a deeper appreciation of the teachings about respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity that I applied to storywork for educational and research purposes.

## The Teachings of Kwulasulwut, Ellen White

I met Ellen White in 1991, but I knew about her long before that. For many years I admired Ellen's work as storyteller, writer, and healer. She has published storybooks (1981, 1995) and currently has one in press. I attended a public lecture given by Ellen at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia. She used stories, humor, song, and drum to engage listeners. Being there, hearing her words, took me back to another time and place when I listened to the Sto:lo Elders. After her talk, I introduced myself and acknowledged her good words, a teaching that I remember



from Chief Simon Baker. He often said, “Go speak to the Elders. It feels good when someone acknowledges your work.” This was the first time that I followed his teaching with someone I did not know. During our short talk, Ellen said that she thought she knew me from other times. I knew immediately that I wanted to work with and learn from her.

Our storywork relationship began when Ellen participated in a curriculum project in which Aboriginal students from across Canada wrote about their Aboriginal heroes. They wrote life experience stories, and some recounted traditional cultural stories. Ellen also agreed to participate in an interview and talk with me about the voices/teachings of the Ancestors for educational purposes. Our talk was taped, transcribed, cooperatively edited, and published in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (White & Archibald, 1992) with Ellen as the lead author. The following story exemplifies research issues about analyzing and representing cultural knowledge that emerged during our talk.

I traveled to Ellen's and her husband Doug's home to work on the journal article. When I arrived, Ellen served salmon chowder and bannock. As we ate, Doug and I teased each other about who drank the strongest coffee—me from the Sto:los or him from the Snuneymuxw Coast Salish. In a way we are related by the Halq'emeylem language. We come from the same cultural traditions. I felt accepted and at home there; I felt like a member of their extended family. Before we began working, I offered Ellen a Star blanket as a gift from the First Nations House of Learning, to thank her for helping us with this important work. When her husband left, I took out the tape recorder, and we sat at the dining room table. I reviewed the intent of the talk, the purpose of the publication, and the process of how we could work together: I would record and transcribe the talk, review the written transcript with her, and get her approval before the text—her story, her words, and her work—would be published (similar to the process used by Cruickshank, Sidney, Smith, & Ned, 1990; Wickwire & Robinson, 1989, 1992). Ellen asked what I would add to her words. I said that I wanted to write about what I had learned from her words and that our article would be cooperative: she and I would be the authors. Ellen said that she liked that [p. 381 ↓] approach because I could question what was not clear and add parts that were missing. Then Ellen began talking about some of her Ancestors; after a few minutes, she said to turn the tape recorder on.

I remember feeling excited and challenged emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually after I left the White's home. My journal entry notes:

I feel almost overwhelmed! What a rich experience—to be involved at so many levels. ... I get immersed in her stories. When Ellen talks about her Ancestors, it is as if she is “there with them”—her voice changes and she sounds as if she is her granny. I recall the power of her metaphors: trees, baskets, canoes, hair, paths, air/body. I see these images so vividly and, when I do the comparison and connection of them to life, considerations are so clear, so evident. (J. Archibald, journal entry, September 18, 1992)

The metaphors visually reinforce one teaching that has guided me since that day: Begin learning with the “core” of knowledge starting from the inside and going to the surface, the outside. Ellen said:

They said, “You learn the base, the very basic, the inside, the stem, and the core.” It sort of sounds like it when you translate it, the core of what you are learning and then expand out. The teacher will already know that—“It is like a big tree, never mind the apples or flowers, we're going to learn inside first and then out,” they said, “never from outside first.” (E. White, personal communication, September 18, 1992)

Ellen's Ancestors also said that it is important to take time to sit and think about and feel what we have learned. Until my encounter with Ellen, I had thought more about uncovering the layers of meaning from story—going from the outside surface to the depths. Now, I had to completely rethink this approach and to go once more to the unknown to find this particular “bone needle.”

On subsequent visits with Ellen, we reviewed the written transcripts for editing purposes. I suggested this process in response to Ellen's question about how I was going to use her talk and what was going to be put in print. My journal notes

Ellen is so good to work with. She knows what words and information she wants kept in, what might be inappropriate for the readers, and

what is culturally inappropriate for this article (i.e., particular healing and spiritual practices). (J. Archibald, journal entry, November 11, 1992)

This research experience with Ellen made me realize some of the complexities of cooperative research work with Elders such as requiring a lot of time to record, listen to, and transcribe recordings verbatim; examining together the correctness of English words that become public cultural record for future generations; and ensuring that the cooperating research partners are both satisfied with an article before it is published.

Ellen took the lead at the beginning of the transcription work, deciding what words and sections to keep and what to leave out. I gave her feedback on her directives and, by the end of the transcript, I could tell that our process was similar to that described by Walter Lightning (1992) and Carl Urion (personal communication, December 1, 1992) as “mutual thinking”: When we came to certain parts, we simultaneously identified them. I think our process of getting to know one another, sharing the same cultural traditions, and establishing a consensual working approach led to mutual thinking.

Out of the complexities I gained an appreciation for four principles: respect for each other and for the cultural knowledge; [p. 382 ↓ ] responsibly carrying out the roles of teacher and learner (a serious approach to the work and being mindful of what readers/ other learners can comprehend); practicing reciprocity where we each give to the other, thereby continuing the cycle of knowledge from generation to generation; and reverence toward spiritual knowledge and one's spiritual being.

## Hands Back, Hands Forward

In the process of learning how to make meaning through stories, which is a core part of Indigenous knowledge, I reached back to the Elders of the Coast Salish communities to receive their teachings. I spent considerable time trying to understand these teachings. Ellen's thoughts about learning the Ancestors' knowledge are worth repeating here: “You could study the [A]ncestors, but without a deep feeling of communication with them it would be surface learning and surface talking” (cited in Neel, 1992, p. 108). Over many years, I learned about the storywork principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy for educational and

research applications. My research-learning relationships with three Elders, Khot-La-Cha, Tsimilano, and Kwulasulwut, also resulted in an intimate understanding of the four Rs of story-work research as an example of Indigenous methodology: respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity. I purposefully detailed the four Rs because I want readers to understand these teachings. The four Rs can also become too comfortable, like staying close to Old Man Coyote's fire, and they can become a cliché, thereby losing their power. There is much more to the storywork research process and to the topic of Indigenous methodology<sup>11</sup> that remains unsaid, waiting for the next chance to tell a story.

In Coast Salish tradition, I hold my hand out to share my storywork methodology with you. For anyone who is interested in using this storywork methodology, I echo Chief Khot-La-Cha, Simon Baker's words, "Take what is useful," when learning something new. I also echo what Thomas King, Cherokee storyteller, scholar, and writer cautions: "Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous" (2003, p. 9). The danger exists when we do not have a deep understanding of the power and beauty of Indigenous stories. As Old Man Coyote joins the circle of Indigenous methodology, he holds out his palm and smiles, wondering how we and future generations will look for the bone needle.

## Notes

1. The term Coast Salish is used to describe the First Nations along the southwest coast of British Columbia. Sto:lo is one of the Coast Salish Nations. Sto:lo means "river" in the Halq'emeylem language. The lower Fraser River, and its tributaries between Yale and the Strait of Georgia, are the river boundaries of the Sto:lo cultural area.
2. The terms Indian, Indigenous, Aboriginal, and First Nations are used interchangeably, even though First Nations in some contexts is limited to mean Status Indian people. For the purposes of this article, Indian, Indigenous, Aboriginal, and First Nations refer to a person of Aboriginal ancestry. Indigenous will also signal that the matters affecting Aboriginal people are global: We share a history of colonization, and we strive to revitalize our knowledges and regain self-governance. Even though I write about a

specific Indigenous culture and the geographical area of British Columbia, Canada, the storywork principles have relevance to territories beyond Canada.

3. See Marie Battiste (2002), Gregory Cajete (2000), Marlene Brant Castellano (2000), Fyre Jean Graveline (1998), Eber Hampton (1995), Oscar Kawageley (2001), Carolyn Kenny (1998), Jane Mt. Pleasant (2001), and Cora Weber-Pillwax [p. 383 ↓ ] for diverse discussions about Indigenous knowledge.

4. Aboriginal communities and organizations across Canada have various ways of identifying and working with Elders, and their criteria may differ from mine.

5. I am thankful to Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt (1991) for pointing out the importance of the “four Rs” (respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity) for Indigenous postsecondary education in their milestone article “First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility.”

6. There are many complex issues concerning appropriation of First Nations stories, culturally appropriate times to tell particular stories, and who has authority to tell stories. The solutions to the issues are diverse and reflect the diverse nature of Aboriginal Nations in Canada. In this chapter, basic examples of ethical practices for storywork are introduced. Asking or getting permission to tell a story, and stating the name and nation of the person from whom the story is acquired, are examples.

7. I share the “Old Man Coyote and the Bone Needle” story because it is one of the stories that connected to me on an emotional level first, and made me shift my thinking and challenged me to continue learning about the educational significance of Sto:lo and Indigenous stories by going on a research journey.

8. These Elders have worked with numerous people in a diverse ways. Often an Elder will determine the learning approach based on the needs and interests of the learner. These approaches may be very different from the story approach that I have discussed in this chapter.

9. Verna J. Kirkness (1994) worked with Simon Baker to document his life story. See *Khot-La-Cha: The Autobiography of Chief Simon Baker*.

10. At the time of my request, I was undertaking my doctoral research at Simon Fraser University, Faculty of Education. I completed my dissertation in 1997.

11. See the following sources for critical discussions about Indigenous research: Marie Battiste and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson (2000), Karen Swisher and John Tippeconnic III (1999), Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), Linda Smith (1999), and Shawn Wilson (2003).

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