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**APPLYING INDIGENOUS
RESEARCH METHODS**

**Storying with Peoples and
Communities**

*Edited by Sweeney Windchief and
Timothy San Pedro*

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CONTENTS

To those who have walked the path before us so that we can forward lessons to our relations, both current and still to come.

1

HANDS BACK, HANDS FORWARD FOR INDIGENOUS STORYWORK AS METHODOLOGY

*Jo-ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem [Stó:lō and St'at'imc]
and Amy Parent Nox Ayaawilt [Nisga'a]*

Introduction

We follow Indigenous protocol by first acknowledging the First Peoples' traditional, ancestral, and unceded lands on which we work, study, and play: the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Stó:lō First Nations. Second, we introduce ourselves.

I, Jo-ann Archibald, am also known as Q'um Q'um Xiiem, which means "strong clear water." My father is Stó:lō (people of the river) from southwestern British Columbia (BC) and my mother is St'at'imc from the interior region of BC. I grew up on the unceded land of the Stó:lō people, so I identify with the river systems and resources of the rivers.

My name is Amy Parent. My mother's side of the family is Nisga'a in northern BC from the House of Ni'isjoohl. We belong to the Ganada (frog) Clan. On my father's side, I am French and German. My Nisga'a name is Nox Ayaawilt (Mother of the Capable One). This name connects me to my mother and signifies the importance of the matrilineal culture that flows through my bloodlines.

This chapter on Indigenous storywork (ISW) will show how we, separately, and then cooperatively with each other, developed intergenerational learning and research relationships; how the seven ISW principles exemplify an Indigenous research methodology within our respective Indigenous communities; and how ISW can be used with other communities. The seven ISW principles include: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy. These principles facilitate meaning making through and with Indigenous stories, which may be of a traditional nature or about lived experiences. Our article also exemplifies the *Hands Back, Hands Forward* Indigenous teaching in our research interactions, which opens space for others to join the ISW circle. Indigenous tricksters, such as Raven and Coyote, will join our conversations at times.

Q'um Q'um Xiiem Jo-ann's Story

I began writing this reflective piece about ISW on a rainy day on the west coast of BC, Canada, in Vancouver. Just over 20 years ago, I completed my PhD through Simon Fraser University, *Coyote learns to make a storybasket: The place of First Nations stories in education* (Archibald, 1997). Imagine writing a doctoral thesis about a coyote learning to make a storybasket in this time period! I had finished a marvelous research-focused learning journey about Indigenous stories, storytelling, and meaning-making. The learning journey was incredible, but the thesis writing process was difficult, complex, and often fraught with anxiety. I smile when I think about accomplishments because my two-year-old granddaughter says joyfully, "I did it," when she is proud of completing a task. However, I did not accomplish the PhD research and thesis alone. I had Coyote, Elders, cultural knowledge holders, storytellers, my thesis committee, and my family supporting me. It was this vibrant support system of diverse communities that made me keep going and that provided good teachings so that I could become comfortable with a research approach and style of writing that was both academic and Indigenous. Most importantly, I undertook a research project that was very meaningful to me and beneficial to Indigenous people and education. I learned from mainly Coast Salish Elders— Stó:lō, Musqueam, Squamish, and Snuneymuxw, using mainly Indigenous oral traditions about the nature of Indigenous stories, how they learned through story or lived storied lives, and good ways to engage with them in a research relationship, which will be shared later in my story.

Towards the end of my doctoral thesis, I was able to name the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical framework that I had developed for understanding the power and beauty of Indigenous stories for educational purposes: Indigenous storywork¹. In many Coast Salish cultural gatherings, when we hear the words, "My dear ones, the work is about to begin" we stop talking to others and pay attention to the important work that will start soon. I felt that using the term "work" with "story" signaled that it is time to pay serious attention to how stories can be used in research and education, and more. I used ISW for a few years for teaching and research purposes and then published the book, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Archibald, 2008) after I felt that the ISW principles could be applied in other contexts. An Indigenous teaching that compliments ISW is shared next.

Hands Back, Hands Forward

Hands Back, Hands Forward is an Indigenous teaching from the late First Nation Elder, Dr. Vincent Stogan, Tsimilano, from Musqueam, who was an exemplary mentor and teacher to many at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and elsewhere. In our gatherings, he often asked us to form a circle in order to share some good words and thoughts to establish a comfortable environment before

beginning our work together. In the circle, we extend our left palm upwards, to symbolize reaching back to receive teachings (knowledge and values) from the Ancestors and those who have travelled before us. We are given the challenge and opportunity to put these teachings into our everyday lives. We then have a responsibility to pass those teachings to others, especially the younger generation, which is shown when we put our right palm downwards. In the circle we join hands in respect, reverence, responsibility and reciprocity. Elder Stogan's teaching also exemplifies inter-generational learning.

Indigenous Storywork Methodology

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) introduced the 4Rs in higher education: *respect* for the Indigenous student, *relevance* to the Indigenous student's culture, *responsibility* for making the university more responsive to Indigenous students, and *reciprocity* where those involved with the university and the student share or benefit from each other's knowledges. I adapted the Rs of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity to serve as ethical principles and practices for working with people and their Indigenous knowledge (IK) of which stories are a core part. Instead of relevance, I used reverence to signify deep respect and honor to stories and their use. All of the ISW principles exemplify relevance to Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous stories. I will highlight some important teachings that Elders helped me to learn and use regarding the ISW 4Rs noted below, which should be viewed as a catalyst for sparking research actions. With each Elder and Elders' group, I learned much more.

Respect

Khot-la-cha, Dr. Simon Baker, Squamish Nation, said "Sit down and listen, and that's the thing, our ancestors used to say" (Personal communication, February 1992)². Over a 10-year plus learning/research relationship I learned how to sit down and listen in order to really hear and then to understand what the Elders, cultural knowledge holders, and storytellers were saying about the role of stories for learning. Developing respectful ISW relationships takes time and cannot be achieved in a one- to two-hour interview. Listening involves using all of our wholistic realms of heart/emotional, mind/intellectual, body/physical, and spirit in relationship to oneself, family, community, or Nation.

Reverence

Tsimilano, Dr. Vincent Stogan said to 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" (personal communication, May 1991)³. Tsimilano always used his Indigenous language to say some prayerful/thankful words at the beginning of a gathering. He would make time for people to connect to their

inner being, to each other, and to the Indigenous topic being discussed. The concept of reverence is very personal and subjective. I learned to appreciate and practice reverence in my personal life and in research through prayer, ceremony, and being in nature. Tsimilano also taught me over a 10-year period, and used a method where he would teach me a little bit at a time, rather than expecting that I would learn all that I needed to know at one time. I think that the concept of reverence is one where we can learn about it, a little bit at a time, in order to appreciate its full meaning.

Responsibility

Kwulasulwut, Dr. Ellen White, Snuneymuxw Nation, co-authored a journal article with me. She guided me to learn about the “core” of a story, which is an important responsibility⁴. When she spoke she talked about her ancestors’ teachings:

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 if it’s flowers [instead], we’re going to learn inside first, and then out, they said. Never from outside first.

(White & Archibald, 1992, p. 154)

I experienced a turning point in my research when Ellen shared these thoughts about the need to learn the core of a story. To me, the core meant learning about the values, beliefs, and the essence of a story, which could transcend time and place.

Reciprocity

I returned to the Stó:lō Elders to learn more about Stó:lō storytelling and making story-meaning through group research meetings that spanned a four-year period, from 1992 to 1996⁵. I learned more about how traditional and life-experience stories filled their everyday lives as children; how intimately culture (IK) and stories were intertwined with experiential, land-based, and intergenerational learning; and why Indigenous story-pedagogy was so important. On this last point, Shirley Leon, former coordinator of this Elders’ group and now an Elder said, “The old way, you had to really think ... you had to figure it out, they wouldn’t give you the answer, you had to figure it out” (personal communication, December 1995). It took me a few years to figure out what the Elders were telling me. The seven ISW principles became my cultural way of “giving-back,” which is a reciprocal action that sustains stories. The three other principles of wholism, inter-relatedness, and synergy could serve as actions to create story-meanings.

Coyote interrupts saying, “It’s about time that I have some space in this chapter to tell a story about me!”

...
Before Coyote tells a story, I acknowledge that Dr. Eber Hampton of the Chickasaw Nation told this story at a research conference. He talked about the relationship or lack of one regarding motives and methods for research. Dr. Hampton eventually gave me permission to use this story and to adapt it to suit my cultural context. I renamed the Trickster, Old Man Coyote because Coyote in all its forms has become my Trickster of learning. Perhaps Coyote can illuminate the remaining three ISW principles?

Coyote’s Story: Searching for the Bone Needle

Old Man Coyote (OMC) has just finished a long, hard day of hunting. He decided to set up his camp for the night by starting a fire for his meal. After supper, he sat by the cozy warm 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. He went around and around the fire. Just then Owl came flying by and landed next to OMC. He 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 OMC that he didn’t see the needle. Owl said that if it were around the fire, then he would have spotted it. He then asked OMC where he last used the needle. Old Man Coyote said that he used it quite far away, over in the bushes, to mend his jacket. Then Owl asked OMC why he kept going around and around the campfire when the needle clearly was not there. Old Man Coyote replied, “Well, it’s easier to look for the needle here because the fire gives off such good light, and I can see better here.” (adapted slightly, Archibald, 2008, pp. 35–36)

When I first heard this story in the early 1990s, I thought that OMC’s actions of going around and around the fire were like the types of qualitative and quantitative research that were used “on” or “about” Indigenous people because academics were accustomed to using methodologies that they knew and they either did not know or did not accept that these methodologies were disrespectful, inappropriate, and harmful (Smith, 1999).

But Coyote says that is only one interpretation. Coyote is thankful that I decided to go out into the dark, to not stay around the fire complaining about “bad” research. I am thankful that my mentors (maybe the Owl) encouraged me to let my emotions, my inner spirit do some problem-solving (physical action) about story research in order to find the bone needle. Over the years, I have

pondered various meanings about this OMC story. What is more exciting are the listener responses that are shared when I tell this story for teaching and for research purposes. In the oral sharing process a synergistic action, like a spark, happens when someone talks about an idea, emotion, or action and someone else catches that spark to kindle another idea, emotion, or action. Amy Parent has caught this spark throughout her graduate education and continues to kindle and make it bright. However, the trickster might say that it found Amy and guided her to use ISW, which is why I asked Amy to co-author this chapter with me. Now, it is Amy's turn to tell her story.

Nox Ayaawilt Amy's Story

In being impacted (lit by the spark) by Jo-ann's OMC story, I am reminded of the times that I sometimes travel with a trickster friend, who often joins me in synchronistic learning moments. This friend has been known by many names by various Indigenous communities (Coyote, Napi, etc.). In my culture, we refer to this character as Txeemsim, which means trickster, or miracle worker in the Nisga'a language. According to Nisga'a Elder Bert McKay, Txeemsim displays the best ideals and behavior for which humankind should strive. But he is an approachable demi-god, full of human failings, even as he demonstrates how these failings can be conquered (as cited in Rose, 1995). In many of the stories, the Trickster also teaches us how to create balance and harmony in our lives; in this way, Txeemsim demonstrates how I have attempted to prepare for ISW while also highlighting a number of "teachable moments" that are filled with humor, complexity, and transformation. For this part of the chapter, I detail my preparation and ongoing training with ISW under the mentorship of Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Jo-ann.

I begin engaging ISW by saying a prayer, making a food offering to my ancestors and request K'am Ligii Hahlhaahl (Chief of Heavens) to guide my work in a balanced and heart-centered way. I have learned this from Jo-ann, Elders, and community spiritual leaders. Showing my deep reverence for all of creation through prayer and ceremony has become a stronger presence in my life as I continue to expand my knowledge and understandings of Nisga'a epistemology and ontology and is the first ISW principle (reverence) that guides the opening of this chapter.

It has been 10 years since I first began formal mentorship with Jo-ann, who has transformed from being my master's (Parent, 2009), to my doctoral (Parent, 2014), then post-doctoral supervisor and now life-long mentor. Txeemsim chuckles and says "She can't get rid of you." I am deeply appreciative of her patience and gentle guidance in teaching me about ISW over the years. It is an incredible honor and a gift to be invited to write this chapter with her. I understand this mentorship to be a pedagogical enactment of the ISW principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity and reverence (Archibald, 2008), which are

ultimately an act of kindness that connects us and brings us into relationship with each other. Through the reciprocal act of mentorship and learning we enact Elder Vincent Stogan's *Hands Back, Hands Forward* teachings and *Sidaxgigat'inimhl Gagoodim* (We strengthen ourselves and our hearts).

I began working with ISW on Musqueam territory as a master's student in the Faculty of Education at the UBC. Here my friend Txeemsim makes an appearance and cajoles me by reminding me that I did not know that I was engaging an ISW process in my master's research until after it was completed (Parent, 2011). For my master's study (Parent, 2009), I examined urban Aboriginal youth's experiences of wholistic education that was delivered by non-profit Aboriginal youth organizations in Vancouver, BC. I used an intergenerational methodology with Elder Jerry Adams who is also from the Nisga'a Nation. Jerry provided mentorship to me and co-facilitated a sharing circle with eight Aboriginal youth to learn more about their thoughts and experiences of IK and wholism. I then did follow up interviews with the youth and Jerry to learn more about the understandings they derived about IK during the sharing circle. As I reflect on this research, it is clear that I was engaging ISW principles of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity as well as Kirkness and Barnhardt's "R"—of *relevance* and with an additional "R" *relationships* as ethical guidelines for the research. I see now how wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy impacted my research story and the analysis that I created as result of these ISW principles being put into action. It was also during this time, that I first encountered my friend Txeemsim who taught me a lot in those early days about working with Elders and the high ethical standards that are required to work with Aboriginal youth in research.

I have since worked with ISW for my doctoral dissertation (Parent, 2014, 2017), recent scholarship in teacher education (Kerr & Parent, 2015) and in my pedagogical practices in the university classroom. My doctoral research project focused on high school to university transitions for Indigenous youth at four research-intensive universities in BC, Canada. I created an Indigenous northwest coast bentwood box research design by weaving together key research stories with Txeemsim and the teachings I received from Delgamuux (Earl Muldon), a master carver and hereditary Chief of the Gitksan Nation. I engaged ISW in my interviews with Aboriginal youth, staff and faculty who had worked or participated in an Aboriginal early university promotion initiative or Aboriginal transition program at a BC university. I am also grateful to my Aboriginal guidance committee (AGC) that provided mentorship to me throughout my doctoral research journey. The AGC included various Indigenous people with extensive professional experience working with Aboriginal youth in BC. Working with ISW in this study reaffirmed my awareness that many Aboriginal people grow into storytellers in the course of their lives. It was a challenge at times to ask youth to share their stories because of their shyness and I learned that including a photo-voice method in ISW was useful for working with young participants. I did not have this challenge with the faculty, staff and community members that I interviewed for the study, all were well-versed storytellers of their experiences, and I was grateful to learn from the stories that were shared with me in the study.

As hinted at by Txeemsim, my experience of preparing and training for ISW has been circuitous, full of surprises and synchronistic moments and is certainly a life-long and life wide process. It was not until the end of my master's program that I began to learn the importance of connecting with the land when engaging ISW in research. Although I had grown up with a deep connection to the land and waterways in Gitxsan territories, the time that I spent in the academy and city began to sever this relationship. It was also during this time that I began to embrace ISW as a research methodology by coming to know and learn more about my family history and through the mentorship that I received from Elder Jerry Adams.

Later, during my doctoral research it became impossible for me to work with the stories that I was analyzing without first going out onto the land to show my appreciation for her life giving presence. I have learned it is important to enact the ISW principle of wholism in a heart-centered way by being in sync with my body, mind, heart, and spirit when working with stories. I often walk amongst a majestic family of cedar trees on Squamish territory. I visit this place frequently as part of my writing and life-long learning process so I can listen to the wisdom of the cedar trees in solitude. In doing so, I also create a space in my heart, mind, body, and spirit to be open to the questions and answers that come to me. The deep reverence I feel when I am in communion with the land and trees allows me return to a heart centered place that facilitates the ISW process and allows me to return to my computer to write, *think*, and *feel* with the stories that I am engaging through the seven ISW principles that I spend time defining below.

In research, the principle of responsibility means that I honor all ethical protocols and community expectations before, during, and after each research project. I also ensure that my research is accountable to my family, my community, and my Nation by expanding my understandings of Nisga'a epistemology and ontology by learning more about our *adaawak* (oral history stories) and *ayuukwul* (laws and protocols) through the Nisga'a language.

Reciprocity in research is understood in terms of affirming relationships and sharing (Kuokkanen, 2007). Not only is sharing vital to the collective benefit of Indigenous peoples, it also serves as an active form of resistance to the hegemonic forces of research and contributes to decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999). At the completion of my master's and doctoral work, I undertook a number of knowledge mobilization projects to ensure that the research findings were shared with Aboriginal communities, participants, the university, K-12 school system, and policymakers. I also continue to share the stories of my research in the classroom to teach Indigenous methodologies.

Synergy and inter-relatedness are ISW principles that unfold when I am in a receptive state to receive the teachings that come from a story. They also helped to bring together the analysis of the findings of my doctoral work and my Indigenous methodological research design in another "aha" moment. Usually, my friend Txeemsim signals when these principles come to light.

Reverence was the last storywork principle that I learned. I did not work with Jo-ann's principle of reverence for my master's or doctoral studies because I was uncomfortable writing about it due to the effects of Christianity, colonialism and my exposure to a dominant modernist worldview (that values secularism, segmentation, polarization, fragmentation, and abstraction), and is foundational to the discourse and curriculum that I experienced in Western educational spaces most of my life. I can see now the contradictory ways that I was engaging IK through my engagement with ISW. At the time, I was in my infancy of understanding IK via ISW and am grateful for the mentorship that has been shared with me by Jo-ann, my doctoral committee, Elders, colleagues, family, and research participants.

Ultimately, it was a synergistic moment that helped me to understand the meaning of reverence during the writing of my doctoral thesis. I was on a writing retreat on the Sunshine Coast of BC and was participating in a yoga class when I was asked to move into the women's warrior one pose. I was standing strongly with one leg back on an angle with one leg forward, my chest was lifted with my arms and head tilted extending to the Creator, when I had an "aha" moment about reverence in this position. I remember suddenly understanding what Jo-ann had been saying about reverence all those years. The women's warrior one pose creates strength in all areas of life—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual—and helps once to face the challenges of daily life with equanimity and poise. Raven pipes in that equanimity and poise were needed to get me through the last stages of my PhD. A year later, I met another mentor, Bruce Robinson, a Nisga'a *Halayt* (traditional healer/doctor). Through my friendship with Bruce, I truly began to learn the practice of reverence in my daily life as result of the teachings he shared with me. The culmination of all of these experiences has helped me to become aware and practice reverence as it relates to ISW in research, the classroom, my personal life, and the various communities with which I interact. I now understand reverence to mean upholding and deeply respecting (at the highest level) all the relationships that I am connected to in a wholistic way including: the land, waterways, Elders, family, mentors, students, friends, and even Txeemsim/Coyote.

Community Applications of Indigenous Storywork Methodology

In this section, we highlight how Indigenous storywork is used with different communities. The following definition of community suits our purposes:

Community – describes a collectivity with shared identity or interests, that has the capacity to act or express itself as a collective ... A community may be territorial, organizational or a community of interest. "Territorial communities" have governing bodies exercising local or regional jurisdiction (e.g., members of a First Nations resident on reserve lands) ... "Communities of interest" may be formed by individuals or organizations

who come together for a common purpose or undertaking, such as a commitment to conserving a First Nations language.

(*Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010, Chapter 9, pp. 107–108*⁶)

Jo-ann will use an Indigenous graduate student community of interest or learning community, while Amy will focus on her territorial community.

Q'um Q'um Xiem Jo-ann's New Storywork

Graduate education and graduate students at the UBC Faculty of Education are an example of a community of practice that I believe develops innovative exemplars of Indigenous methodologies. I have enjoyed the challenge and have witnessed the benefit of developing and teaching Indigenous methodology graduate courses and serving on supervisory thesis committees of graduate students. I begin by highlighting how two former Indigenous doctoral candidates used ISW as part of their methodology: Sara Davidson (2016) and Dorothy Christian (2017)⁷. I served on Sara's doctoral committee and was Dorothy's doctoral supervisor.

Sara Florence Davidson sgaan jaadgu saandlans, of Haida (Haida Gwaii, BC) and Euro-Canadian ancestry uses ISW as an ethical research framework for her community- and school-based research on ways that narrative writing influences high school students' writing and identity. In her PhD dissertation, *Following the Song of K'aad'auw (Dogfish Mother): Adolescent Perspectives on English 10 First Peoples, Writing, and Identity*, Sara operationalizes the seven ISW principles as a complete ethical research framework (Davidson, 2016, pp. 31–45). She first drew upon Shawn Wilson's (2008) concept of relational accountability for research, then she used ISW for building and sustaining her research relationships with the students, teachers, and community members in a small remote community in northern BC.

I highlight one of the ISW principles that Sara operationalizes: reciprocity. She notes:

This principle of reciprocity, though it was rarely explicitly discussed in her book, was ever present in all of her interactions with Elders and community members. She explained that one aspect of reciprocity is “sharing this learning with others” (p. 48). Of all the principles, the commitment to reciprocity was one of the most important for me in my own work ... [it] closely connected to the notion of contribution – the importance of which was a significant part of my upbringing ... Throughout this research, I engaged in reciprocity and made contributions to the community as a researcher, an educator, a facilitator, a presenter, and a community member

(Davidson, 2016, p. 39)

In her researcher role, Sara developed the research questions so that the findings would be beneficial to the host school district. She shared her findings with the Haida Education Council; in addition, they expressed interest in using the ISW ethical framework for their future policy for reviewing research proposals that come to them for approval. Sara is a seasoned teacher, so she readily shared pedagogical and curricular ideas with teachers in the school district, which were not used in the research site. In her facilitation role, Sara assisted with organizing guest speakers and offering weekly discussion sessions for educators on various Indigenous education topics. As a presenter, Sara shared a research project with various school and community groups at the research site that she had completed prior to her dissertation research, which focused on traditional Haida pedagogy. In her role as community member, Sara shared her cultural knowledge during a school district event. She elaborates on her reasons for taking on these various roles during her research:

I share these examples here to demonstrate how reciprocity can look in the context of research. Though I know that this was not a requirement for my research, it was an import aspect of my participation in the community. I believe that it [reciprocity] influenced my study because it gave the participant and the community the sense that I was not only there to take but also to give.

(Davidson, 2016, p. 42)

Sara's examples of reciprocity in her research setting demonstrate the deep caring and commitment that she has to give back to her community and to the school district so that research is beneficial to them. Her forms of reciprocity are in stark contrast to researchers who took knowledge from Indigenous communities through their research and whose research did not benefit the communities or research participants (Smith, 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Kovach, 2009). Another Indigenous scholar, Dorothy Christian, took great care to ensure that her research was carried out in respectful, responsible, and reciprocal ways with Indigenous community members.

Dorothy Christian Cucw-la7, is Secwepemc (Shuswap) and Syilx (Okanagan) First Nations from the interior plateau area of BC. Her doctoral dissertation, *Gathering Knowledge: Indigenous Methodologies of Land/Place-Based Visual Storytelling/Filmmaking and Visual Sovereignty* uses ISW to guide her discussions and analysis of her “shared stories/conversations/experiences” (Christian, 2017, p. 132) with 13 Indigenous cultural knowledge keepers from Canada and the USA about their worldviews on land, cultural stories, and cultural protocols (Christian, 2017, pp. 131–175). She found that the ISW principles were evident in their stories and perspectives. I will highlight some aspects of her discussion about the principle of synergy that enlivened her analysis process. Dorothy listened to and engaged with both the oral conversations and the written transcripts of them in an iterative process:

In my process of interpretation and search for meaning I purposefully engaged the auditory, visual, tactile and intuitive senses. I listened to the recordings a number of times; whenever I was on a road trip, I plugged my iPhone into the USB connection of my car radio. The auditory engagement was primary for me because each time I listened, I could hear and feel the rhythm of the recorded voices. In my deep listening, I was transported back to the setting of when and where we were sharing stories. I would re-live the synergy of the storytelling experience.

(Christian, 2017, p. 133)

The interactions between the cultural knowledge keeper, Dorothy, the place and time of the shared experience, and the orally told stories could be re-lived through the audio recording. In the next quote, Dorothy shows a wholistic engagement with the written research transcript. I have often reiterated the teaching that various Elders have said about listening: that we listen with our three ears; two that we hear with and the one in our heart:

The textual engagement of the transcripts provided another way of experiencing synergy because in the reflection time I was able to digest, feel and re-experience the stories while I was reading. I engaged all my senses. I reached out for my sense of place in the story. I read with “three ears.” I put myself in the story by consciously focusing on the life force energies of the story and the storyteller that is in the space.

(Christian, 2017, p. 134)

Dorothy’s analysis experience involves additional skill, time, and effort in order for her to understand and make meaning from and with her participants’ stories. It may include coding words for commonalities or themes, but it goes far beyond this type of coding. She also mentions the difficulty in articulating the meaning of the ISW principles within a Euro-Western academy that uses a narrower definition for each one. In her words:

I found that the **synergy** (emphasis in the original) principle is the most difficult to articulate because in attempting to describe an Indigenous concept in the English language proves challenging. I speak of this concept as an exchange of life force energies that infuse the exchange between the story, the storyteller and the listener in that “space between the words” that Kukpi Ignace (2008) discusses (p. 100), which encodes the understanding of spirit. In Secwepemc understanding, the life force is your “soomik” that is your personal spiritual power (Ignace & Ignace, May 2014). An unspoken understanding with all of the knowledge keepers is that the energies are alive because Indigenous peoples believe all things are infused with spirit.

(Christian, 2017, pp. 283–284)

The quote above demonstrates the interrelatedness between principles such as synergy and Indigenous spirituality. It also shows an expansive and deeper meaning of synergy. Coyote can’t wait to hear what Txeemsim has to say about Amy’s experiences of applying ISW.

Nox Ayaawilt Amy’s Storywork

In March 2017, I returned to my motherlands, in search of my bone needle, and wrote this piece about my new ISW experience. I am sitting in our community center hall in the Nisga’a Village of Laxgalt’sap reflecting on how the ISW principles unfold in my community. I have just spent an amazing four days visiting with family, eating our traditional foods, learning more Sim’algax and participating in our Nisga’a Elders & Youth Forum. I am feeling appreciative to have spent so much time listening and learning from our Sigidim Haanaḱ’ (Matriarchs) and Simgigat (Chiefs) who had been aptly referred to as our “cultural professors” throughout the conference. I can see that there are some differences in how ISW principles may apply in my community context. As Jo-ann has stated, Indigenous communities will have different stories, protocols, dances, songs, and ceremonies that are connected to a place through a particular language. However, ISW has provided significant markers to guide me in how to think and prepare myself to begin enacting these principles with others in my Nation.

Our first Ayuuk (law/protocol) is the foundation of all our other laws and teaches us the importance of respect. This means that one must know our Ayuuk⁸ (laws) and protocol around our adaawak, which are stories about the history of the lands and waterways of our Nation. These adaawak answer questions about the Nass Valley and all the living and spiritual beings that have resided on our lands since time immemorial, and provide significant understandings about the values, properties, and beliefs of each Wilp (house) and pdeek (clan). Some adaawak, belong to all Nisga’a peoples while others detail the history of a particular Wilp or pdeek. This is where understanding the meaning of respect becomes very important when working with our adaawak, because not all people will have the rights to share an adaawak publicly since many are the private property of each Wilp or pdeek (Morven, 1996). It would be considered disrespectful and a violation of our Ayuuk if an adaawak was shared by someone other than the rightful Wilp or pdeek that owns the story. Upon my arrival in the Nass, I was very excited to spend the day in our Nisga’a Lisms (government) building in Aiyansh, which houses our archives and all written records that were required for our treaty, the *Nisga’a Final Agreement* (2000). It also happens to be the home of two books that contain all of our Nation’s entitlement adaawak. I was very excited to spend some time with these books because they contain well over 10,000 years of our living history and culture. I remember feeling the power, magic, and awe of learning my House adaawak for the first time.

The following day I traveled to our feast hall in the village of Laxgalts'ap. As I listened to our Sigidimhaanak' and Simgigat speak, I learned more about the important responsibilities that I have as a Ganada (Frog) clan member and researcher to learn our Ayuuk before working with our Nation's origin stories, various adaawak, and the personal life experience stories (of those willing to share). This responsibility will continue to enhance my understandings of Nisga'a epistemological and ontological frameworks in a culturally seamless way. I am reminded of my conversation with Jo-ann not too long ago when she stated, "People may have access to our stories but not know what to do with them" (Personal Communication, 2017). I understand her statement to mean I am responsible for finding my own meanings from these stories (Txeemsim says that I can't ask Jo-ann anymore), and for translating these meanings across time, space, and place through the enactment of our Ayuuk. In doing so, I am grateful to take one step further in my life journey because ISW has assisted me to learn the theories behind the stories in the context of my personal life in a wholistic way.

Engaging ISW can span many communities simultaneously. Being born and raised in northern BC on Gitxsan territories but also finding myself being an urban Nisga'a community member as an adult, I have experienced how these relationships span through our motherlands and into the territories of other Nations as well. As a visitor to Coast Salish territories, I am part of a strong and thriving urban Nisga'a community that continues to be connected to our Nation's homeland both politically and culturally. It is here that I can now see how deeply reverence informs these relationships and the possibilities of connecting with each other through reciprocal sharing and storytelling in many places and communities. I am internally grateful for the Yuuhlimk'askw (the guidance and love that is transmitted through counsel, lectures, and storytelling) of dear mentors, Elders, and family members of many different Nations who have taken the time to mentor me.

Txeemsim swiftly strokes its wings and in doing so brings the principles of inter-relatedness, synergy and wholism into the story. I am brought back to the magical evening that I spent in the archives with Nita Morven, our Nation's Ayuukhl Nisga'a Researcher. Nita would synchronistically appear at a critical moment as I was reading an adaawak, and tell me more about it through her personal lived experience working with our Elders' Council for many years. As we visited in her office until late in the night, she told me that it has taken her years to understand what an Elder has meant by a comment that was made in a meeting. I giggle now, thinking that Txeemsim too has taught me about the time, patience, and persistence needed to understand what Jo-ann has meant by the term being "culturally ready." In another "aha" moment, Txeemsim brings to light my new found understanding of cultural readiness from Dr. Cindy Blackstock of the Gitxsan Nation:

We have been given the ancestors' teachings and the feelings and the spirit. We can do a couple of things with that. We can say that what we know is inadequate and that we're not Indian enough and that we don't know enough about it or we don't want to pass it on. And we hold our breath and our people stop. Or you can nourish that breath. You can breathe in even deeper the knowledge of others and understand it at a deep level and then breathe it forward. That's the breath of life.

(as cited in Michel, 2014)

I first recognized that I was taking a breath of life not long ago after I returned to Squamish territory from the Nass Valley. I found myself in beauty and solitude with my familiar family of cedar trees again. As I was walking, I began taking many deep long breaths. I reflected on the way that I had been holding my breath for a long time because I was fearful that I did not know enough about our adaawak, and ayuuk. While in the Nass, I had been recognized and welcomed home in our feast hall by our Elders' Council. The public encouragement I received from Sim'oogit Henry Moore (Chief Councillor of Laxgalts'ap) and Fran Johnson on behalf of our Elders' Council to "move home, work for our Nation and continue learning our language," enabled me to take this breath of life. I am thankful that ISW has facilitated this process to become "culturally ready" and in doing so being gifted with this beautiful breath of life. I will continue to nourish this breath in all the communities, places and relationships with which I am connected. I reach my left palm upwards and am grateful for the teachings I have received from Jo-ann and all the Ancestors, and Elders who have been with me on this journey so far. I pass my right palm forward to the next generation so that we may collectively continue breathing life into our Nation and various communities, through the power of one interrelated story at a time. The circle is now complete. Txeemsim quickly chimes "for now ..."

Last Words

Engaging an ISW methodology was and continues to be a meaningful experience for us on many levels. For Jo-ann, I have felt privileged to learn from exemplary Indigenous Elders, cultural knowledge holders, and storytellers who grabbed my hand when I reached for their help. They showed their love and patience with me as I listened to their stories with my "three ears" and then tried to understand ways to engage with stories that brought out the power and beauty of the stories' teachings. I then had to figure out how to work with the stories for educational and research purposes. The seven ISW principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, wholism, inter-relatedness, and synergy guided me. I then extended my hand to the next generation of Indigenous scholars/graduate students to share these ISW principles through teaching graduate research courses and mentoring students through their graduate research and beyond. Now they are practicing this inter-generational teaching.

Along the way, Coyote in all its manifestations became my critical friend, mentor, and cajoler to keep me closely connected to the teachings—Indigenous knowledge—of the land, the Ancestors, family, and community. I have enjoyed travelling with Coyote, Amy, the graduate students highlighted in this chapter, and others of course. Coyote says that it is hard to believe that the learning relationship between Amy and Jo-ann has been a decade long so far. Sharing the space with Txeemsim has been ok too. Txeemsim says “just ok?”

In Jo-ann’s words, I have valued the keen interest, valuable insights, and humor that Amy has provided me and I look forward to our continuing ISW relationship. Sara Florence Davidson and Dorothy Christian have breathed new life into the ISW principles for their respective research contexts. Their stories became intertwined with Amy’s and mine in this chapter; yet, their research journeys are very different.

For Amy, ISW has allowed me to learn more about finding meaning in participants’ stories as well as my own story, helped me to honor reverence and the “synergizing” principle of spirit, and functioned as a vital heartbeat that has directed me towards being culturally ready to take the breath of life. It has brought me back home to my motherlands and with the help of Txeemsim, I will continue to search for the bone needle to learn more about the particularities of ISW through our Nisga’a language, ayuuk, and adaawak.

Both Coyote and Txeemsim want the last word. They think, “Too bad that we didn’t have space to tell our versions of Indigenous storywork.” Watching and travelling with Jo-ann and Amy, even Sara and Dorothy, on their research journeys has been fun, hard, and meaningful. There were lots of issues related to language/conceptual differences where terms such as reciprocity, reverence, and synergy have particular meanings in the English language, but they mean so much more within an Indigenous knowledge, ISW context. Researchers need to continue going into the dark to find the bone needle, but it is ok to return to a re-kindled fire to get warm and refreshed. It was hard to be patient and our hands got tired as these Indigenous scholars struggled with or didn’t understand these or other ISW principles. But they persevered, as did we. Our circle of Indigenous storyworkers has grown over the years. We look forward to travelling with others who take up ISW in the future. We have many more stories to experience and to tell.

Notes

- 1 This chapter will focus only on ISW as a methodology. Space limitation prevents me from discussing literature about Indigenous oral traditions that guided my research. Examples include Ahenakew & Wolfart, 1992; Akan, 1992; Armstrong, 1993; Basso, 1996; Battiste, 2000; Castellano, 2000; Cruikshank, Sidney, Smith, & Ned, 1990; Sarris, 1993; Wickwire & Robinson, 1989.
- 2 See Archibald, 2008, pp. 38–47, for a fuller description of learning with Khot-la-cha, Dr. Simon Baker.
- 3 See Archibald, 2008, pp. 47–51, for a fuller description of learning with Tsimilan, Dr. Vincent Stogan.

- 4 See Archibald, 2008, pp. 51–57, for a fuller description of learning with Kwulasulwut, Dr. Ellen White. Also see, Ellen White’s publications about Indigenous stories (White, 1981, 2006).
- 5 See Archibald, 2008, pp. 59–82 for a fuller description of learning with the Stó:lō Elders.
- 6 The *Tri-Council policy statement* is a joint ethical research policy of Canada’s three federal research agencies: the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- 7 Only one principle from each person is highlighted because of the chapter’s word length.
- 8 *Ayuukhl Nisga’a* is the ancient laws and customs of the Nisga’a people. These laws and customs inform, guide, and inspire the learning of Nisga’a culture. See <http://www.nisgaanation.ca/about>

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COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES

Elizabeth Fast [Métis/Mennonite] and Margaret Kovach [Plains Cree/Saulteaux/member of Treaty Four in southern Saskatchewan]

Tansi, my name is Elizabeth (Liz) Fast, a co-author of this chapter. I have Métis and Mennonite ancestry and, as someone who grew up distanced from what it means to “be Métis,” I have spent time questioning my own positioning on different research teams. I have put thought into ensuring that ethics and relationships are always at the core of my work. Tansi, my name is Margaret (Maggie) Kovach. I am of Plains Cree and Saulteaux ancestry and a member of Treaty Four in southern Saskatchewan. A significant portion of my academic life has been devoted to the philosophy and praxis of Indigenous research methodologies and the centrality of Indigenous collectivist knowledge(s) in this approach. Together, we are the co-authors of this chapter.

Why does relationship with the Indigenous community(s) matter within Indigenous methodologies and research? How does a researcher understand their own self-situatedness in relation to community? What relational research practices align with critical community engagement? Through responding to these questions, we highlight the significance of community accountability in Indigenous research within our own research practice and as Indigenous faculty members who assist student researchers. In reflecting upon the Indigenous community-researcher relationship, our interest focuses on method, protocols, and practices of engaging with community. We are equally interested in the Indigenous ontological preconditions of collective reciprocity. This collective reciprocity underscores the value of community-researcher relationship within an Indigenous methodological approach.

This chapter explores the responsibilities associated with community-researcher relationships and the subsequent outreach that is required. This includes knowing community, knowing self, and being aware of the practices that can impede upon or nourish the community-researcher relationship. In this chapter, a commentary