



## **Implementing Indigenous Ways of Knowing Into Research: Insights Into the Critical Role of Dreams as Catalysts for Knowledge Development**

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### **Key Words**

Indigenous • research • methodologies • dreaming • inner knowing

### **Abstract**

This research project expressed a Muskego Inninuwuk methodology as a foundation to explore experiences of individuals who possess both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry in the development of their identities. The overall goal of this research was to create a space for individuals to express the impacts of systems, relationships and the ways in which people come to understand their overall wellbeing and connection to ancestors through stories in personal identity development. As an Indigenous researcher engaging with a Muskego Inninuwuk methodology meant that a foundational mechanism for knowledge development included inner knowing and dreaming; this article describes the process and experiences as a result of incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing. In this way, Indigenous research methodologies are catalysts toward healing, decolonization and resurgence.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indigenous peoples in Canada are dynamic and diverse and vary in processes of re-visioning and retrieving the pieces of who we are as recovery from colonial processes. Absolon and Willett (2005) indicate that this is a time of “pulling ourselves together” (p. 112) where awareness and expression of self-location are central to this rebuilding. Identity, the way we answer the question, “Who am I?” is linked to Indigenous self-determination and journeys of healing, decolonization and resurgence. The purpose behind the development of an Indigenous research methodology then becomes a matter of social justice juxtaposed against processes of transformation, decolonization, healing, and mobilization of peoples (Smith, 1999). This purpose is intricately bound to my spirit where I am and will remain accountable to not only myself, but also my family, and my community (Kovach, 2010).



It is possible that through expression of personal stories of who we are, of the relational nature of our identities and ways of being, reconnecting and re-memembering, we are able to move towards mino-pimatisiwin (Hart, 2002). Mino-pimatisiwin can be expressed as the “overall goal of healing, learning, and life in general” (Hart, 2002, p. 44). This can also be linked to personal journeys of decolonization (Kovach, 2010) which moves beyond identifying colonial impact and seeks change. Processes of healing, decolonization and resurgence have allowed for my development as a Muskego Inninew Iskwew (Swampy Cree woman). This deeply intimate research project was born from my own personal journey with identity, belonging, membership, connection and meaning.

As a mechanism of pulling myself together it was necessary to develop a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology that particularly supported insight into experiences of identity. This Indigenous methodology was used within a study designed to explore the experiences of individuals who possess both Cree and non-Indigenous ancestry and how they have engaged and connected with their identity. The Muskego Inninuwuk methodology specifically privileged and drew from Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, relational accountability, and mino-pimatisiwin. Wilson (2008) indicates the interconnected and interdependent composition of an Indigenous research paradigm:

I believe that Indigenous epistemology and ontology are based on relationality. Our axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining relational accountability. With a deeper understanding of these concepts, I hope that you will come to see that research is a ceremony. The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. (p. 11)

A Muskego Inninuwuk methodology expresses a mechanism to gain further insight into our responsibility to maintain balance with Niwakomâkanak (All my relations, all of creation) and honour the connection and fluidity between all aspects of self (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual) and self in relation towards personal decolonization (Hart, 2002). This article works to support the growing literature that explicates the specific development and application of Indigenous research methodologies. In particular this article describes the ceremony of research: where the critical role of inner knowing and dreams as catalyst activities supports ways of knowing within a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology. This description will begin with an investigation into the role of relationships and relational accountability within the development of the methodology.

## RELATIONAL KNOWLEDGES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

“Indigenous epistemologies live within a relational web, and all aspects of them must be understood from that vantage point” (Kovach, 2010, p. 57). Fundamental within a Muskego Inninuuk (Swampy Cree) worldview is the belief that knowledge and experiences are relational (Ross, 2011). From this understanding, in this research project, addressing experiences of individuals must also acknowledge and incorporate respect of and accountability to relationship. This includes interpersonal relationships, relationships built with research participants, relationship with Creation, relationship with ideas, concepts and everything around us (Wilson, 2001). We come to understand more about an idea through exploring what it is connected to, and what it is in relation with. It is through our understanding and experience of relationship that we can work to express knowledge shared between participant and researcher (Wilson, 2001, 2008). This relational understanding is also important for the researcher in order to express their relationship with the ideas and concepts that are being explored.

From this, it is essential that a Muskego Inninuuk methodology must acknowledge and incorporate relational accountability. Relational accountability is a foundational principle that expresses the need to respect and maintain balance within each of these relationships. In other words, this is the way in which we are responsible for fulfilling our relationships and answering to all my relations with the world around us (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). As Wilson (2001) emphasizes:

As a researcher you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. (p. 177)

Relationality impacts every decision and interaction within a research framework (Kovach, 2010). For example, within a sampling framework this means that it is not simply a matter of the researcher choosing the participants. It is more of a reciprocal process with some form of pre-existing relationship, connection, and measure of trustworthiness signifying a respectful approach to research (Kovach, 2010).

In considering research validity, I hear the Elders’ voices: Are you doing this in a good way? There is a Cree word, *tâpwê*, which means to speak the truth. This is about validity, or relationally speaking, credibility. To do this means to tend to the process in a good way, so that no matter the outcome you can sleep at night because you did right by the process. (Kovach, 2010, p. 52)

Doing right by the process, in other words, incorporating actions that signify the responsibility undertaken within my project can be shown through sharing my own relationship with the research. The following section will share stories of who I am and why this project was critical for me to undertake.

### **RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY: SHARING SOME OF MY STORIES**

At this point, according to teachings shared with me by my family, my Elders, and my community members, it is an important protocol for me to share an introduction of who I am, where I come from, and who my family is. I also hold a similar responsibility to self-location as a researcher. Coming from an Indigenous perspective, one of the responsibilities that I undertake as I prepare to engage in research includes locating myself. In other words, sharing my stories, my experiences, who I am, and where I come from in order to attend to relational accountability. This process is integral to ethical Indigenous methods of inquiry and allow for transparency (Kovach, 2010). Location speaks to the relational foundation of Indigenous worldview and knowledges. In revealing and sharing my identity with others I am revealing my intentions and investment in this research project (Absolon & Willet, 2005). This also includes the responsibility that comes with creating a relational space within which to engage in this work (Wilson, 2008). It is part of acknowledging the responsibility that comes with carrying another's story, and that in these experiences I will work to honour and maintain this responsibility in a good way (Weber-Pillwax, 2001).

I am a Muskego Inninew Iskwew (Swampy Cree woman) of mixed ancestry, and a member of Fox Lake Cree Nation, a community located in Northern Manitoba. My given names are Gladys Lorene. I was named after my maternal and paternal grandmothers. I wear my names with pride as within them, and within my heart, I am connected eternally to these strong, powerful, and vibrant women. My mother is Debbie Lynn Anderson and my father is Michael Charles Lawrenchuk. I am a mother of three beautiful children. I am a wife, sister, niece, auntie, cousin, daughter and granddaughter. With each of these sentences I could tell many stories about my connections, spaces, places and relationships that have brought me forward to the present. These pieces of my personal location are an important part of situating myself in my relationships and to locate me in relation to my ancestors.

As indicated previously the research I completed searched into the experiences of Cree peoples with mixed-ancestry in identity development. However, this was not originally the topic I set out to explore. Throughout the development of my proposal for the completion of my Master of Social Work program I journeyed through several qualitative research topics all rooted within my ever-expanding Indigenous understandings of my interconnected place and space in the work that I do. I would come to the point that necessarily required me to locate myself within the project. This

locating process is where I became stuck. The questions of, “Why me?,” “Why this question?,” “Why this methodology?” all impacted me deeply. Initially I articulated my Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) roots, singularly focused, determined to recapture a sense of self that had been removed and displaced from my reach. This was a method of reasserting power and control over who I am and how I am connected to the roots of my father, the lands of my Cree granny Gladys Moose and my Northern Manitoba community. As I moved through my personal commitment towards decolonization, building awareness, connecting and building relationships, a nagging question would come up for me – what about my other pieces? What about my mother, my aunts and my maternal grandmother? These strong women raised, formed, and guided me into womanhood – are not Cree. How do I balance these pieces of myself to honour these women in my life? How do I articulate these pieces of my whole being in a manner that does not cause questions of authenticity in one world, but at the same time lead to denouncing the experiences of another? Each time these questions were never quite settled. I found I could never quite fit comfortably into the work that I was attempting. I knew with these constantly reoccurring tensions that I had inherently found my exploration. More accurately, my exploration found me and would continue to remind me through my dreams of the work that I was meant to complete for this research. I worked to understand and make meaning from the knowledges gifted to me in my dreams, although I would not always understand what was being shared. As I came to a deeper understanding of the importance of intuitive ways of knowing, I came to honour the gifts that I have been given through my dreams. In these dreams I would be given direction, information, and guidance that would let me know that I certainly had found the answer to my “Why this question, why me, and why Indigenous methodologies?” This intuitive process has largely guided my journey and it is through my dreams that I have received affirmation about the necessity of my movement with this topic. It is truly a deeply personal, transformative, decolonizing and healing journey as highlighted by Absolon (2008):

The past, present, and future intersect and much of our research is about searching for truth, freedom, emancipation, and ultimately finding our way home. Finding our way home is a search to return to our own roots, dignity, and humanity as the Creator originally intended. So one path many of us choose is emancipation through research and knowledge. Many of us understand that knowledge is power and our search for knowledge constitutes a search for power. Indigenous research is about being personal and political and responsible for creating change. (p. 103)

The articulation of this methodology is based upon my personal transformative, mobilizing, healing, and decolonizing journey. I have reconnected with this knowledge that was to a large degree, excluded from my childhood due to personal, familial, and societal impacts of colonization and the destruction it left in its wake. Foundational channels of knowledge transmission from older family members to myself, which would have enabled me to come to understand my place and role within my Fox Lake Cree family and community, were in almost all cases severed.

As a part of my reclamation I continually seek a deeper understanding of and connection to a Muskego Inninuwak worldview. I am not speaking from a place of fluency in this ancestral language, or from a deeply rooted connection to the land that my grandmothers before me possessed, nor from a place where I can say that I know all there is to know about what this means to my journey. I am, however, coming from a place of learning and growth, where, with deep respect, I open myself to the possibilities of a commitment to reclamation and decolonization. This is the location from which I speak to a Muskego Inninuwak methodology. This is the location from which I am constantly working to search out, understand, and reclaim ways of being, knowing, and doing in a good way. The following section presents the development of a Muskego Inninuwak methodology.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF A MUSKEGO INNINUWUK (SWAMPY CREE) METHODOLOGY**

Indigenous epistemologies are action-oriented, inter-relational, broad-based, whole, inclusive, and spiritual (Kovach, 2010). This research project is based upon the world view of Muskego Inninuwak (Swampy Cree), specifically of Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwak (Fox Lake Cree) described by Ross (2011) as deeply rooted and interconnected with the land:

Fox Lake people's territory is situated in the northeast region of Manitoba, embraced by rivers, lakes, and muskeg. Fox Lake people's history is rooted in stories, landmarks, relationships among land, people and animals, and through the Inninu language. More specifically, their relationship to the land and waters is reflected in the telling of stories and legends about Aski; the naming and remembering of places and landmarks; the use and navigation of the local landscape and waterways; and the received knowledge they hold about the plants, animals, and seasonal cycles within the territory. The Kischipi, or Great River (Nelson River), is the largest water system to flow through the Fox Lake people's territory. (p. 13)

The foundation of Indigenous methodologies rests upon Indigenous worldviews (Absolon, 2008; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). A worldview is a personal belief system connecting individuals to their identity and knowledge. This provides

a basis for how we come to know who we are, where we are from, what we know and how we interact within the world. Worldviews are passed from generation to generation and are rooted within traditions, languages, relations and culture (Absolon, 2008). Worldview impacts methodology in that it is interwoven within every decision, implicit or explicit, made by the researcher, and, therefore, profoundly impacts the research process, motives, purpose, and roles. It provides grounding of the self in the research process and requires articulation (Absolon, 2008).

Simpson (2000) has outlined seven principles of Indigenous worldviews: (a) knowledge is holistic, cyclical, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities; (b) there are many truths and these truths are dependent upon individual experiences; (c) everything is alive; (d) all things are equal; (e) the land is sacred; (f) relationship between people and spiritual world is important; and, (g) human beings are least important in the world. Foundations of an Indigenous worldview include the understanding that all life is sacred and all life forms are connected (Youngblood Henderson, 2009). As humans we are only one strand within the web of life; and, we are dependent upon all of the other strands in order to survive. Therefore we must respect, value, and care for all of our relations (Youngblood Henderson, 2009). In the development of a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology I was able to frame my research into ways of knowing, being and doing as they applied to my project.

When I sought to develop a Muskego Inninuwuk methodology I began with my own community of Fox Lake Cree Nation. There is little articulated documentation of a Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwuk (Fox Lake Cree) worldview. What has been documented and written down has been in response to my community's involvement in reclaiming and asserting power over their right to continue to live in relation to our traditional territories. As a result of generations of hydroelectric development in the traditional territory of Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwuk (Fox Lake Cree), the transmission of a healthy sustainable sense of self from one generation to the next was shattered. Beginning in the 1950's and 1960's developments included the Kettle, Long Spruce and Limestone Generating Stations, and the Radisson and Henday Converter Stations within Makeso Sakahukan (Fox Lake) traditional territory. The imposition of developments and the resulting influx of people into the region to dam and flood the land in order to harness the power of the water for economic benefit of others resulted in numerous impacts upon individuals, families, the community and land to which we belong. These impacts will serve as a reminder that what one does to the land upon which we live and the way in which this is carried out *does* impact people. In fact it impacts the children of the first generation of people exposed to the developments, and the children of those children, to which I can personally attest.

These historical developments disconnected Makeso Sakahukan Inninuuk (Fox Lake Cree) from vital resources and supports to strive towards mino-pimatisiwin (a good life). Fast forward to this decade and there is renewed interest in further hydroelectric development in my community's traditional territory. As a result, resistance, transformation, and healing continue to be relevant within Makeso Sakahukan (Fox Lake). This has not come easy. It is a process through which we learn, as individuals, as family, as community from trial and error and begin to uncover deeply entwined intergenerational and internalized impacts of the destructions. As a part of this movement, Makeso Sakahukan Inninuuk (Fox Lake Cree) have been involved in ensuring that what occurred with previous developments does not repeat itself in an even more devastating manner. One method of protecting the community against future impact, in the form of loss of and disconnection from traditional and communal knowledges, has been the recording of life histories of older people in Makeso Sakahukan (Fox Lake). I was fortunate enough to be involved in the work in my community as a researcher where I engaged with people's stories, bore witness to impacts upon relationship and spirit. Being immersed in the stories of my peoples has allowed me great appreciation for the necessity of knowing who we are and where we come from for the wellbeing of not only my generation, but also the generations who will follow.

The research project described utilized a Muskego Inninuuk (Swampy Cree) methodology based on understandings and values of mino-pimatisiwin, meaning to live a good life in a way that honours our relationships and connections to all things, in a way that seeks é- tipapéskopanik (balance) and is in minonénimowin (harmony) (Ross, 2011). As Inninuuk (Cree), we are interconnected with all elements of the world around us. Families, communities and nations are equally important to the understanding of who we are as individuals since we see ourselves as individuals in relation with those around us. It is through these relationships that we come to understand our identity, our responsibilities, and the roles that we must fulfill within these relationships. Niwâkomâkanak (all my relations) speaks to the interconnection, relatedness, and equality of all things. We are all relations. These relationships are our connection to identity, community, spirituality, and our history and are founded upon Aspénminowin (trust) and Kisténitamowin (respect) (Ross, 2011).

A Muskego Inninuuk worldview informs the way in which we come to know about the world around us. Hart (2010) indicates the following ways through which Cree knowledge is shared and the ways of knowing privileged from this perspective:

Indigenous epistemology is a fluid way of knowing derived from teachings transmitted from generation to generation by storytelling, where each story is alive with the nuances of the storyteller. It emerges from traditional languages



emphasizing verbs, is garnered through dreams and visions, and is intuitive and introspective. Indigenous epistemology arises from the interconnections between the human world, the spirit and inanimate entities. (p. 8)

We come to know about the world by engaging with Indigenous knowledges. While Indigenous knowledges are highly contextual and dependent upon the specific and therefore variable environments and languages, they have overarching characteristics that encapsulate them (Brant-Castellano, 2000). First, they are personal, rooted in personal and subjective experience where the degree to which you can trust what a person is telling you is based upon the relationship between the speaker and the listener, taking into account integrity and perceptiveness of the speaker. This means oftentimes knowledge can be varying with even contradictory accounts, but remains a valid account unique to the person (Brant-Castellano, 2000). Within this understanding, the search for truth is not an establishment of one “correct” view over another but rather honours personal experience as individual truth. It is important to distinguish wisdom from personal knowledge; wisdom is based upon social validation where collective analysis and consensus building occurs (Brant-Castellano, 2000). “Thus, an Indigenous research paradigm is structured within an epistemology that includes a subjectively based process for knowledge development” (Hart, 2010, p. 8).

Second, Indigenous knowledges are communicated through oral transmission. There is a responsibility inherent within oral transmission of knowledge for both transmitter and learner. The transmitter is responsible for passing knowledge and considers whether the learner is ready to receive it and whether the learner is ready to use it in a responsible manner (Brant-Castellano, 2000). This responsibility for knowledge also indicates that a relationship between the two are necessary for responsible transmission – knowledge is passed on within context of this relationship that reflects both an intellectual and emotional interaction based upon shared experience or relationship (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

Third, Indigenous knowledges are experiential. One way in which we can come to know about the world is through our direct active engagement (Brant-Castellano, 2000). Perceptual experiences are a key component of this engagement, where perception includes experiential insight (Hart, 2010). This insight evolves through exercises of inwardness (Ermine, 1995), that allows one to “subjectively experience a sense of wholeness” (Hart, 2010, p. 8).

Fourth, Indigenous knowledges are holistic. This requires us to engage through all of our senses working in conjunction with intuitive or spiritual insights. This holistic nature of Indigenous knowledge and experience is often visually conveyed through the use of a medicine wheel representing the circle of life, past, present, and

future (Brant-Castellano, 2000). The medicine wheel is a tool that teaches us to seek balance within our own lives, to form and honour our relationships. This teaches that collaborative relations are essential in order to work towards individual balance, in other words, to strive for *mino-pimatisiwin* (Hart, 2002). The holistic quality of Indigenous knowledge requires that we come to understand the totality of experiences. Attempting to dissect or de-contextualize experiences from this totality contradicts this characteristic (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

Indigenous ways of knowing and being as described can be expressed through the incorporation of dreams as a method of inquiry. The following section will introduce dreaming as a catalyst for gaining insights into the topic being researched through an Indigenous research methodology.

### **INNER KNOWING AND DREAMS AS CATALYSTS FOR INSIGHTS IN RESEARCH**

How we come to know and who we are as researchers is as important as the knowledge we seek (Absolon, 2011). Resurgence through asserting Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing is supported by attending to the interconnections and relationships necessary to explore these experiences in a good way. Cardinal (2001) articulates the gathering of knowledge within Indigenous research and the connection to inner knowing:

Essentially I am saying that Indigenous research methods and methodologies are as old as our ceremonies and our nations. They are with us and have always been with us. Our Indigenous cultures are rich with ways of gathering, discovering, and uncovering knowledge. They are as near as our dreams and as close as our relationships. (p. 182)

The way that we come to know about the subject is informed through our stance in the world, the way we view the world, and what we believe to be true (Wilson, 2008). Within this project, value was placed on both process of doing research as well as content. The process of this project rests largely upon relational accountability. This honours knowledges gained from the participants and the space that is created as a result of the relationship between storyteller and listener. From an Indigenous foundation of knowing, being and doing based on relational accountability and understanding the journey of *mino-pimatisiwin*, strategies of inquiry undertaken for this project include inner knowing, self-location, stories and natural conversations, and journaling.

For this project, the preparations of myself as the researcher within a Muskego Inninuuk methodology were key to upholding Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. This reflects the experiential, process centered and inward reflecting and

knowing that comes with personal experience. Ermine (1995) asserts that the richest source of knowledge can be found within oneself: “Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self” (Ermine, 1995, p. 108). Inward reflection is centered within a Muskego Inninuuk methodology because of the value placed on this type of knowing (Kovach, 2010). Attention to inward knowing is supported through connecting and sharing with Elders and participating in cultural catalyst activities (dream, ceremony, prayer) as means of access (Kovach, 2010). Dreams, as a catalyst activity for attaining access to inner space are so invaluable that the external environment is often manipulated in order that dreams might happen (Ermine, 1995). The foundational importance for understanding of these experiences is based on a Cree concept described by Ermine (1995):

Mamatowan refers not just to the self but to the being in connection with happenings. It also recognizes that other life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower. It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge in itself. The experience is knowledge. (p. 104)

Throughout the development and implementation of this research project, I continued to learn about the ways in which to incorporate spirit and inner knowings into all aspects of my life. For the direction of this thesis, for example, I have acknowledged, honoured, and incorporated knowledges coming to me from dreams, happenings, and meditation within my every day. Preparations included offering tobacco at various times throughout my journey, asking for guidance in particular areas, and to give thanks for the knowledges shared with me at different points in time. This also included smudging and utilizing sacred medicines for myself.

These catalyst activities, dreams, ceremony, and prayer, have been critical to the development, to the implementation, and to the completion of this research including participant selection and meaning making. Inner knowing that has come as a result of dreams and day visions have influenced direction that this research has taken. For example, the impetus behind this project was re-directed from original intentions to complete research that centered on other goals. I had completed literature reviews for several other thesis proposals until each time I came to a point of stagnation. Something didn't feel right about it. Rationally they made sense, and I had support to complete each of the outlined projects, but it was not what I was meant to be working on and this came through in my dreams. At each of these instances I was given dreams that directed me. In one dream I had missed a flight that was asking me to change a piece of my body to be able to take the flight and was re-routed through Aotearoa/New Zealand where this request to change myself was not necessary. In another dream I was buying a house that looked complete and like everything I

wanted, but the door to the back room opened up to an abyss of fire and jagged rock, stubborn even in my dreams I decided it was fixable and moved my family in. During the first night we were chased from the house by a monster. I was being directed over and over again through the stagnation in my writing and through my dreams I would need to focus on something different.

When I had settled on the area of identity for mixed-ancestry Cree people, although it was uncomfortable because it was so personal, I knew I had to undertake this search for exactly that same reason. It only made sense for what I was being shown in my dreams. As I set out on this journey, my dreams would reinforce this direction. During the time when I was preparing to write my proposal for this research I had this dream:

*I dreamt I was a tour guide in an old building, likely built in the 1800's. There were many levels and stairs, it was dark and musty, there were cobwebs and it was largely uninhabited. I was walking through the hallways with a lantern in my hand and I was guiding a group of people through my life. The only other people in the building were ghosts, people who made up my past, those who created me and impacted my life, ancestors, mentors, and peers. I was touring the group through my life, through my past, through the people who made me who I am. It was a healing process in my dream: it wasn't difficult or emotional it was necessary. Those within the building were like artifacts in a museum, memories held on within my own being. (Rowe, July 15, 2012)*

I would like to note, that while I now speak about dreaming experiences and accessing inner knowing as if it has been something that has come naturally to me: this could not be farther from the truth. Throughout my lifetime there have been numerous instances where I have been given knowledge or direction through my dreams, or other catalyst activities; but I would shrug it off as coincidence, question the validity of what was being shown to me. These reactions are as a direct result of disconnection. However, as I came to question my reactions I would pay more attention to what was being shown. I noticed I would experience qualitatively different dreams and I started to talk about them with the people around me.

I became more curious about the occurrence of this vivid dreaming. In speaking with Elders I came to understand the importance of listening to what was being shared. I came to understand that this was an important way of coming to know that I needed to present within my research. I incorporated inner knowing that occurred through times of meditation and thinking deeply about myself in relation to my project, about the work that I was completing. When I was looking for guidance, I created space for myself to complete this work. At dream times I would be aware of the content, feelings, and meaning connected to the dreams that were given to

me. During the times that it was connected to my thesis, I would record, share with trusted individuals, speak out loud and undertake a process of thinking deeply about the knowledges that were shared. Sometimes I would be able to decipher the meaning and what the dreams were showing me; other times, although I felt like it was important, I would not be able to understand what was being shown to me. And so I would let it sit; I would sit with it. There are dreams that only now, after a couple of years, are beginning to make sense within my learning and healing journeys.

For example, at one point when I was particularly struggling and questioning my ability to finish writing my thesis proposal, I was given the gift of the following dream:

*I had a beautiful dream last night that I know I needed to write down in order to capture this in my research process. It is clearly linked and has given me some strength to move forward. There are a few elements that stick with me now as I write.*

*I am in a school, I am navigating my way through the hallways and I know my way around. I am happy to be there and I feel like I belong. I am moving fluidly through the halls, greeting the people – but I am looking for something. I am not sure what it is I am looking for. I look down and I notice I am holding a young baby – under 3 months for certain. I am in love with this baby, I adore her – I think it is a girl – but I am not sure. I am nurturing and caring for the baby. I breastfeed the baby and it is the most beautiful feeling in the dream. It makes me feel so happy to connect with this baby in this way and I feel that the baby is happy and growing from my feeding her.*

*I woke up with the most beautiful warm, happy and loving feeling.  
(Rowe, September 30, 2012)*

I was given the gift of this dream – not only to offer encouragement and to remind me that this work I am doing is meaningful to me for a reason – for it comes from me. It is founded upon an idea that is so intimately connected with me, I must nurture it and that is my responsibility in this project. I am responsible for this work and it drives me to move forward. For me this is a foundational way of connecting to not only spirit, but to the essence of who I am.

The dreams of pregnancy and a baby occurred consistently in this undertaking for me. They nudged me forward and gave me strength in times of self-doubt and apprehension. Internalized colonization, discussed by participants and within the literature examined in later chapters is not something that I have escaped within my own healing. It still rears its ugly head through self-doubt, questioning, resistance, lack of confidence in my abilities, lack of belief in self worth and value. To be able to

express my voice and know that I have something meaningful to share is not without struggle. It threatens to immobilize me as I engage in an internal struggle. This has been one of the greatest personal challenges in completing a Master thesis. I am far from being freed of the impacts of colonization, but I can say that in completing this work I have progressed. The dreams of a child, of being pregnant, are important indicators that I am healing and working on my own personal resurgence.

At another point in time when I was nearing the end of writing my thesis, I was feeling very anxious. There was a great deal going on for me and I struggled to handle the emotions that came along with delving into my own personal experiences of identity as I was concurrently transcribing and thinking deeply about the stories of participants. I was concerned about honouring, respecting, and sharing their stories in a good way. Caught in these spots and with the deadlines looming I felt the pressure. There were a couple of weeks that this pressure reflected in all of my dreams, it seemed I could not get any rest from the demands.

Through this I continued to work, to process, and to think deeply about the stories: I was deep into meaning making. Then a beautiful dream came to me, I was comforted and supported by my mentor in this dream. He let me know that everything was going to be okay, that I was strong and I was going to make it through. When I shared this with my thesis advisor, he stated that I must be near the end of my thesis writing (personal communication, June, 2013). In this way I was being told that I had completed what I needed to for this project and I could bring to conclusion what I had been writing about.

For me this journey was a matter of trusting my own self, the knowing that lies within that can be accessed through dreams, visions, and ceremonies. It was a matter of accessing this knowing with intention: creating space for the catalysts to knowledge gathering to occur and internalizing the meaning being shared. This meant clearing my space internally and externally with intention. Through my own healing, decolonization and resurgence I learned that this is not only a credible means of accessing knowledge, perhaps, it is one of the most critical ways as Indigenous peoples we will come to know, to facilitate further healing, decolonization, and resurgence.

The oral, experiential, holistic, and personal characteristics of Indigenous knowledge (Brant-Castellano, 2000) necessitates that ways of knowing and coming to know about an idea necessarily lead to specific ways of being and doing based upon a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) understanding of the world. Each of these is connected and crucial, and includes the magnitude with which relationality and relational accountability are included in the design and implementation of this project.

One of the necessary steps to move this inward knowing coming from my dreaming into praxis is in the sharing of these knowledges with broader communities. The synthesizing of this knowledge is encoded and embedded within community

action and awareness. Ermine (1995) describes the community as a repository within which to hold and transmit from one generation to the next the accumulation of this knowledge, providing a foundation for further exploration through inner spaces and subjective knowledges. This has nurtured within successive generations a lure to inwardness where introspection can provide meaning for contemporary Indigenous peoples. Ermine (1995) indicates:

The language of the people provides another valuable indication of inner space. The word for 'mystery' usually refers to a higher power and also connotes our own deeper selves as a humble connection with the higher mystery. In conceptualizing this existence of 'ponderable' mysteries, our languages reveal a very high level of rationality that can only come from an earlier insight into power. Our languages suggest inwardness, where real power lies. It is this space within the individual that, for the Aboriginal, has become the last great frontier and the most challenging one of all. (p. 108)

My work responsibility and work for this project and the participant's stories did not come to an end at the completion of this research even though it has been written up and successfully defended. I have only begun to fulfill my responsibilities to the knowledges shared through my inner knowings, through the stories of the participants, and through the meaning making that has come from thinking deeply about what was shared. I will take these knowledges and meanings back to participants, and back to community to continue the work that has been built with the establishment of these relationships and the sharing of these stories.

## **CONCLUSION**

An Indigenous-grounded research agenda involves four major processes including transformation, mobilization, healing and decolonization (Smith, 1999). Rather than being an end vision, these processes engage in psychological, spiritual, social, and collective movements that continually impact individual, family, and community transformation, mobilization, healing, and decolonization (Smith, 1999). Indigenous research methodologies are alive, relational, and reciprocal (Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2008). In the search for knowledge, attentiveness to spirit through sacred ceremony and protocols, and use of intuition, inward reflection and inner knowings are important to the overall journey (Absolon, 2011).

In particular, in the development of a Muskego Inninuwuk methodology critical attention was given to the role of inner knowing and dreams as catalyst activities for coming to know about identity. Specific examples of these catalyst activities and their impact upon the overall project have been highlighted. These examples provide

support for further development and incorporation of inner knowing through dreams and other catalyst activities as methods supported by Indigenous ways of knowing within Indigenous research methodologies.

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