

Ceremony at a Boundary Fire:

A Story of Indigenist Knowledge



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Shawn Wilson

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Edmund W. Gordon

Special Contribution by Narcisse Blood

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We dedicate this paper to Kainai Elder Narcisse Blood
to honor his memory and stories
for their contribution to our work and thinking.

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by

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Special Contribution by

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A Note About This Paper's Structure and Format

This document is a story rather than an unedited and verbatim record of events. Saying it is a story doesn't mean it's not true, but that in fact it has been edited to better convey the truth we all experienced as we lived these events together. That is the purpose of story, is to create an opportunity by which a person who was not present during an event can experience and learn from it themselves instead of merely being told what happened.

The narrative of this story integrates emails, face-to-face conversations, and reflections in the voices of the different people who took part in what happened. Formatting has been used to try to indicate these different kinds of communication as well as the different voices. Modifications include editing for clarification and brevity (since there were so many hours of conversation), but more significantly include arrangements and rearrangements of timing and syntax to put the story in as traditional a narrative voice as possible. Indigenous stories frequently use repetition as key signifiers and a structure of circular loops within the overall linear sequence of events. That means things sometimes double back on themselves -- which of course is how we all experience life on a daily basis: as something happens in a given instant, we commonly reflect on previous events that now take on a new meaning in light of a present event, or we suddenly anticipate a direction things might go that we hadn't foreseen.

Resources and references that support and/or inform statements such as the one just made about traditional Indigenous narrative form are listed at the end of the document in the order they appeared in the story. The first one on that list provides supporting documentation for the information in this note. These resources are not footnoted in the text so as not to interrupt the flow of the story.

Frontispiece and end-piece art tell the story in a different format. Shawn Wilson explains: "The words "text" and "textile" are both from the Latin *textus* for 'woven.' An online etymology dictionary says: 'An ancient metaphor: thought is a thread, and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns -- but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver. The scribes made this old and audible abstraction into a new and visible fact. After long practice, their work took on such an even, flexible texture that they called the written page a *textus*, which means cloth.'"



Frontispiece conceptualized by Shawn Wilson.
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Ceremony at a Boundary Fire: A Story of Indigenist Knowledge

Ohoyo vt nana kanoihmi nan vnnoa anoli
(“The woman is telling a story that is ceremony.”)

West of the Hudson River, past the black cliffs that line the shore across from Manhattan, a long, low range of mountains rises from the plains. The rocks at the upthrust fault scarp of the highlands are Elders, more than a billion years old. Worn recumbent, they watch with passive gaze all that plays out upon the sloping plain between their gnarled roots and the gleaming sea beyond the river. Their rounded peaks bear the names of those who lived in those mountains with the Lenape Nation for millennia, who were living there still when the first white settlers arrived. From Eagle Rock or Panther Mountain you can see the bristling towers of New York City against the red evening sky. A thick tangle of railroads and factories, highways and neighborhoods glitters through the branches of pines and hardwoods where the urban corridor thins and washes up against the mountains. In the mornings, the Elders’ long blue shadow stretches out and down across the sloping plain towards the City, bathing it, breathing softly of the dark.

And in those morning shadows, on the rolling rise of woodland that laps against the Elders’ feet, in a house made with stones who still remember where they came from, a wise and learned man called a gathering. It was to be an academic discussion but it turned itself into a ceremony instead. This is the story of what happened.

Edmund W. Gordon to Dawn Hill Adams, email
Fall, 2014

I would like to talk with you about a new conceptual inquiry that I have undertaken with some support from the National Science Foundation. You will not be surprised to know that I have continued the work of the Gordon Commission. Basically, at this time, I am trying to make a case for a more effective use of measurement science to inform and improve teaching and learning transactions. Obviously, this is one of the conclusions arrived at in the commission. Over the next several months, I will be organizing a small study group to advise me as I struggle with this set of issues. In the process of developing the group, I will be consulting with friends and other informed scholars. I am writing to determine if you will be available to me for such consultation.

I am struck by your and my overlapping concern for sensitivity to alternative ways of knowing and understanding the world. Assessment has tended to be limited to probing for declarative and procedural knowledge. I sense a need for a componential analysis of the domain covered by alternative ways of knowing and the identification of indicators by which their presence and functioning can be recognized and understood. I want you to help me recruit a group for a Consultative Conversation on this subject.

I am Edmund W. Gordon, son of Mabel Ellison and Edmund T. Gordon, M.D. I am proudly descended from four generations of educated people of color, African, Native American, African Caribbean, and, a little bit, European American. I was born at a time when the dominating culture of former colonialists propagated with the folklore that people of color, like me, were uneducable. It is with almost equal pride that I

acknowledge that I now am the emeritus occupant of two endowed professorships at two different Ivy League universities. But I am, perhaps, most proud of the fact that I like to think of myself as very much like my father, a man of unordinary human agency and excellent personal character. It is my effort at emulating my father that has not only kept me out of serious trouble, but also pushed me to be a useful, compassionate and responsible person. As an intellectually competent human being and a person of color my weapons are ideas and logical argument, which I consider to be essential to meaningful social change.¹

Dawn to EWGordon, email
Fall, 2014

I am deeply honored to accept your invitation to help with this project in any way I can. Cross-cultural communication is not always easy. I want to be sure you understand that the conversation in which we engage might not look the way you think it will. It is possible, in fact, that the way our group would approach things will not serve your project because of this. I personally think it can and will. But it may take some time and patience for that to play out. And that, too, may not serve your purposes. So I am doing my best to communicate clearly. The people I will approach, to sound them out about participating in the dialogue you envision, are Narcisse Blood (Blackfoot), Ryan Heavy Head (Blackfoot), and Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree). I understand that since Shawn lives in Australia you would ask him to participate via Skype.

-- I'm Dawn Hill Adams, Oklahoma Choctaw. My people were Removed from our Mississippi homelands nearly 200 years ago. My father, Louis Hill, professor of engineering and a traditional Dreamer, worked hard to teach me Indian values and ways far from home and made sure I knew the Land as my teacher. He taught me the power of Story, and my mother Jeanne Murray Hill showed me the music in words.²

Shawn: It's kinda funny but the first I heard of the discussion that we were going to have, came via a mutual friend in New Zealand. I read this strange email from Fiona on Xmas eve that said, "I just want to back up Dawn's letter to you, and say that I'll hope you'll be involved in this initiative/conversation." So my curiosity was definitely raised when I open the next email which was from Dawn, and once I read what she was planning I was keen to participate. My main concern was that I didn't think that I could participate fully via Skype. I thought that we would have a stronger chance of articulating the concept of Indigenous worldviews if we could work together as a group and build upon each other's ideas. With knowledge being relational, it is best demonstrated through working together in relation with each other. This relationship can work to a limited extent via distance technology (thankfully!) but meeting in person takes it up a notch or two. My thinking was, "If this meeting is really important, then I need to be there in person." There were a

¹ Edmund W. Gordon, Ph.D. is John M. Musser Professor of Psychology, Emeritus, at Yale University and Richard March Hoe Professor of Psychology and Education, Emeritus, at Teachers College of Columbia University.

² Dawn Hill Adams, Ph.D. is Co-President, Founder, and Senior Scientist of Tapestry Institute in Longmont, Colorado.

few logistical problems to be overcome in planning to get me there, but though I was physically travelling the furthest my actual travel was trouble free and I ended up arriving first and was the only one who didn't face any delays.

-- I'm Shawn Wilson, an Opaskwayak Cree (Nehiyaw) from northern Manitoba in Canada. I grew up on the reserve that has been the home Land of my people for millennia. My parents, Stan and Peggy Wilson, are both professors of education. I feel blessed that I was provided an education that has allowed me to learn Traditional ways from the Land and Elders, as well as through Western education systems.³

Dawn: Shawn was expected to participate in the meeting via Skype because of the travel expense if he attended in person. The same day I invited him, I emailed Dr. Gordon to point out that in-person relationship is an important part of the way Indigenous people operate. I volunteered my honorarium to the travel budget if it would help pay for his ticket. Two days later, when Shawn wrote to express his interest in the meeting, he had the same idea. He thought it was so important for him to come in person that he, too, offered to forego his honorarium so there'd be enough money in the budget for a plane ticket from Australia. On January 23, we got the permission we'd been waiting for: Shawn would be able to come to New York and help advance the work that was so important to us all.

After writing Shawn the good news about his ticket, I went out on the Land and did ritual. My father had passed over the evening before and it seemed to me he must have helped us. For this work had been important to him. He had been excited by the meeting Dr. Gordon had organized and the promise it offered. He understood the possibilities and they were ones he'd cared about all his life, for he was the fourth generation of our family to take up the charge of using a Western education to serve the greater community good.

Shawn: I know that I could go to any Aboriginal student and ask why they're at university, and I would be so surprised it would knock me off my feet if one of them said, "I am there to better myself." They all say: "I'm there to help my community" or "to make things better for my community." The idea of bettering self for self is foreign, even when the person is heavily mainstreamed in other areas.

EWGordon: My father got an education as an M.D. and served as a physician for the same kinds of reasons. He was a man who avoided obvious challenge to the established order but worked behind the scenes to bring about change for marginalized people. So he would not have been a leader of one of the anti-racism marches of the nineteen fifties and sixties. Instead, he would have quietly financed the protests or secured the permit for the demonstrations. I marched in the civil rights demonstrations of the sixties, but I am less likely to have led the public protest than to have provided its conceptual leadership. Yet sometimes I find you have to wear the dashiki, that you must be who you are and what you stand for.

³ Shawn Wilson, PhD. is at the University Centre for Rural Health, Lismore, NSW, Australia. "I acknowledge the Bundjalung people as the traditional owners of the land on which I live, work and play."

Dawn: On Friday night, when Ed Gordon suddenly realized for the first time that Shawn had traveled 10,000 miles solely and only to take part in our meeting, his expression leaped into bright planes of joy. He sprang from his chair to thrust his arm across the massive oak dinner table and grabbed Shawn's hand in a grip of crackling power. In that moment, a flash of connection sprang from the impact of those hands and those hearts to encircle us all in a timeless embrace – my father and Ed's father among us, and Ryan and Narcisse who were so far away.

-- *Narcisse Blood: I'm a Kainai person. My name's Tatsikiistamik, Middle Bull. I wish we could just do our presentation in Blackfoot and have a translator. It would be so much easier! I am a survivor of residential school and I bear the scars. If we're going to learn from Place, we have to deal with those historical traumas. So, what we try and come from is what has sustained us all these years – that you're a **person** first. We are meant to love one another. Then you can add all the other titles.*⁴

Ryan: Narcisse and I are here from and representing Red Crow College on the Blood Reserve. Right now, at our college, the program that Narcisse and I are involved in, Kainai Studies, is somewhat under attack. We have a new administration that wants to go back to what we were doing about fifteen years ago, which is just basically trying to be a feeder system to the mainstream universities. And so they're meeting with an outside consultant who's going to review our program as part of an effort to undermine what we're doing. So my stomach is a little bit on end. I've been having a lot of stress over that.

*My name is Akayo'kaki, Many Wardings-Off. This word refers to the way bison defend the herd against wolves by charging out from the circle to steer away danger. My white name is Ryan Heavy Head. I am caretaker of the Beaver Bundle. My elder male relative is Ponokaiksiksinaam, White Elk, who everyone here knows as Martin Heavy Head. My elder female relative is Sai'piiiaakii, Charging Woman, who everyone here knows as Pam Heavy Head. Martin's daughter Piipiiiaakii, which translates as Baby Girl, I stay with her, which is to say we're married.*⁵

As soon as the meeting dates were set, Ed Gordon wrote his assistant Kavitha to say he needed to think through how to relate the resources Shawn, Narcisse, Ryan, and Dawn were bringing to the meeting to ways “to think about, collect information concerning and better understand how persons teach and learn declarative, procedural and spiritual knowledge and thought.” Then he added: “Once I understand how I intend to

⁴ Narcisse Blood, Kainai Elder. Former Director of Kainai Studies and a Researcher at Red Crow Community College in Cardston, Alberta, Canada. Principal on the Learning From Place project, part of the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, funded by the Canadian Council of Learning, and advisor on the SSHRC-funded Itsinikssiitsi project.

⁵ Ryan Heavy Head, Founder and Director, Aimmoniiisiiksi Institute of Blackfoot Learning. Kainai Studies Coordinator, Red Crow Community College in Cardston, Alberta, Canada.

conceptualize that relationship, I need to figure out an agenda for my conversation with them that will produce the exchange that I need.” So Kavitha phoned Dawn to plan a formal agenda.

-- I am Kavitha Rajagopalan, daughter of Vatsala and P. Rajagopalan, Tamil-speaking Iyengar Brahmins from the Haritha Gothram. I have been working with Edmund W. Gordon for six years, and in that capacity have helped him write a book on the future of educational assessment, among other editorial and writing work. In my own professional capacity, I am a writer and policy analyst specializing in global migration and social cohesion in cities.⁶

Dawn to EWGordon, email
January 21, 2015

Kavitha and I had a delightful conversation yesterday. One of the things she asked me about was the agenda for the upcoming Consultative Conversation, and she was a little surprised to learn that we are something of an “agenda-less” people. When I explained why this is so, she was very intrigued. She felt it might be helpful for me to share this information with you since you were not able to be part of that discussion.

To us, an agenda assumes we can know what will happen and in what order. It is a statement of our determination to reach a particular outcome by a specific means, usually through a set of steps. As such, an agenda’s structure reflects linear, control-based processes that do not fit with Indigenous cultural processes of collaborative work. We believe that something remarkable and vital happens when people come together within sacred space, with good hearts, to accomplish something important together. The Land, or Place, participates in what happens as much as do the people. The people pray to ask the spirits who guide them to help as well. That means there are sources of information, insight, guidance, and inspiration moving in the process that add elements to it no human being could anticipate. A pre-set agenda would shut all that out.

I truly believe that although we may do things a little differently, you will be very happy with the result. And Kavitha tells me you often begin a meeting over a conversational dinner. Such a meal is an important part of opening our meetings as well!

EWGordon to Dawn, email
January 21, 2015

Since, especially with the Consultative Conversation concerning alternative ways of knowing, I want to learn about alternative thought systems, it seems entirely appropriate that we at least begin without a formal agenda. I would not object if in the course of the conversation we collectively arrived at an agenda, so long as it did not preclude the expression of dissonant ideas. My desire is to be inclusively respectful of ways of knowing, and I do not want to be constrained by the ways we “think that we know” that would influence a predetermined agenda.

Dawn I am entirely comfortable with your approach. I have turned to you and your associates for enlightenment. There may be some point where I will not be able to embrace your perspective, but to date I have encountered from you nothing that causes

⁶ Kavitha Rajagopalan, M.A., Senior Policy Fellow, World Policy Institute in New York.

me pause. Even when and if I find that I cannot live with something you advance, I pray that I will be capable of thinking about it. My position is that ideas may sometimes have to be rejected for the extant purposes that need to be served or for the point in time in which they must be applied, but the arbitrary rejection of the products of conceptual generativity is unacceptable. In our conversation I hope for orderly but open and inclusive conversation. I hope you and our consultants can live with my bias.

Of course, travel itineraries and plane reservations still necessarily anchored the meeting to calendar and clock. Dawn was to arrive in Pomona, New York on the afternoon of Wednesday, March 4 and work with Ed Gordon that day and the next to prepare for the meeting. Shawn would fly in the same day to have time to recover from jet lag. Then he and Ryan would come to the Gordon residence late Thursday afternoon so they and Dawn could do ritual together on the Land before the meeting's official start over dinner that evening. The main consultation dialogue would take place Friday, March 6. Then everyone would go their separate ways.

Ryan: The Time Obstacle is one of the biggest blocks to Indigenous ways of learning. Time is an obstacle just in the way that we schedule things so that we don't work in Real Time.

Dawn: The likelihood of bad weather worried me throughout planning because New England was having such a severe winter. As I made my way through the tail end of a blizzard to the airport in Denver, spun-out cars in ditches along the road foreshadowed the travel hazards we would all face. Nevertheless, I wasn't worried when the pilot of my weather-rescheduled flight told us the electrical system had a problem. But then an unnerving series of events began to unfold, similar at multiple points to a situation my mother had experienced more than forty years before. Her plane had finally taken off after hours of announcements and actions I was present to witness, that paralleled the situation I was witnessing now. Despite two major repair efforts, her plane lost power to half its engines as well as its landing lights several hours out over the desert. It flew for miles just above the landscape to minimize the impact of a crash landing as the sun began to set, passengers crying and praying, until they reached an airport big enough for the plane to land again. It came down just before dark in a pile of foam, raced by fire trucks using their headlights to brighten the runway. My mother's shaken admonition to family members -- "Never fly on a plane you have to get off twice for the same repair" -- kept surfacing as I waited at the terminal gate. What could the uncanny parallels between my flight and hers mean?

After several hours I realized I could not just "listen to reason" and set aside the information conveyed by such a remarkable pattern of semblance. There was also, though I felt uncomfortable giving it credence, a niggling sense of anxiety crawling through my long bones. Intuition conveys information even when we don't know exactly what the feeling signifies and must work hard not to jump to conclusions. In this case, I didn't believe there was threat of an actual plane crash, and that made it harder to decide what to do. But I finally booked a seat on the next flight, though it wouldn't get me to Newark until nearly 2:00 the next morning and during a new storm forecast to roll through New York around midnight. I would still have all day Thursday to meet with Ed Gordon to

prepare for the meeting. But I felt guilty because I knew many people would have judged me as being superstitious. They would have thought I was responding to “omens” that I thought presaged some kind of disaster. But I knew it wasn’t that way.

The thing is, you have to pay attention to the information that comes to you. The trick is having discernment.

Thursday March 5, CONSULTATION at the Gordon residence

Shawn: Knowledge is contextual. So any certain tests of veracity of that knowledge are also contextual. It’s impossible to separate epistemology from methodology.

EWGordon: Your understanding of the nature of things will influence how you go about reinforcing that understanding.

Shawn (to Dawn): Actually . . . I’m really not sure I’m comfortable saying “This is what we think” without an Elder present.

Dawn: Well . . . That’s why I’d invited Narcisse to come.

Ryan to all of us, email

Wed, February 11 2015. 9:40 am

I regret to have to share with you that my good friend, colleague, and in-law Narcisse passed away in a car accident yesterday morning.

When we worked together to clear a space that would let the meeting take place in Real Time, we had no way of knowing just how quickly even our most basic plans would be challenged. The loss of Narcisse just a few weeks before we were scheduled to meet left us without an Elder, but it dealt a far more severe blow to his closest friend, Ryan, who had developed and delivered the Kainai Studies Learning From Place program with him. Deeply concerned about Ryan’s well-being, we wrote to affirm the strong sense of power and vitality we could still feel inhabiting his and Narcisse’s shared work, but offering him the opportunity to postpone the meeting date or even withdraw entirely. Ryan’s courageous response was that he intended to join the group exactly as promised. “I know that Narcisse would want me to move forward and share what he taught me, to try carrying our combined spirit into this conversation,” he wrote. It wasn’t to be the last challenge Ryan faced at this meeting. But he persevered because, he pointed out many weeks later, “In Blackfoot country there is a sense that when you say you’re going to do something, you need to carry through and do it.”

But there were only three of us now. And we had no Elder – a serious problem for a meeting where we were being asked to provide information that requires the presence and authority of a person recognized by the community for their knowledge and wisdom. There was a sense of being inexorably moved towards an event that was suddenly unsupported, of needing to keep an obligation but finding ourselves in the position of working without a net. Fortunately, Shawn had just returned from a meeting where he’d had the opportunity to visit with Indigenous scholars from New Zealand, Australia, and

Canada. So he had words of reassuring wisdom to share even as he, too, felt the discomfort inherent in an increasingly unusual situation.

Shawn to Dawn, email

February 16, 2015

One thing that an Elder here, Dr. Norm Sheehan, told me about a month ago, is for us to remember that Indigenous Knowledge itself has agency, and will do what it needs to do to protect itself or to make itself heard. So I guess we need to have faith that things are working out as they should. My personal challenge is putting that faith into practice and trying not to worry.

February rolled storms over New York like surf on the nearby Atlantic. Deep snow heaped over lawns and piled in parking lots. It lay in thin layers of hardpack where people had scraped and swept walkways, highways, and runways. Shawn arrived in New York just after dark on the fourth of March and was driven the 40 miles to Pomona through a landscape of glittering snow and rising temperatures. Just after midnight, it started to rain.

By the time Dawn landed in Newark at 2:00 am on the 5th, black water pooled like oil under the streetlights. Warm rain dissolved the top layer of snowpack and swept meltwater into sheets of flat, braided runoff. Then, before daylight, the temperature fell and the rain fluffed up into snow again. It started to form a soft frosting over the ice-crusted mass left from previous storms.

On the Garden State Parkway between Pomona and Newark, armored snowplows lumbered three abreast, traffic crawling behind them. Whole buildings surfaced through the fog of falling snow like whales rising for air, then vanished like ghosts in the white opaque morning. It was nearly 11:00 before Dawn reached the Gordons'. Shawn, recovering more quickly than he'd expected from jet lag, caught a cab to the residence and arrived around noon. Kavitha, leaving Brooklyn for the meeting right then, packed for an overnight stay in Pomona knowing she would be stranded there by the storm. Priya, Dr. Gordon's assistant, made it to the residence in time to take part in the unscheduled afternoon meeting that decided to happen, and to help prepare for the planned dinner that night. Ezekiel Dixon-Román, due to attend that dinner, called to say he couldn't get through the storm from Philadelphia because of bad road conditions.

Ryan's plane was due in La Guardia at 1:30.

-- I'm Priya Gunaseharan, practicing SGI Nichiren Buddhist and daughter of a South Indian engineer father and African American lawyer mother. After graduating from Columbia, I found my way back home to Rockland County and found work with Professor Gordon. I dedicate most of my time outside of work to acting, singing and songwriting - interests that complement my studies of Human Diversity and Pedagogy under the guidance and mentorship of Professor Gordon.⁷

⁷ Priya Gunaseharan, B.A. (Columbia University Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, May 2014), Assistant to Dr. Edmund G. Gordon, Ph.D.

We settled on low couches in a den with tall picture windows that looked out upon a snowy winter woods. Beautiful carvings and paintings of beings from many tribes' traditions and stories, collected during the Gordons' travels all over the world, surrounded us on shelves and table tops rich as mahogany spice. Kavitha arrived, breathless and trailing a swirl of biting wind and crystals of ice dust on a dark coat. And perhaps because of those who were present, but perhaps also because of the heavy gray wind that poured down from the mountains, the first few moments of casual conversation rolled over and slid to one side almost immediately, displaced by the massive shape of culture and learning that surfaced beneath it.

It began with an innocent statement of the meeting's primary goal, which apparently followed a standard format for all the consultative conversations Dr. Gordon had convened for this project. Dawn was to prepare a written statement about Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, he explained, and Shawn, Ed, and – when he arrived – Ryan were to support her in that endeavor. Ed Gordon had no way of knowing that Dawn had never once imagined this was the plan – or that learning it nearly ended the meeting before it could start.

Dawn: My immediate inclination was: *run*. Had I been a person who is capable of walking, much less running, across snow and ice without turning into a hurtling human luge, I would have been gone. Stricken, I turned to Shawn and sent him a mute appeal for back-up. My horrified objections to the idea were all trying to get through the door at the same time and their stuck mass of gyrating arms and legs was choking me. Fortunately, thanks to my travel delay, I wasn't alone. Shawn was present, and more than equal to the task of opening a discussion that would eventually explain why this simple plan deeply violated Indigenous principles of learning and knowing. Of course, it took quite a while for things to come clear because authentic cross-cultural communication isn't easy. So that night I emailed Shawn and Ryan about how uncomfortable I still felt, and what we might do to fulfill our obligations to Dr. Gordon and his project while also fulfilling the even deeper obligations we owe our ways, our people, and our understanding of Knowledge. Shawn's reply helped me see how we might move things in a more productive direction. When I read his words, I felt more centered and less like I was about to lose my balance and go sliding across the slippery landscape.

Shawn to Dawn, email

March 6, 2015, 4:55 am

I think that what you are feeling might be the reflection of a misunderstanding of the nature of the knowledge that we want to discuss. I've found before that others can generally come to understand relationships as the basis of our reality, as everyone is in relationships and can share that experiential knowing of it. However, other people seems to have a hard time with grasping the flow on, that knowledge therefore cannot be owned (or discovered); it belongs to and with the land and community context rather than with an individual. I think that none of us would be willing to put our hand up and say 'this is the way we think,' as the thinking itself is 'owned' by the group and grows through the process of sharing /talking together. But it has also been taught to each of us by our own Elders and teachers - so they are a part of that custodianship as well. Making sure that it is represented properly then becomes a group process, so can't really be done by just one

person. Sure, I'm hoping that you can take the lead in the ceremony of getting these ideas on paper, but feel like I would need to stand beside you (metaphorically) and also get the approval of my Elders to stand behind me as well. Maybe we need to explain how we understand participation in and custodianship over the ceremony of knowledge creation.

-- THURSDAY --

Shawn and Dawn spent the first few moments that we were all together trying to explain that a report produced in the way and format Dr. Gordon expected could not possibly express our ways of learning or our epistemic systems. Dr. Gordon, Kavitha, and Priya began to ask questions for clarification. And so the Consultative Conversation began a half day earlier than planned.

One of the first things Shawn explained is that Knowledge is *contextual*. It is Land-based in a certain land. This means a "Grand Unifying Theory" isn't something Indigenous researchers look for. We expect knowledge to be contextual, local to a specific Place. We emphasize the *relational* aspect of knowledge. That relational aspect is embedded in the very notion that knowledge is contextual to Place. Knowledge is seen as arising out of that relationship, and its purpose is to reinforce and maintain the health of that relationship.

These two statements about knowledge being contextual and relational led to discussion about the purpose and benefit of knowledge. Ed Gordon pointed out examples of advances in scientific knowledge, for instance, that have led to important benefits for people and societies. Other more theoretically-based advances in knowledge carry benefits that are less practical and more esoteric, but still highly valued. Shawn and Dawn responded by challenging us to think about how we define things that are of "benefit" to people and communities. In the dominant culture, concepts of success primarily relate to growth. Growth may not be a benefit, especially if we are pursuing growth beyond the planet's carrying capacity. Harmony is a benefit of knowledge that reinforces and maintains healthy relationships.

The other critical issue that arose was that of knowledge ownership. The idea that knowledge benefits people and societies through advancing economic and other kinds of growth generally goes with a view that knowledge is owned by the individuals who "discover" it. Talking about "advances" in knowledge implies that human agency is the fundamental process of knowledge construction: individual people push ahead or pioneer new kinds of knowledge through their own actions and cognitive processes.

We see knowledge as having its own agency. Shawn told us about meeting an Aboriginal Elder, Dr. Norm Sheehan, who used this term to express the autonomous nature of Indigenous Knowledge and its innate ability to reveal itself *as* it chooses and *to those* it chooses. The fact that we see knowledge as coming from the Land -- which holds knowledge and is the source of knowledge -- means that a human *receives* knowledge instead of *discovering* it. Then, of course, the person processes the information that's been received, communicates it to others, and applies it in some way. But that human cannot be said to have discovered or invented the knowledge, so they cannot possibly own it.

It was at this point that Ed excused himself a moment and Shawn turned to Dawn with a pained look that must have mirrored hers earlier, when she'd first learned of the meeting's expected outcome. "I'm really not sure I'm comfortable saying 'This is what we think' without an Elder present," he said very softly. Dawn was silent a moment in the storm-darkened room. Then she said, even more softly, "Yes. Well . . . That's why I'd invited Narcisse to come." She shrugged sadly. Both were quiet a long time then, reflecting. Knowledge has agency and can choose to reveal and also to protect itself. We needed an Elder present and had arranged for one who specialized in formal education based in learning from the Land. When he was taken so unexpectedly, we had opened the door to postponing the meeting in a way that might, as a side-effect, have given us time to find another Elder who could attend. But things had played themselves out to this moment: the two of us sitting on plaid couches in a quiet den, the third member of our group somewhere between a Minnesota transfer point and La Guardia, snow falling thickly as Times Square confetti on New Years.

Ed, coming back into the room, settled himself into an easy chair and then leaned forward with an intent expression. "David Ausubel has explained that in learning, if the learner has advanced organizers -- ways of classifying knowledge -- he learns better," he said. "That is, if he has hooks on which to hang what he is learning, he can get hold of it. I am looking for those hooks." He spread his hands. "This is key."

Shawn and Dawn thought a moment, and then said they thought that relationship-building was a possible hook that would allow people to get hold of the ideas we were trying to express. As Shawn wrote later in his email to Dawn, others can generally come to understand relationships as the basis of our reality because everyone is in relationships and can share that experiential knowing of it. But Ed shook his head. This was not working for him. And if he could not find the hooks, no one else who read our report could find them either.

Dawn: The biggest challenge in conveying this type of knowledge is context. We are talking about trying to find a context for communicating. It seems to me that's what Ausubel's hooks are.

Shawn: An analogy held in a story becomes the hook on which the knowledge is hung. The story enables relationship building to the information it contains. In research, we then look at specific stories of relationship and make them part of the Long Story.

EWGordon: This is a story most people don't know or understand.

Shawn: The story hooks I'd like to place things on are not validated. The dominant culture really doesn't value Story as a way of knowing, though it values story in other ways. Hollywood certainly values some aspects of story, for example. And so do the people who go to movies.

EWGordon: What if you tell us the stories and it will be our job to translate or interpret the meaning ourselves? Wouldn't that mean we construct the meaning that is in the story?

Kavitha: (writing in her notes of the meeting) *This idea is generally challenged all around.*

Shawn: It's true that five or six different people can hear a beautifully told story and all get a different lesson from it. Or years later, we can understand some part of the story we didn't understand at first. This is an aging of knowledge. But the Story may choose who it comes to or doesn't come to. It can come to us or not. We are not constructing the information ourselves.

Dawn: In the dominant culture, a story often ends with a synthesis, a moral, or written analysis. The meaning of the story, when story is used to transmit information, is clearly stated: "This means that . . ." But we see Story as conveying meaning to people in its own way – Knowledge having and expressing agency – so we do not overtly state the Story's meaning. The meaning is left ambiguous because we cannot, ourselves, say what it's going to be to any particular person. The meaning arises within the relationship between the Story and any specific listener.

Shawn: How, when and where we talk impacts the knowledge. This speaks to the agency of knowledge. It is creating and forming itself through the process of storytelling. I understand differently as the storyteller than you as the hearer, hanging it on your own pegs.

EWGordon: There must be things in common to a human being in any or all contexts. These things would serve as hooks or pegs that allow us to get a handle on new kinds of information.

Dawn: In theoretical physics, mathematics is seen as a universal language -- in fact, as "the language in which the universe is written."

EWGordon: When it comes to mathematics, if there are manifestations of quantitative relationships that are universal, why should it be restricted to mathematics?

Shawn: The concept of beauty is universal. I was just at a meeting where I was talking with Indigenous scholars and Elders about beauty. There's a strong functional component to it, too, not just aesthetics. The functional part relates to how the beautiful thing fulfills a role in its essential relationships.

Ed grew pensive and sat back in his chair as we thought about the role of beauty as a universal, accessible source of meaningful information to all humans in any or all contexts. He mused aloud about one of his sons, who learns in a different language from the one he and his wife and other children learn in. Whereas most of Ed's family are scholars who acquire knowledge from specific kinds of written materials and intellectual analysis, this particular son builds exquisitely beautiful and sea-worthy boats. He learned to do it through his hands and through the feel of the wood he uses to make them. It's a different kind of learning that is not intellectual. Yet it has value because the boats are valuable and sought-after. These boats have beauty that's both aesthetic and functional,

and they express a relationship between Ed's son and knowledge, boats, the sea, the materials, the tools, and boat-building.

This caused us to reflect as a group upon the role of art and creative process in learning, and on the other ways that we learn: through story, dream, intuition, and experience. Shawn told a Dakota story of how the flute came to be, which was that a person was present when the wind blew through a long and slender hollow stick that'd had some holes drilled into it by a woodpecker. So the flute was not "invented." Knowledge was translated from its source through the medium of wood, wind, and woodpecker to the person who was watching and listening. The person was then able to use that knowledge and transmit it to everyone else. Ed observed that this type of non-cognitive knowing is meta-mentation: the orchestration of numerous signals and kinds of information in the interest of problem-solving. Feelings, attributions, specific technical information, and abstract representation can all be part of this meta-level process, but it's more than any of these alone. Meta-mentation goes past the thinking-only, intellectual kinds of learning. Shawn pointed out that ritual is a part of this type of learning, too.

Kavitha: Shawn, I read your book Research As Ceremony before our meeting. Can you clarify what you mean when you talk about ceremony or ritual being part of the act of knowledge creation in this context?

Shawn: If you conduct research to gain enlightenment or to build a better community, to improve and maintain relationships, then that is a ritualized process. You must access liminal space, or create that space by setting a time or place for ritual, in order to be open. This creates a process whereby the sacred miraculous can become physical. The miracle of the ceremony of enlightenment takes us to a place where things shift and tie together, and then there is a translation process whereby the knowledge becomes cognitive.

Kavitha: So is the understanding itself cognitive? Or is it something else?

Shawn: It's intersectional. In the story about how the flute came to be, the understanding arose in the intersection between the wind, the wood, the woodpecker, and the human.

EWGordon: Is this sensitivity to process a characteristic of Native epistemology?

Shawn: I think so, yes, because it's relational. Relationship is a living process.

EWGordon: So we have a difference of learning methodology. It's impossible to separate epistemology from methodology. Your understanding of the nature of things will influence how you go about reinforcing that understanding.

Kavitha: Shawn, have your ideas about Indigenous research methods changed since you wrote your book?

Shawn: I guess the biggest thing is that I've changed the way I label the research paradigm I outline there. I call it *Indigenist* now, instead of *Indigenous*. This emphasizes

that it's a philosophical issue, not a claiming of ownership by one group of people. You can be a white Indigenist just like you can be a male feminist.

Shawn went on to tell a story about what happened in the old, pre-contact days when the Cree people sometimes traveled to the edges of their lands:

When they came to a place where they knew other people lived, they stopped and built a campfire at the boundary. The people who lived in the neighboring land would see this fire on the boundary between the peoples, and they would know to come and visit, to communicate with people from another culture.

"How do we create intersectional spaces at the edges of our understanding to meet in a new area?" Shawn asked. "How do we create the campfires that invite others to visit with us?"

Priya had left the room to take a phone call during this conversation, and now she returned. "Forgive me for interrupting," she said, "but I've heard from Ryan. He left the airport in Minneapolis-St. Paul all right, but a plane slid off the runway at La Guardia this afternoon so they closed the airport and turned back his plane. They've told the passengers they expect La Guardia to be closed at least five hours while they clean things up, so they completely cancelled his flight. He's gotten a ticket for another flight that leaves Minneapolis at 7:00 pm, but he's also on standby for a 1 o'clock flight that's been delayed to at least 3:00. But he has hopes it will fly out soon and that he'll get a seat on it."

Everyone was sobered by the thought of the accident at La Guardia and worried about whether or not Ryan could get to New York. It was already 4:00 pm on the East Coast. The afternoon light was dim, and heavy snow rained down steadily outside, mounding white graves over the garden plants. Shawn and Ed excused themselves. The women, temporarily alone in the living room, quietly discussed their hope that Ryan had perhaps already caught the standby seat and was on his way to a safe landing in New York even then. But the storm had certainly not let up since the accident closed the airport.

Dawn thought about her own weather-related problems and the mechanical failures that had caused her to take a much later plane. She'd gotten to Pomona nearly 24 hours later than scheduled as a result – in time to have Shawn at her side when the conversation began so unexpectedly early. She thought about Narcisse and the unspoken things about the role he was to have played in this meeting, that had passed between her and Shawn earlier that afternoon. She shook her head then and said, almost to herself, "Something is moving here."

"What do you mean?" Priya asked. "Do you mean that the snowstorm is making the meeting so hard, that the weather is sending a message it shouldn't take place?"

Kavitha, leaning against the wall, mused that Dawn wouldn't have made an effort to come, or engaged in comfortable conversation with Shawn and Dr. Gordon, if she thought the meeting was not supposed to take place.

Dawn remembered her feelings of the day before, when the mechanical problems of her plane had paralleled those of her mother's flight so dramatically. Her face appeared stern as she searched for the words to express what she'd counted on then to make a difficult decision. "What's moving is power," she said finally, "And when power moves,

it can take things in directions we might consider either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depending on the situation. This is one of those times that powerful energies are manifesting in turbulence – in life as well as in weather – and making it so things don’t happen the way they usually do. The turbulence of this power is impacting our meeting just as it’s impacting other things, elsewhere. We can’t tell yet whether we’ll think it was ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in the end.”

Kavitha: When my mother was a little girl in India, one night a terrible typhoon struck the coast. Trees were uprooted and the winds howled and my mother was terrified. She huddled into her mother's bosom and asked what was wrong. And her mother said that the Devi -- parashakti, the life force -- was entering the town, and taking up residence in the temple that had been built for her. Many years before my mother was born, there had been a jasmine grove that was home to many poisonous snakes. The town men cut down the trees with machetes and drove the snakes away. But as they took revenge on the grove for the snakebites their people had suffered, their blades drew a hot gush of blood from a stone nestled among the green jasmine roots. So they knew they had made a mistake. They built a temple and put the stone on its altar and prayed to make things right again, and many years passed. Finally the Devi accepted their prayers and came home. And that was the night the typhoon struck the town. Before my daughter was born, and I was fearful of birth, I called my mother and as I stood on the sidewalk in the middle of a glaring, blaring city, my mother told me this story. And what she told me was this: when the Devi comes, she doesn't come gentle. When the life force passes through you, it might feel like destruction.

We gathered once more that afternoon before dinner. Dr. Gordon had clearly been thinking during our break. His sharp mind had been processing all that he’d heard, still looking for a way to connect it to what he already knew. He had built a boundary campfire and we had come. We’d all sat down to visit but then he’d discovered we spoke an unexpected language, one whose words didn’t quite make sense to him yet. Now he was walking up and down in the flickering patterns of darkness at the edge of the firelight, eyes flashing bright with concentration. When he finally sat down, his strong hands cupped the ends of his chair arms and he leaned towards us with keen focus. It seemed to Dawn, watching him, that he had brought an armload of wood into the room with him and, as he sat down, thrown it into our boundary fire to make it blaze up more brightly. He began to add words describing his work and its goals to the widening circle of light.

One of the purposes of the series of consultative conversations of which ours was a part, Dr. Gordon explained, was to try to lay an epistemological groundwork that could show the academic assessment community where it might be off-base and therefore needing to change what it’s doing. The Gordon Commission on the future of assessment in education had just spent several years looking at what’s working in the field of assessment and evaluation and, perhaps more importantly, not working. “If we understand that our colloquial notions of knowledge are outdated,” he said, “then education and its measure have to try to understand how out of step they are, epistemologically, by decontextualizing assessment when human performance does not occur out of context, for example, and by privileging standardization when we understand

human performance as multimodeled, multiperspectivist, and multifunctional. I would argue that if the purpose of assessment is to improve how we educate people, then measuring where people are or where they have been is immoral.”

One of the things he'd come to understand is that there are many varied ways of knowing, that knowledge itself is varied. This means if we're concerned with understanding and measuring knowledge, we have to use many varied ways of understanding and measuring it. But that's a highly labor-intensive enterprise. So the question then becomes: Can we assess non-cognitive learning? If we speak of assessment as analytic, then yes. But if we focus on measurement, we'd have to focus on correlates of human cognition. An analytic approach to assessment would focus on the affective, cognitive and situative, and not privilege or isolate any of the three. What are the underlying commonalities for all the *varied* ways of learning, of understanding, and of knowledge itself? If we can identify those, do they provide a workable way to approach measuring many different kinds of knowledge?

In the pause that followed this question, Shawn quietly observed that if the goal of education is to provide Western qualifications then it might seem reasonable to use Western methods of assessing it. But if the goal is Indigenist qualifications, then you don't need Western qualifications. Instead, if you're studying Indigenist ways of knowing, you need Indigenist assessment methods.

Dr. Gordon explained that in his studies of learners world-wide, he's come to see that the capacity for adaptation is unique to human beings, and that as a *human* capacity it unites learners in “pretty much the same level of adaptive ability” from places as different as rural Asia and Africa on one hand, to urban schools with highly Westernized curricula on the other. “It seems to me that while we privilege different aspects of learning and different languages,” he said, his strong voice filling the room with ringing conviction, “it's all about *survival*: adapting to the environment. This is the real indicator of what I have come to call ‘*intellective competence*,’ and people everywhere seem to develop it. It's the cumulative product of human beings, not of any one group. And that's what I'm interested in: the affirmative development of academic ability, and of intellective competence. Education should develop this and assessment should ensure that it's happening. Surviving in your environment and adapting to your environment are real indications of competence – this is the cumulative product of human beings.”

A technological society, he went on, rewards adaptations that adapt a learner to that society. This makes sure we do not deprive students of the intellective capacities that adapt them to that society. But this does not make the core intellective and learning processes of people in a technological society different from those of people in other societies, or normative for people in all societies. The processes are still about realizing the *human* capacity for adaptation.

Yet he felt he was hearing us talk about Indigenist learning as if it was something unique – and so far the point of unique process we pointed to seemed to be relationality. But, said Dr. Gordon, relationality as a core learning process did not allow him to separate Indigenist learning from other systems of learning. That was true whether one thought of relational generativity of knowledge – the process of generating knowledge through relationship – or relational adjudication – the idea that knowledge is assessed or evaluated through or within relationship. In fact, the more he thought about relational adjudication, the more it seemed to him that it could produce paradoxical results that

would have to be resolved in some way. And that way would have to lie outside the relational knowledge system to get any leverage. Such a shift would require us to surrender relational knowing as a sort of ultimate core process, which means Indigenist knowing would not be unique or different from other systems after all.

Shawn: Could it be that we're in error to look for *uniqueness* here? I can't say my way of thinking is unique because I know only what I think and my own experience, not what others think or experience. And certainly I see logical positivism as a subset of Indigenist learning systems.

EWGordon: Maybe we are looking for differences that are not real here. Maybe the fundamental processes are the same. It could be that the differences we think we see are artificial or imposed.

Shawn: Well, one difference I do think I notice is the idea that ambiguity *needs* to be resolved. You spoke of it as a challenge to relational adjudication just now, that it could produce a paradox that has to be resolved. But in my experience, I've found that ambiguity is sometimes necessary. I don't feel the need to resolve it. So maybe our different assumptions about the need to resolve ambiguity are one real difference between our systems of understanding.

Dawn: I think the participatory nature of knowledge acquisition is also different. Logical positivism is based on objective learning that necessarily takes place outside of or apart from whatever is being learned about. This is seen as the only means of producing reliable information. In a relational system, participation – being in relationship to the thing you are learning about and to the knowledge itself -- is essential to the learning process. I mean, if knowledge is generated through relationship, you literally cannot learn if you take an objective “apart” stance outside the thing you're trying to understand. Which does take us back to relationality as a core process.

EWGordon: I am trying very hard here to understand Indigenist or Native American knowledge production or thinking. It seems to me I see two parts. The first is peculiar to the ways in which people relate to the land or the universe, and this is not necessarily cultural. I think we have to use care, in thinking about this part of it, not to categorize or classify systems unnecessarily. The second part I see is conceptual: that knowledge is produced or generated as a natural phenomenon, and that learning arises through relationship. Further, it seems to me that spirituality and experientiality are implicit parts of relational learning though they have not been explicitly emphasized in the things you've said so far. It seems you are also saying that learning is communicated through narrative, that there is attention to the practicality of information, and that polity is important. The lived experience as a member of the group is a source of information.

Shawn: There is an Elder named Jo-ann Archibald who works on Sto:lo / Halq'emeylem language revitalization. She was telling me how now that they teach the language in school, there are more people that can speak it. But while these people are ok with the vocabulary, they aren't able to “speak properly” – they don't know the cadence of the

language and how to engage in conversation or discussions following Sto:lo ways of thinking and communicating. My father, Stan Wilson, talks about something similar, frequently. To paraphrase him: “When white people came, we could see the value in the gifts that were brought with them – for example it’s much easier to hunt with a rifle and to travel by snowmachine than by dogteam. So we adopted and adapted those tools into the way that we live on the land. But a problem is that we, myself included, thought that English as a language would also be the same – that it would be an easier way to communicate that we could adopt into our life. It does make it easier to communicate with other (non-Cree) people around us. But the problem is that English carries and is built upon a different way of thinking than our language. So by not using our language we are losing our philosophy and ways of thinking.” That’s why I’m trying to make up for it by teaching my children Cree philosophy, so that even if they can’t speak Cree they’ll still know the underlying philosophy. The really important questions are: How do you enact your values? What are your sacred laws? How do you live according to them?

EWGordon: I am curious to figure out how spirituality figures into the knowledge problem.

Dawn: The spiritual is not supernatural or extra-natural. The Land that is the source of knowledge is alive, and we are participating in the process of knowing with it.

Shawn: It’s about agency and natural interactions. Knowledge has agency. This view has moral authority of a type that invites people to participate in the process.

And on that note, we were called to supper.

As the evening wore on and the dishes came and went, a string of third-party text messages relayed information about Ryan’s progress as he tried to get to New York. He’d gotten a seat on the afternoon flight, we learned, and then we heard that he’d landed in La Guardia and was on his way out of the terminal to the car that would bring him to Pomona. With happy cheers, we set aside our dessert plates and decided to wait for Ryan to come before we left for the hotel so that he could eat dinner, too. Food was put away to stay warm and we continued to visit with each other while expecting to hear him at the door any moment.

Dawn: Suddenly I realized that Priya, seated at the end of the table, was talking to Ryan on the phone. Her head was down as she listened intently, dark hair hiding her features. A moment later she hung up and looked at the party assembled around the dinner table. The news we’d gotten about Ryan’s successful landing in New York was incorrect, she told us. His plane had been turned back again. The airline told him they might have another flight later that night, possibly tomorrow morning. “Ryan says his gut tells him to stay there,” she finished. “But he is going to try to come on.”

Shawn and I looked at each other, and I am sure I had the same look of furrowed concern on my face that I saw on his. “That’s not right,” we said. I called Ryan at once.

Ryan: When the 3 o'clock flight rolled around, it didn't take off. La Guardia was still closed. Eventually, about 5 o'clock, it was going to fly and they were able to get me on, stand-by. So we got on the plane and took off. But we did not reach La Guardia. They turned us back and we ended up going down in Detroit.

And at that point, even before that, I was having my reservations about how to proceed. Because it was just very recently that we had lost Narcisse, and some of the circumstances surrounding his passing included travel that he was doing and an indication, perhaps, that he should stay home. What had happened was that he left his house to go to the airport and got about halfway there and realized that he had not taken his wallet. So he had to go all the way back home and fetch his wallet, and then go up to the airport to catch a flight. And a lot of us here, you know, kind of seen it that maybe it was telling him, you know . . . We wish that he would've just stayed home at that point. And so when things started to go wrong with me at Minneapolis-St. Paul, even with the first flight not taking off, I started to think . . . you know, it just reminded me of that, of what happened so recently. And I didn't want to not pay attention to that. And especially after I came down in Detroit, by then my wife at home was getting pretty upset too. She was telling me "maybe you should just turn around and come home." And so I remember talking to Dawn, and talking to Priya, about the situation. And my gut was telling me that I needed to quit, that I wasn't supposed to go to New York. But at the same time I did feel very conflicted because money had been spent on me, flying me to New York. And I felt obligated to the group. You know I was very honored to be asked to be part of the consultation, and I didn't want to let the group down. In Blackfoot country there is a sense that when you say you're going to do something, you need to carry through and do it. And at the same time, my gut was telling me "it's time to stop." But I kind of felt like if I bent to my intuition, it might be considered superstitious in the mainstream and it would be frowned upon. So I was very glad when I talked to Dawn and she kind of let me off the hook and let me know that it's ok to follow my intuition, and in fact it's preferable. That I was demonstrating one of the key points of the consultation in following my intuition.

Dawn: I called Ryan specifically to support what he already knew from his intuition – from his gut, which was telling him to stay put. I helped him to balance against the pull of expectations about what he "should" do, logically. Because of what I had just gone through, I understood the kind of pressure he was feeling. But the information conveyed by his intuition, by the sense of unease that told him to stay put, was important. I knew very well that in asking Priya to arrange for two nights of hotel stay in Detroit so that Ryan could Skype with us during the meeting next day, and in asking her to further work through the logistical nightmare of completely altering his travel arrangements, I was laying Indigenist ways of knowing – in this case, intuition -- on the table in very clear view. Acting on a cultural point of view in a way that costs time and money ups the ante on its reality. It was as scary for me to do that as it probably was for Ryan to take a deep breath and let go of the sense that he simply *had* to come on. So before I hung up, I told him: "Thank you for demonstrating one of the main points we've been talking about, which is valuing all the different ways of knowing, and taking them seriously, and living with integrity out of that." Then I paused, disconnecting the call, and watched my own

words hang suspended in the air. I caught again the glimpse of something moving, a vanishing tail tip bounding into the dark.

This is how it happens: A man woke up in the middle of the night. He could hear water running in the kitchen and could not understand how he'd come to leave the faucet on. The damp mountain wind blowing through the open loft window was cold on his back as he stumbled to the stairs. He felt his way down in the dark, one hand against the wall, and suddenly plunged both feet into a strong current that swirled around his legs. Shaking with confusion, he turned and ran back up the stairs to the loft. When the light switch did not work, he grabbed a flashlight. "It took me a moment to realize what I was seeing," he said later. "My first thought was to wonder how so much water could have come from the sink. Then I thought to myself, 'It's running through the kitchen like a river!' And at that moment, I understood something so impossible I thought I must be dreaming. But I looked out through the tall kitchen windows and I could see it was true. The river wasn't at the bottom of the hill any more. It was in the house, flowing through the kitchen like the walls weren't even there. And the house was somehow in the river. I could see my neighbors' emergency yard lights gleaming off the dark waves all around me, as far as I could see." He shook his head when he remembered it: "I knew it had been raining a lot. But I didn't understand it wasn't the same rain as usual. I don't even know when the river started to rise. I didn't see it happen until it was flowing so strongly through my house that the sound woke me up. I will never forget how shocked I was to realized the water I'd heard running wasn't from the plumbing in my own house."

Dawn to Shawn, email

6 Mar 2015, at 4:34 am

I've been praying. I think doing ritual on the land today can help us turn things right.

Shawn to Dawn, email

6 Mar 2015, at 4:55 am

I guess we should have went with the opening ceremony right off the bat instead of waiting for Ryan. I think that starting with ceremony this morning will get us back on track.

-- FRIDAY --

February and March rolled storms over New York like surf on the Atlantic. Snow lay heaped over lawns and piled in parking lots, and in thin layers of hardpack where people had scraped and swept it away. Overnight Wednesday a few hours of inexplicable warm rain dissolved the top layer of snowpack. By Thursday the temperature had fallen, the rain had fluffed into snow again, and driveways and walkways had become interlaced ribbons of packed snow and ice, white velvet over a slip of lustrous gray satin. When Kavitha picked up Shawn and Dawn at the hotel Friday morning, the sky was clearing to sapphire blue. She handed them steaming hot cups of coffee and tea and together they set off to do the ritual deferred in hopes that Ryan could have been there to take part.

Shawn: I think that just through driving around and trusting (mostly Dawn's) instinct, we were able to find the perfect spot to do the ritual – we placed the tobacco on a rock under a tree, in a fork in a small stream. It was significant that there were a lot of deer tracks around, that we also probably wouldn't have noticed if it wasn't for the fresh snow (though I'm not sure yet how or why that's significant).

Dawn: The man who owned the land that called to us was friendly and open to the idea of us paying respects to the ancient mountain whose feet rested on the back of his property. But he was worried about the ice and his liability if we fell. He said he'd lived in that place many years but never seen such slippery conditions. After we talked a while, he told us if we drove behind him as far as we could, and then walked very carefully to the area we'd indicated we wanted to go, he would let us in. The lane was so narrow that the edges of plowed snow scraped and sang along the doors of Kavitha's car as she followed the man back through the woods. Several times the tires slipped. I was worried Kavitha might be anxious and maybe even wishing she hadn't come.

Kavitha: I was not anxious at all, since I felt what we were doing was sacred and that I was in Dawn's and Shawn's watchful care. I knew we would follow our instinct and if I felt uncomfortable we would go elsewhere. I loved being with them both there. More even than the conversations, I will hold that moment by the deer tracks, watching loose snowflakes flying in the breeze and the sun on the hillside, and the look on Shawn's face as he held the tobacco to the sky. I felt blessed and loved to be included.

Dawn: Kavitha got out of the car with casual confidence. But when I opened my door and saw how deep the snow was, and how treacherously thick the ice, I felt a shiver of fear. I grew up on the desert. My experience of walking on ice includes breaking my leg in three places in a Michigan parking lot. But ritual fulfills a sacred obligation to Place. I had to go. The trick was how to get there without falling. Deer hooves had cut deep angular cups into the snow that marked a game trail to the base of the mountain. With a calming breath and a silent prayer, I pushed my walking stick into the snowbank beside me and aimed for the path the deer had carved. Suddenly Shawn's strong arm was under mine, firm and steady. I was so grateful for that support! He grew up in Manitoba, so he understands how to keep your balance when two wholly different kinds of ground surface meet in a slippery interface. "Take short steps," he taught me as we walked slowly through the sparkling morning, "and keep your weight over your feet."

Shawn: I think that the conversations that we were having really opened up after we held the ritual, and really allowed ideas to come together and develop. I felt much better after we prayed and gave an offering, for we were asking for quite a bit. The knowledge that we were/are attempting to "capture" in this text would only allow itself to be caught once we had asked nicely. The ritual itself not only brought the three of us who were physically there closer together, but it also somehow incorporated the rest of the group closer into a new community. The enlightenment or deeper understanding of knowledge that resulted doesn't belong to any one of us, but is a result of our group effort – perhaps the knowledge is birthed into its new written form through our combined efforts?

Dawn: My ritual prayers in Choctaw are simple. It's only in the last few years that I've started recovering the language taken from my family four generations ago. But while Shawn placed our offerings beneath the snow at the foot of a tall, slender tree, I used the language of my people to ask the Land for help. I begged it to gift us that extraordinarily special kind of knowing that comes as a blazing flash of insight. Standing in the bright morning, my gaze resting on the mountain that was vertically striped in slender brown hardwoods bare against the snowfield, Ryan came to my mind. He'd walked as slippery a landscape last night as I was standing on now, I realized, and as a result of the very same storm. I prayed that we would all be able to keep our weight over our feet in whatever turbulence had yet to play out.

Shawn: One other thing that this brings to my attention, mostly from Kavitha's story, is how we can become kind of complacent about the power of ritual and ceremony, which kinda ties in with the Buffalo Rock story. I'm quite often doing different rituals, and after a while it can become a bit predictable or like I'm "going through the motions." Like Ryan was saying about when the Elder was first telling him the Buffalo Rock story – I've already heard this story before. So sometimes it takes something special or different to shift our thinking out of its current rut or the pre-conceived patterns that we're used to, in order to get to the next level of insight. So it was significant that we put off (or Nature made us put off) the ritual around inviting ourselves onto the Land, as well as having someone extra there who hadn't done this ritual before (or at least, not how we did it). Seeing the ritual through Kavitha's fresh eyes brought a higher level of mindfulness to the whole process. This mindfulness in turn afforded us the insight or enlightenment that we prayed for. I don't know if we would have been permitted this level of enlightenment if we had done the ritual right at the start on Thursday.

Friday, March 6, CONSULTATION at the Gordon residence

Naturally our ritual set us at odds with even the modest meeting agenda that remained after all that had happened so far. We were on our way to the residence when Kavitha got a call asking where we were and politely letting us know we were holding up breakfast. Invigorated by our ritual and the beautiful morning, we probably weren't as repentant as our hungry colleagues would have wished!

That morning the five of us who'd met the day before were joined by two of Dr. Gordon's long-time colleagues, Eleanor Armour-Thomas and Juliana Quintero.⁸ As we sat ourselves down to breakfast at the magnificent sectioned oak tree that had been made into a dining table, Ryan joined in with coffee and breakfast from his Detroit hotel room

⁸ Dr. Eleanor Armour-Thomas Queens College, CUNY, Department Chair, Secondary Education and Youth Services Research Interests: Improvement of Teaching and Learning, research in cognition and learning, with particular emphasis on students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Juliana Quintero, B.A. Interpersonal Communication, William Paterson University; Paterson, NJ Candidate for Masters in Professional Communication, William Paterson University; Paterson, NJ

via Skype. When the connection kept freezing up, though, we turned to a speaker phone. For the rest of the meeting Ryan's strong voice rose from a black spider-shaped pod perched on broad legs in the center of the table, at the heart of the group. We began with introductions all around, Ryan taking a moment to explain that Kainai Studies is a land-based learning program of traditional Blackfoot studies, its curriculum of about 70 undergraduate courses emphasizing both individual and community knowledge.

Since the conversation had unexpectedly started a day earlier than planned, we recapped some of the key elements of Indigenist learning we'd discussed on Thursday for Juliana's, Eleanor's, and Ryan's benefits:

- Indigenist knowledge comes from the Land and has agency, choosing who it reveals itself to and under what circumstances;
- Indigenist knowledge is relationship-based, often intersectional;
- A value system based in beauty, utility, and service to the community, rather than knowledge for knowledge's sake, undergirds Indigenist knowledge;
- Participation, experience, ritual, story, art, and spirituality, as well as cognitive processes such as logic and reason, are important Indigenist ways of knowing.

Kavitha said she'd found herself thinking a great deal about what "relational" means in the context of an Indigenist epistemic system. "What does it mean if a knowledge seeker does not just discover, observe, or create knowledge, but instead participates in an interactive and dynamic process of relationship to knowledge?" she wondered. "What are those practices of relationship?"

Dawn pointed out that the consequences of relational knowing Kavitha had been thinking about were meaningful not only to processes of learning, but also to processes of disseminating what has been learned. The standard academic dissemination model is one in which scholars lay out knowledge they feel they have personally created or discovered, claiming ownership of it in the process. But if knowledge is seen as something held by the land, that reveals itself to community through relationship, "it belongs to and with the land and community context rather than with an individual," as Shawn had written the night before. She felt it was essential that any statement we produced about Indigenist knowledge as a result of this conversation disseminate that information by engaging readers in the very processes being described. That is, Indigenist knowledge should have the opportunity to reveal itself to the readers so they could engage with it themselves. They needed to learn about it in a participatory way.

Ryan: An immediate thought I have about this is that what's worked for us is storytelling. At a recent conference where we disseminated information about the influence of Blackfoot people and culture on Abraham Maslow's work, instead of making a standard presentation, we storytold. Indigenous knowledge was inside the story itself. Narcisse was becoming interested in filmmaking and dramatization as a means of communication, in fact, because of the learning possibilities inherent in those forms of story.

Shawn: There can be a problem using story to disseminate in educational settings, though, because there is a pedagogy behind storytelling that is not universal. In traditional Indigenist learning-through-story pedagogy, the story is not open to whatever the listener brings to it. Yet you're not told what you're learning either. You are required

to engage with the story itself to learn, and it reveals different things to different people. Because of this ambiguity, story is not generally valued as a means of information transmission in academia.

Juliana: Ryan, when you told the story about Maslow and the Blackfoot, did you facilitate or guide the process of learning through your presentation?

Ryan: No. The story was open to what the audience got from it. But I have to say there's a value to inquiry in traditional learning that seems to be cross-cultural with the mainstream. Let me share an example of how we use the storytelling methodology.

My wife and I carry the Beaver Bundle, which is a living embodiment of the first treaty between animals and humans. Every year, we have two public ceremonies – at the beginning of summer and beginning of winter, which are the two Blackfoot seasons.

When hosting the Beaver Bundle, we have ceremonies every time the moon disappears, but those are kind of private. And then we have larger ceremonies that are open to the public at the end of winter and the end of summer. And at the one that's at the end of winter, we're supposed to feed the people that come to the ceremony four different foods. Our Elder told us, "Ok, I don't want you feeding them potato chips and cola and stuff. We've got enough diabetes. And everybody's contributing to that. You're supposed to be feeding them Life. So don't do those things."

There's four foods, each one of those has a song that goes with it, in the ceremony. And those songs speak to those four foods giving people long life. One of those foods is buffalo tongue, one of them is pemmican, one of them is berry soup, and then the other one is eggs. And our Elder told us, "Well, you know you're going to have to go and buy your buffalo meat, your tongues. And you're going to have to buy the buffalo meat that you use to make your pemmican because there's just no buffalo out there except on these farms. But as far as the berries go, and the eggs, the source is still there." So, you know, he says he didn't want us to go to the store and buy our eggs. We need to go back to the source.

We'd both grown up with berry picking and stuff, and that was very familiar to us. But neither one of us knew anything about eggs. And in fact, we started asking around, we couldn't find *anybody* that really knew. Even the Elders didn't know how to get eggs any more. They could remember their parents maybe getting them in the past, but they didn't really know how to go about it. So we had to get that knowledge from the source as well. We had to go back to the birds to find out how to get the eggs. And the first year that we tried it, we thought, "Well, there's this Blackfoot moon called the Duck Moon. So that must be when we go get the eggs, during the Duck Moon. And that would be right before our regular Beaver Bundle opening, too, our ceremony. So that must be when we go get them."

So we waited 'til the Duck Moon and then we went out and we started looking for nests. And we found this goose sitting on a nest, and I walked out – usually they choose islands to nest on – and I walked out to that island, waded out, and she got off her nest. There was I think six eggs and we took two from there, brought 'em home, and we very quickly learned that if a goose is sitting on a nest, it's too late to be taking those eggs. 'Cause things develop really fast in those eggs. And I don't know how it was in the past,

but today nobody's going to want to be eating those, if we try to serve them at our ceremony. So we basically failed that first year, to be able to get the eggs.

And so the next year we started off a whole moon cycle earlier, in the Eagle Moon. And we start going to the wetlands and just sitting every day and watching, And we saw the various ducks migrate in. We saw the geese go from hanging out in clans to pairing up, to starting to kind of defend the territory, to having some nesting behaviors, and then one day getting very protective. And then we knew that there was eggs hidden. And just like chickens, you know, the geese, they'll just lay like one egg a day. They sock them away until they have a full clutch -- a clutch might be six, nine eggs -- they won't sit on it 'til they've got the full thing -- and you have a week when the eggs are available but not being incubated. During this time, they replenish if any eggs are lost, so you're not impacting the bird population if you harvest them then.

So what you have is basically like one week to get those eggs. And you have to know when that week is. You have to be paying attention to those birds and know when that window is. And each one of the ducks kind of goes in sequence after that. The geese are the ones that open it up. And what's interesting is that what we've found now, after about seven years of doing this egg-gathering, is that the very first eggs are available at the first full moon after the Equinox. And that's Easter, by the way. So you start to realize how important eggs would have been for people in the past when that's the first food that kind of opens up the new season. You're breaking basically a winter starvation with those eggs. *Majorly* important. And of course celebrated all over. And in a way, the Beaver Bundle is -- kind of that ceremony -- is kind of like the Blackfoot version of an Easter celebration.

So yeah, we got to appreciate Time a lot, and engagement with the Place. And knowing what's going on. All those days sitting there, waiting for that first year, waiting for those geese and ducks to nest, we also saw a lot of other things going on. We saw a lot of what the animals were doing, and we matched it up with what happens in our ceremony. And we got to appreciate what was going on in the Beaver Bundle ceremony a *lot* more from being out there with the animals and learning from *them*, you know, what each of those parts of the ceremony were about. We got to appreciate the whole thing as a celebration of the renewal of life. And just getting to appreciate Real Time.

Interestingly, we were reporting on this to the Elder and he told us this is exactly the kind of learning a person with a Beaver Bundle is supposed to know in order to maintain the treaty with the animals. So he suggested I share what I'd learned with my students in a slide show. But I said, "Let me take my students out to observe and learn as I have." I translated it into a course that ran by a Blackfoot lunar cycle and we turned it into a year-round series. I shared the Blackfoot names of the animals where they were available, I shared what I had observed at my own site, and then had them share their observations.

Kavitha: As the facilitator, were you pointing them to things or just letting them find them?

Ryan: They observe and they do their own sharing of what they observe. If there are any questions or things they didn't understand, the students answer from what they've learned. I've been doing this kind of stuff for about eight years and I share what I have

learned too, so we are all learning from each other. The traditional method is that you throw them out there and they learn from experience.

Eleanor: How do you set goals and objectives to assess progress in this type of program?

Ryan: They have to do their weekly experience and document it in some way. They have to journal to show me they are spending five hours out there. They can use any medium – notebooks or video, etc. – but I want to see a play-by-play. For every moon cycle, there are certain species they have to learn to identify. It's the first step of learning the natural world because learning the identity is the first step to knowing. I teach Blackfoot names where they exist, and English names. The sooner you learn an identity and give a name to something then the more attention you pay to it. Then they start to take notice to whatever species that is. Then, they take a species identification test. I run this like a three-round elimination tournament, a competition with prizes that makes it fun for the students. I have fun with it. They enjoy getting into the competition. But they come out learning the species.

EWGordon: You threw a boulder in my path with saying they have to learn an English name. Is that really essential?

Ryan: It isn't essential that it's English, but there is an English name for all of the species whereas there isn't a Blackfoot name for everything out there. And knowing English names improves the students' employability – with parks and conservation groups for example. They get jobs there, and part of the job application process is identifying and naming local species.

Kavitha: Do the students go out alone?

Ryan: No, they select their own sites but they don't have to go out on their own. They can go in pairs or bring their families. Some bring their dogs but I wouldn't recommend that. People have been wanting me to take groups out to show them what I'm talking about, but I find that doesn't work because people look too much for an interpretation from the guide. And that disrupts their own relationship with the place, keeps them from forming one.

Eleanor: When we classify learners, we may suggest that only certain groups of people can know or learn in a certain way. How do you distinguish the learners who can learn this way from those who can't?

Ryan: I don't know that I hold that perspective. From my experience, traditional learning is open to anybody. There is a traditional system for knowledge transfer and there are certain experiences that you go through to get these transfers. But the door is open to anyone to seek the transfer.

Dawn: I think we are only saying this kind of learning is Indigenous because those are the cultures where it's still practiced. But these ways of knowing are how people have

always learned. If we call it Indigenous, it's possible to think it applies to only those people. But that's not how it is. That's why Shawn uses the term "Indigenist" instead. It's open to everyone.

Ryan: There was a time when the University of Poland was meeting with myself and a couple of colleagues, via Skype, to discuss the idea of starting some of our courses in Poland via distance learning. Over there in Eastern Europe there has been a long-standing fascination with North American First Nations cultures. And at the University of Poland they said they do a lot of distance learning. There's a lot of people from all over Poland and Eastern Europe in general who take their courses from a distance. One of the most popular courses is on an old Nordic language that's pretty much extinct. Nobody just speaks it today but people still study it. And the people we were talking to said, "People are so fascinated by that course, we often have 500 students a semester taking it. However, we feel that if you offered a Blackfoot language course, it would be even more popular. And so you could expect at least 500 students a semester in that course, and if you did an additional second course in your culture, then that would be equally popular as well. So you could expect tuition from a thousand students a semester."

And to us that sounded really good, because as a small tribal college we are always faced with issues of not having enough revenue, relying on little temporary project grants to kind of run the show. So the president had asked me to negotiate with Poland since they were interested, and see if we could get something up and running. It went all the way to the stage where we were going to advertise for the courses in the train stations in Poland. And the advertising guys were talking to me, and they said, "We need a story. We need a story that we're telling through the ad, about why people are taking these courses."

And I told them, "Well, my perspective is this: We know that there's a long-standing fascination with North American First Nations cultures in Eastern Europe. So what I would like to demonstrate through our courses is a way of life that comes from a certain place – that is connected to the ecology of that place, that reflects that ecology, that's part of it. And so, you know, we can go back and look at the language and the origin stories, and we can look at the different cultural institutions in Blackfoot communities, and show how it comes from this place. We can demonstrate that as an example, that then the students will hopefully reflect on, with respect to their own place. And certainly there was an Indigenous culture in Poland as well. And so perhaps through taking our courses, students could get an example that they could then use to help revitalize their own ways, or rekindle – just regrow them. Because as long as you've got the ecology of the place, you can always kind of re-invent an Indigenous culture that fits that ecology."

And so, I told him, "What I don't want is: I don't want to be teaching students how to be Blackfoot. And then I don't want to be responsible, down the road a few years, when suddenly at the Sundance there's a hundred, two hundred people showing up from Poland to participate. I don't want to be responsible for something like that. I'm not going to be teaching people how to be Blackfoot, even though I know people are heavily invested in those kind of projects." They've got these Native clubs there, and each club takes on a tribe and tries to learn their language, and tries to learn their technology from the 1800s, and their ceremonies, and their cultural institutions, and all of this. That's not

what I want to be involved in, right? I don't want to be involved in supporting that. I want to show them an example, give them an ethnographic example of what it means to be Indigenous and be connected to Place, and how that comes about. And then they could reconnect to Place *there*.

And the guys who we were talking to said, "Yeah, Ryan, I understand what you're saying. I understand your concerns. *But* ... you can't change what's in a person's heart." I told them, "No, I can't. But I don't have to teach it to them."

And that's where I backed out of further conversations with them. And actually, I did so kind of against the will of the president of our college, who wanted me to continue to pursue that relationship with them for the revenue. But I just felt like I didn't want to be responsible for teaching people traditional knowledge for their own reasons. And so I backed out and I just didn't continue to pursue it. Now, you know, *my* idea is still there. I wouldn't mind doing distance courses like that, that people can take and learn about Indigeneity, and I can use what I know as an example. But it's more to help them get reconnected with their Place than it would be to try to teach somebody to *be*, you know, Blackfoot or what have you.

Shawn: To me, the lesson here is that we can teach Indigenist philosophy and ways of looking at the world, but that our specific teachings are Indigenous to our homeLands, are sacred and Land specific. At least that's what I took out of Ryan's story – we can teach a process that can help others build their own connection to Land but we can't transfer content or rituals intact from one Land to another. Notice that the pair of concepts "process and content" also relates to the distinctions between "Indigenist and Indigenous."

Kavitha: Knowledge seems so rooted in the place. Can knowledge be place-specific given forced migration? How do people maintain or transfer knowledge that originated in one place if they have been relocated to another place?

Ryan: These are place-based knowledge systems and ways of life. But you can migrate the process; it's almost universal.

Dawn: Choctaw culture developed in what is now Mississippi. There are relationships with certain animals from the homeland there but of course a lot of those animals live in Oklahoma and other places, too. The relationships we have with those animals persist outside of the original place. I have felt it and it's clear the animals have too. So the knowledge that arises from those relationships can exist in any place where we and those animals both live, no matter what place it is. But the biggest difference isn't geography but time: the land was really different 200 years ago, in both Oklahoma and Mississippi. Urbanization, invasive species, and habitat loss impact what things live in a certain place and what kinds of chances they have to interact with people. When my dad was a little boy, Poteau, Oklahoma was entirely prairie grassland. He saw the trees invade during his lifetime, and now it's a woodlands habitat there. So ultimately the emphasis *has* to be process, because things are going to change. Even if people don't move, the land is going to change under their feet because of things like urbanization. But it's possible to allow

the relationship between the people and the land to keep up as things change, or to regenerate if knowledge has been lost over time.

EWGordon: It's about process. The culturally significant point is relationship to place as a *process*, not relationship to a *specific* place!

Kavitha: So how do people develop Indigenist relationship with land?

Dawn: This is why Ryan's story about teaching process to the people in Poland is so important. Too often, when people want to learn "Indigenous ways" there is a focus on material objects like dance fans and on actions – things like certain songs or dances – without any understanding of process at all. Ryan was saying to them: "Learn process so you can engage with the land where you live so you can regenerate relationship with that land." The hard part is getting people to pay attention to process.

Kavitha: My people are from India. Here in the diaspora we have tortured ourselves to try and maintain orthodoxies – to have the required coconuts growing in your yard or your house to do certain rituals, for instance, when the weather here is so different from the weather in India. But we protect those orthodoxies, and I experience such a large sense of loss trying to do that in a place where the land is so different that this is almost impossible.

Ryan: If I had to move, then I couldn't see myself following Blackfoot traditions but I would focus on developing my own relationship with whatever Place I moved to.

Shawn: If you don't adapt to the local place that you visit or move to, you become a missionary. I have seen people conduct pipe ceremonies or hold sweat lodges in a place they didn't originate in, and I find it deeply disrespectful to the local practices.

Ryan: The most important ceremony that establishes relationship to place is food and the sharing of food. In fact, the Blackfoot term for the land is "our food." The first step of Indigenizing is a process of connecting with the foods of your place. Clark Wissler's ethnographic "cultural area theory" that divided or organized Native tribal groups into "plains," "coastal," "plateau" cultures and so on is really pretty funny in that regard. You look at that and you know he got it from the Native people he encountered, because that's how we relate to the Land. We see *ourselves* this way. The traits of each culture emerge in relationship to the ecology and the local food source – for example, buffalo, salmon, or corn. Our human mission right now is to build those relationships and become more fit in this eco-social context so our lives support many.

Shawn: The teachings of the Elders in Australia are that it's essential for our ways of knowing to be shared, for humans to survive. Our ecosystems have changed so much that Western science can't keep up. Our processes provide a way of surviving the change.

Ryan: Species ranges are already shifting. Last year, I encountered Monarch Butterflies where I live in October, and they should not have been there then.

Shawn: There has already started to be diaspora of Pacific Islands people due to rising sea levels flooding their home Lands.

Dawn: A lot of people talk about the loss of traditional knowledge as our Elders die. This is important because there is codified knowledge that is place-specific that can be passed down through the generations. So you can be taught very specific relational knowledge in this way. But if you understand the significance of *process*, if you engage in reciprocity, you can get that knowledge in another place, or if the place you are in changes. When we say Knowledge has agency, it means if climate change moves a plant species you rely on out of your area, you can receive knowledge about new plants moving into the area, to form new reciprocal relationships with them. We can still be instructed. We can adapt.

Ryan: Food relationships involve reciprocity. Narcisse and I were invited to speak at a climate change meeting organized by Al Gore and David Suzuki. And the solutions were all about how to “take less.” That’s good, but it’s still a mining mentality. It’s about taking only, not reciprocity or giving back.

Shawn: The ultimate assessment is survival of humans as a species.

Ryan: What the beaver does supports other animals. It is an important component of the environment for other species. That’s why the Beaver Bundle is so important. There are animals that have had a relationship with us before, but we have lost it. They are waiting for us to become human again. Lewis and Clark’s journals record that the magpies came to their tents, unafraid, and ate from their hands. They used to be our hunting partners. They want to be in relationship with us again. What it takes is paying attention, observing different animals closely. You can tell individual animals of a species apart pretty quickly, just by looking at them. I do rattlesnake conservation work and I can distinguish different individual rattlesnakes by the scale patterns on their backs. I can tell the birds apart, where I live, by their individual color patterns and behaviors.

Ryan went on to tell us about an online birding forum in which he participates. Recently, one of the scientists posted a photograph of a Great Horned Owl with an enormous tag on one wing, which the scientist had attached as an identification marker. Ryan took issue with this practice, saying that it was detrimental to the owl’s flight and its ability to be a successfully silent night predator, and accused the scientist of being too lazy to simply pay close attention to the owls he was studying. If he did that, Ryan posted, he wouldn’t need to engage in such a harmful practice. This ignited a firestorm on the discussion board. The scientists insisted that such tagging was the only way to observe individual birds and track them, and that in fact it had allowed them to document the fact that this particular owl had traveled far from its tag point after being released. Ryan’s response was that they didn’t know what this information even meant. It might just mean that the owl was trying to get away from such a traumatic experience. The scientists on the forum then accused Ryan of being too emotional and therefore not really a good naturalist or ecologist. A few days later a different scientist weighed in with literature that suggested such wing tags do, in fact, cause problems with flight and

successful predation in owls. And once that literature was introduced, then it was at least marginally accepted – whereas Ryan’s statements, based on experience and relationship, were not. He found it significant that scientific literature was the only kind of knowledge recognized as valid, and that no one else but him felt it was important to consider sacred natural laws, such as reciprocity, as an equally valid part of research protocol.

Dawn pointed out that this reflects the discussion we’d been having all along: that there are many different kinds of learning but that only cognitive learning is recognized as valid in many mainstream research and education communities. In this example we see the importance of emotional learning, which tells us where we are ethically so we know how to behave in order to maintain healthy relationships. In Ryan’s case, as is so common, instead of his emotions being seen as valid indicators of important information about the situation, they were seen as deleterious to understanding the owls. So he was told to shut his emotions down. But emotional responses force us to address and face conflicts between situations and value systems and are therefore valuable sources of information.

When Dawn addressed the fact that the online birding group members valued information about the harm wing tags do to owls only when such information was produced in the scientific literature, her voice expressed a measure of disgust. Dr. Gordon pointed out that this implicitly demeaned the value of the prior research that had produced the cited literature. The key issue – and this was the very focus of the consultation itself -- was evaluation: how does a person evaluate information and assess its reliability or veracity? For instance, he asked, how is consulting Elders, which we had referred to many times, any different from consulting published literature? After all, going to the literature is basically searching out the accumulated knowledge about something. How is that any different from going to an Elder to get an answer based on accumulated knowledge?

Shawn smiled as he reflected on Dr. Gordon’s words. “Consulting an Elder doesn’t always get you an answer,” he said. “Depending on what you ask, and on the Elder, they might not reply or they might tell you to just use your common sense. In fact,” and his eyes twinkled, “if you ask something that really is a matter of plain common sense, an Elder might just laugh at you instead of giving you a reply.”

But Dr. Gordon wasn’t to be dissuaded from his point. Comparing the authority of Elders to that of published literature was important, he explained, because otherwise we seemed to be saying that that the role of Elders for validating and providing knowledge is unique in Indigenous cultures. But the project is not about documenting what’s unique to each culture, but about identifying core human responses that must be recognized and accommodated by the mainstream community even if they hadn’t been aware of them as universals before.

Dawn: I did not intend to demean the value of published knowledge. I was irritated because it seemed to me that people on Ryan’s ornithology board demeaned the value of *his* knowledge and valued only published literature. They would not have valued the input of an Elder’s experience or knowledge either, since it would also not be in the published literature. The issue to me is the philosophy that automatically values academic processes of acquiring knowledge as the only ones that are valid and reliable. Asking an Elder or doing a literature review are both processes that rely on community vetting of

the authority who's asked to provide valid knowledge. The academic community sees the publishing and peer review processes as objective and therefore a reliable measure for vetting authority. That's why it puts literature so high on the "reliable information scale." But we all know that the peer review process is highly politicized. It's not at all the purely objective thing people act like it is. And one of the main goals of academic publishing isn't attempting to comprehend the truth, which is what everyone insists it is, but personal and professional advancement. Publications are required for tenure and promotion. That said, there are some published academic authors I would trust the same way I would trust an Elder. But it's not because of the numbers of their publications or which journals they're in. It's because they are known in the community and have been vetted in the same way we vet our Elders: there is public, community-based recognition of that person's wisdom and expertise. Everyone in the scientific community knows the difference between people with tons of shoddy publications that nevertheless get into print, and people who have fewer publications but a track record for personal integrity. Yet the scientists on the bird forum who attacked Ryan were denying this by their actions, by the way they valued literature alone as being of value. We're not saying literature has no value.

Shawn: I think that in Research Is Ceremony I was talking about something similar, but not really the same, in relation to literature reviews, and how for me it's difficult to do a regular literature review where I would critically analyze someone else's research. In recognizing that knowledge is built in relationship, I recognize that there is no way that I can know all of the relationships (context) that went into someone's research. And that no doubt they did the best that they could in their context. I would have done things differently and come up with different results, but that's because I myself am different – so I can't judge them by my own standards. So I was arguing that all I can really do is to provide as much of the context, including preceding research work done by others, as possible so that others might be able to understand (but not to judge).

When comparing an Elder consultation and a literature review, it also comes down to the context for how something plays out in the world. We may be attempting to tease out the application or the context of an occurrence. The literature review seeks absolute answers, but consulting an Elder seeks to understand the context.

Ryan: And Elders don't provide you with answers most of the time. They point you to an understanding. The learnings I appreciate most are when an Elder points out a path. Let me tell you a story from my experience.

One day, Ryan told us, he was at a sacred place called Sundial Butte with a Kainai Elder named Bruce Wolf Child, *Makoyiipookaa*. There is a large cairn on the hilltop there, and old campsites marked by tipi rings on the flats leading to the river coulees below. As they walked there, Bruce led Ryan to an isolated large boulder that lay in the long yellow grass on the flats, saying as he did so, "Let's go look at this *iinisskimm*." In Blackfoot, *iinisskimm* translates to Buffalo Stone. This stone was the size and shape of a young buffalo calf nestled in the grass with its legs folded up, resting. It was rubbed smooth where the buffalo, when they were still living there, had rubbed their winter fur off against the rock in the spring shedding. So "Let's go visit this *iinisskimm*," said

Bruce, and they went to look at it together. Then he told Ryan, “Let’s look around on the ground around it here and see if maybe we can find some *iinisskimm*.”



Buffalo calf rock at Sundial Butte. Photo by Ryan Heavy Head.
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Ryan was puzzled. There are small *iinisskimm* stones used to call the buffalo but they are not the same thing as the big stone shaped like a calf that lay in the grass at their feet. Little *iinisskimm* are a fossil called *Baculites*, and they are hard, shiny cylinders small enough to be held easily in one hand. These little Buffalo Stones are a spiritual item in Blackfoot tradition, a bit like what some people would consider a charm. Ryan knew this because he was transferred an *iinisskimm* about 25 years ago. He received all the traditional *iinisskimm* knowledge as part of the transfer so he knew the *iinisskimm* song and its origin story, how to use it in different ceremonies, and how to keep it properly. He also knew, as part of this knowledge, where you find the little *iinisskimm*. And it’s not in a place like the one they were standing.

Little *iinisskimm* stones come out of a dark soil matrix that outcrops in bluffs down along the river coulees. But here was this Elder saying that if Ryan was to go around the Buffalo Calf *iinisskimm* rock and look carefully, he would find little *iinisskimm* on the ground around or under the edges of it. So they looked, Ryan admitting with some discomfort that he was kind of humoring Bruce in this because he knew they weren’t going to find any little *iinisskimm* there. It wasn’t possible. But the Elder was going along and picking up a rock here and there, turning it over, looking at it, and saying “Well that’s not quite it,” and then putting it back down. After picking up a few this way, he said, “Well maybe we’re not going to find any here. But I bet if we just follow this way

down into the draw here, there's going to be another boulder, another Buffalo Rock. Maybe we'll find one there."

Ryan couldn't see anything like that from where they were standing and didn't know how the Elder would know such a thing was there. But they started walking toward the draw and sure enough, there was another large *iinisskimm* boulder. It was actually much larger than the first rock and parts of it were worn very, very smooth from all the years the buffalo had rubbed their winter fur off against it. There were even signs that local cows were still using it to rub themselves on. Then Bruce said to Ryan, "Let's look around this one. Maybe we'll find some of those small *iinisskimm* here." So again he was picking up stones and looking at them, turning them over, and saying things like, "This is kind of like one but this is not it." And again Ryan was humoring him by looking with him, knowing that this is not where you find the little *iinisskimm*. And after picking up several little stones and them not being the right thing, Bruce said, "Well, maybe we're not going to find any today." And then he told Ryan, "Come."

So they walked back up on the flat, and up there he said, "I'm going to sing you part of the *iinisskimm* song." And then the Elder sang Ryan the first half of the *iinisskimm* song that he'd already been taught 25 years earlier. But Ryan didn't want to tell him, "Yeah, I know that song. I've been transferred *iinisskimm*. I know all about it." Because, he told us, you just don't do that in Blackfoot ways. You don't say that you know stuff. You never say "I know" because then you stop learning at that point. So Ryan didn't say anything. And Bruce sang him the first half of that song. Then he said, "Well, when you find an *iinisskimm*, come back and I'll sing you the other half of that song."

And so Ryan went away thinking, "What's wrong with Bruce? Why doesn't he know that's not where you find *iinisskimm* – that they are down in the coulees by the river, not on the ground around these big boulders." Telling us about it over the speaker phone on the table, he laughed when he admitted, "I was kind of thinking, you know, that Bruce didn't know what he was talking about."

But this very incongruity – that an Elder would not know a thing like this, that he should know -- was enough to really hold Ryan's attention for several days. He kept coming back to that event in his mind and thinking, "Why did Bruce do that? Why would he look for those *iinisskimm* around the big Buffalo Rocks when that's not where you find them?" And so he kept coming back to it, kept thinking about it, and finally something began to happen.

Ryan remembered that when the *iinisskimm* is on a smudge altar for prayers, it rests upon a bed of sage, hard buffalo dung, and shed winter buffalo wool. He had been told that's because the little *iinisskimm* embody the big boulders the buffalo rub on to get their winter fur off, the Buffalo Rock boulders he and Bruce had searched around. And around those larger stones, in the old times, the buffalo would come to rub and so you would find hard dried buffalo dung there, and the rubbed-off wool, and there would be sage growing around there. So this is what you were embodying on the prayer altar by putting the little *iinisskimm* on a bed of these things. You were embodying that bigger *iinisskimm* Buffalo Rock.

Then he thought about the *iinisskimm* origin story. Before, the Blackfoot hunted the buffalo like wolf do, stalking them on the plains and then running them down on foot. It was an endurance race across miles of prairie, hunting buffalo in the way they had learned from the wolves, and then the hunters killed the buffalo with a hand-made bow

and rock-tipped arrow. “Can you imagine,” he asked, “what a hard way of surviving it was, to hunt that way?”

But then one day, at a time of starvation when the hunts were not going well, a special thing happened. A woman was down by the river picking rose hips. And she heard a song being sung to her – the *iinisskimm* song -- and she looked around and she saw this little *iinisskimm* stone sitting on a log. And the stone said, “Woman, pick me up. I’m powerful. “And so she picked it up and then it give the gift to her of the *iinisskimm*, the calling of the buffalo. It came to her with the song. She took it to her husband first, who took care of the Beaver Bundle. And that evening they hosted the first *iinisskimm* ceremony to call the buffalo in for the people to survive. First a lone bison came and walked through the camp in response to the calling, but they were warned not to kill that lone bull because if they did – and this is a kind of a traditional food ethic – if they killed the first one then the other buffalo wouldn’t come. So they let the first one pass. And then the herd came. And the people were able to lead the herd where they wanted to, to hunt them. And so they had food and they survived.

And then Ryan realized, somehow it came together in him: the *iinisskimm* is used to call in the buffalo. And if you called them to the place with the big Buffalo Rocks, it was perfect for them to rub on. They would come to look at that Calf Rock on the flats at Sundial Rock, and then they would be drawn to rub on it once they were there. And they would love that and so then they would go up the draw a little farther and see the next big Buffalo Rock and they would rub on that one, too. And at that point, if there were a few people up on the sides of the draw they would be able to kill the buffalo coming up into it that way. They would not have to chase them across the plains. Some endurance runners would still have to keep the herd moving once it got started, to keep the animals moving into the draw. But what a huge change in hunting technology it would have been when the *iinisskimm* revealed itself for calling the buffalo into this kind of place, to where these large Buffalo Rocks were. Ryan realized he had just thought of the *iinisskimm* as a sacred object. He had not understood it in the context of hunting the buffalo that way, as a kind of technology, as a gift from the *iinisskimm* to the people through that woman, that day thousands of years ago in the coulee when the people were starving.

And suddenly it hit home for him: the large *iinisskimm*, the Buffalo Rocks, were selected to be at Sundial Butte for a purpose. It was set up this way. It didn’t just happen to be here. And people started using them, and they started using them to call the buffalo toward places where they could basically impound herds of bison and feed whole camps, instead of running on foot and taking individual bison and group hunting them like the wolves. The significance of that technology is recognized and held sacred in the form of the little *iinisskimm* on peoples’ smudge altars, that are used ritualistically. But the serious *iinisskimm* are the large ones, the big Buffalo Rock and the Calf Rock that drew the buffalo to them and into the draw. That was the technology. And it suddenly hit home for Ryan what a massive, massive, important experience this was in Blackfoot history.

So he went back to Bruce with his epiphany. He told him, “I found the *iinisskimm*. It was right there, the big Buffalo Rock. We were looking at it the whole time.”

And he said, “Yes.” And then he sang Ryan the other half of that song.

So then Ryan went back to the Elder who had originally transferred him the *iinisskimm*, and he told him all about this experience that he’d had, the epiphany and all of this, and that Elder told him, “You know, actually there are many *iinisskimm* songs. I

just gave you the one. But there are many.” So he started teaching Ryan more *iinisskimm* songs that he didn’t even know existed. He had just known “the” *iinisskimm* song.

Ryan said that the ability to have that original transferred knowledge find anchor in a lived experience helped him see and appreciate to a greater depth what was really going on, what the *iinisskimm* were. It opened up another level into the *iinisskimm* that he hadn’t even known existed. “The Elder who asked me to look for something that I knew could not be there,” he said, “but who insisted I think about connections and try to figure things out for myself, opened my eyes to how Elders teach and how you have to have an open, inquiring mind to receive knowledge.”

Shawn: Knowledge has agency. And we see the learner has agency too.

Dawn: Ryan, forgive my asking, but you know we are tasked with preparing a report of our conversation here. And I wonder if you want the Buffalo Rock story to appear in such a document, whether that’s a right thing to do. So many people have told me we must protect stories like this, rather than share them, that I am a little worried if it should be there or not.

Ryan: It’s a good question, one that I’ve asked myself a lot of different times. I’ve never figured out a way to share that experience and talk about it without just telling exactly what happened – which is what I normally do, telling the story to my students. I don’t mind sharing it because I think it’s important for people to know or hear about that kind of pedagogy. Some people might not have been as reflective in that scenario as I was and might not have caught the lesson. I think I was kind of lucky in a sense – lucky and then not, because you know, what was done to me put my mind to work trying to sort it out!

Dawn: This could be seen as sort of a testing, like a gatekeeping process the Elder was using. But you’re saying it’s a pedagogical technique, not that kind of a test.

Ryan: Yeah, I think it’s part of the pedagogy. But I think that people do miss it. Because I think that a lot of people don’t ask enough questions in general. They don’t follow that inquiry-based type of learning. And so I know, again, with my own Elder with the Beaver Bundle, if you don’t ask questions he’s not going to share very much, you know. He’s going to give you some basics, but if you want the real in-depth teachings you have to ask the right questions. So I think it’s an important story to tell.

But I recognize why you have some reservations about it. For a while here, maybe ten years ago, the concept of intellectual property went through the Blackfoot community. And it became something that was used in some ways for gatekeeping knowledge. The whole idea was that you didn’t want somebody from the outside commandeering some traditional knowledge and making a profit out of it and, you know, just using it for their own purposes. But it ended up being used against, say, our students, for instance. Where they might not be able to pursue certain types of inquiries because of this notion of intellectual property, this fear.

But I feel like a lot of traditional knowledge *needs* to be shared, that in a way we’re kind of too hung up a lot of times on the protection of it and that this is putting the knowledge in jeopardy. A friend of mine, from the Southern Blackfeet nation, John

Murray, he and his wife Carol were running a Blackfoot studies program at the Blackfeet Community College. And they were teaching a lot of traditional knowledge in the courses. He invited an Elder as a guest one day and the Elder sat in on the class and then went back to John's office afterwards. And he asks John, "Well aren't you concerned with some of the things you're sharing in class? Aren't you concerned about our intellectual property?" And John told him, "Go out in the hallway and grab any one of our students and ask them to tell you about *Makoyohsoko*, which is the Milky Way." There's a really important Blackfoot story dealing with the Milky Way and its relationship to Blackfoot cosmology. So John said, "Go out and get one of the students and ask them to tell you about it. They won't know what you're talking about. So who are you protecting this knowledge *from*?"

About that same time, when everyone was talking about intellectual property, we were doing a traditional land use study at Red Crow College and the students were interviewing Elders about where to get traditional medicinal or ceremonial plants on the reserve -- how they collected them, and their knowledge about those plants, those kind of things. And so each of the students had set questions they would ask the Elders, and one of the questions was, "How do you feel about outsiders, white people, knowing about this traditional knowledge about the plants?" And for the most part, when that student asked her question, the Elders in interviews said, "No, we don't agree with that. This is our knowledge. It was given to us. It shouldn't be shared with them." And that was the case until they came to my wife's late Great Uncle, Francis Heavy Head. And I really loved listening to Francis's interview because it was just a crack-up.

First of all, he told the students that he didn't know anything about plants when they first came and when they first started the interview. And this is the way Francis normally was. He'd tell you he doesn't know anything about a topic, but if you start actually exploring it with him you find he knows quite a bit. So that's what the students did. They started asking him questions regarding the plants that are mostly used in ceremony: "Have you ever picked sweetgrass? Have you ever picked saskatoons? Chokecherries?" And of course he'd done it all, right? So he did actually have quite a bit of experience.

And when it came to the sweetgrass, one of the things that most of the Elders had instructed the students was how to identify it by the purple base of the grass stem right where it meets the ground. And so with Francis the students said, "Ok, when you're out looking, when you're gonna go pick sweetgrass, how do you find it? Do you go to the base of the stem and look for the purple color?" And Francis told them, "No. I'm just walkin' around out there and I see, 'Oh! There's some sweetgrass!' And I pick it." I really love how he gets right through the B.S. down to the reality. The reality of it is if you know sweetgrass, you just see it. Just like anything else. It's just like knowing what berry's a saskatoon. You just know it, right? So that was that part.

And then came the question for Francis, "Well, what do you think about white people or outsiders knowing about our plants?" And Francis laughed. And he said: "Oh, I think they *already* know. They're the ones with the herbal stores in Lethbridge!" Then he says, "Besides, *saaamistsi*: they're medicines. What do you wanna' do? *Hide* them?" And I really liked Francis's take. To me, it speaks to this perpetuation of fear that people have over traditional knowledge sharing. And my own approach to it has been that traditional knowledge *needs* to be shared. There's a lot that should be common knowledge but that rarely is.

Dawn: Yet you backed out of teaching the class in traditional knowledge at the university in Poland. I know that people will want to understand how these two things are related.

Ryan: Well, as I said, I don't want to be teaching students how to be Blackfoot, and I don't want to teach people traditional knowledge for their own reasons. But I do want to show them an ethnographic example of what it means to be Indigenous and be connected to Place, and how that comes about. Then they can get reconnected with their own Place, which I think is important. In this case, the point of the story I told isn't the *iinisskimm* technology itself, but what it shows us about how Elders teach.

And there is, you know, some knowledge here and there that is accessed through ceremony so it's not taught that way. And also, a lot of traditional knowledge can only come through experience.

My colleague Duane Mistaken Chief, whenever the topic of intellectual property would come up, he would say, "Well I can tell you all about, you know, what I've learned through my transfers. But unless you've done it, it's not yours, you know. It's still forever my intellectual property. And if you do the experience yourself then you'll have it, you know."

Eleanor: In different ways of knowing, what are the terms of validity and reliability that let you know you can trust what you're seeing and learning?

Shawn: Something is understood to be more true if it is "encircled" – that is, if it exists within a web of community relationships, and when context has been taken into account. Because Knowledge is contextual. It's also relational, so you must look at the nature of relationship that went into making knowledge. If you behave properly, if you demonstrate love in your actions, then it is a path to truth.

EWGordon: Is consensus important? Are you saying that if the group accepts it, it becomes a valid concept? If so, are we criticizing the nature of the consensus? In the dominant culture, consensus is a quantitative measure. In Native American culture, you are saying consensus is social, that the feelings of the group – the love that flows between them – provides validity.

Shawn: Yes and no. There is a conflict between the ideal and the reality. In reality, consensus is not possible. But I think there is also an appreciation of the ambiguity of acceptance.

Dawn: A lot of emphasis on verifiability stems from a basic distrust of the observer, which comes from the belief that an observer might not be objective and that objectivity is the only source of valid information. A concern with verifiability of that type is only meaningful within that value system. If we accept the notion that complete objectivity is not actually possible, we can let go of the insecurity that makes us question the veracity of someone's observation. If someone else doesn't see it, that doesn't mean it's not true or that it didn't happen. That other person may simply not have been in the place to have learned that knowledge. Tolerance of ambiguity means we don't have to actually know

what one thing is “true” or not. And this allows us to recognize that something may be factually or emotionally or ethically true, depending on the situation.

Ryan: Not everyone has to have the same truth. You can have an individual learning experience. But if new knowledge is viewed as something that should be retained for everybody, then we have formal and informal systems for validating and reaching consensus about validity, for accepting that piece of knowledge into the collective knowledge. For instance, in traditional knowledge systems, there is a lineage of learning through transfer of knowledge to others, who then transfer to yet others. So your role in the lineage system involves not only a teaching but also a learning experience. You learn from transferring and watching what happens. The “grandparent” teacher has experience in how their “child” experiences learning this knowledge, then learns from watching him or her as a “parent” experience passing that knowledge to his or her “child,” and also learns from seeing what happens with this transfer to the “grandchild.” Once you are at a “grandparent” level, where you have taught knowledge to others and learned from watching what happens, you are going to be wiser than someone who has just learned the knowledge and not transferred it to someone else yet. Their findings are going to be seen as less “valid” than those of someone who’s a “grandparent” in the knowledge lineage.

EWGordon: It seems like we are saying that a criterion for validity is the consequences knowledge has for a community, which introduces the language of consequence as an important factor.

Shawn: There are different levels of natural and spiritual law, or rules, for behavior. And if those rules are broken they have consequences that would tell you that you were behaving improperly.

EWGordon: If those consequences are negative, then individuals and groups will not follow it, and if they are positive then the group will embrace it?

Dawn: I think it’s important here to bring this back to the Land. The root of this knowing comes from the Land.

EWGordon: You might want to give some attention to virtual place. Humans have the capacity to create symbolically the things that are important to them. I gather it is easier for us if there is physical representation for them, but people who study psychological representations have written about the type of worlds people in prison create in order to survive. I think one of the problems with modern technological societies is that so much of our land is virtual – in video games, for example -- and is not an accurate representation of the land itself. There is room for considerable distortion when you deal with virtual reproduction.

Dawn: A feather may transmit information from the Land, but a brass replica of a feather will not. In a reciprocal relationship, you learn that there are consequences to mistaking virtual replicas for the living reality.

Ryan: The distinction between *representation* – like a virtual replica – and *embodiment* is very important. Narcisse used to say it's the difference between metaphor and metonym. An embodiment is a living part of a larger whole.

Dawn: Exactly! Thank you, Ryan. That's why I keep saying today, "It has to come back to the Land." We are not talking about human constructs or representations of knowledge, though the conversation keeps veering that direction. We are talking about living knowledge that arises from, and is part of, the Land – a living knowledge, that, as Shawn pointed out, has agency.

EWGordon: Shawn, as I reflect on your book Research Is Ceremony, I wonder now if it is your scholar's take on the subject. Or were you trying to capture what you see as "Indigenous praxis" with respect to knowledge production? In my own writing I give "Gordon's take" on what it should be rather than reality. I wasn't sure if you were making a normative statement.

Shawn: The way I wrote it was my attempt to express praxis, trying to turn it into story rather than presenting it as a Western style academic text. But I think it is a "Shawn research methodology." I wouldn't extend it more than that. However, when I say it's mine I'm not claiming ownership. It has somehow formed residence with people from my continued relationships with them, and that has been humbling for me and very fulfilling.

EWGordon: You are in that sense fortunate, then. I wonder if I am attempting to bring African American and modern advanced societies together because I see survival in the modern / Western context? I have tried to bring our community into that context rather than representing the community. I still debate with myself whether my strategy is correct.

Dawn: Is this a matter of survival, or a question about the ethical nature of the enterprise?

EWGordon: There are two sets of ethics: for maintaining cultural integrity or maintaining existence integrity.

Dawn: A ritual act is a two-way street that includes giving back as well as receiving. A value or ethical system about survivorship in that context includes resilience. It engages in ritual that maintains the greater well-being of the larger community.

EWGordon: That may be true. I fear that my project is to bring the African American community and the modern technological communities closer together, to make them more likely to survive in that context. As a result, I have pushed harder to bring that community into modernity than I have to represent that community to the modern community.

Dawn: I'm struck by the emphasis we all have on the survival of future generations, whatever strategies we are using. This speaks to the ethical nature of the enterprise.

That's what I think Ryan was saying when he told us about the Elder Francis saying "why would you hide medicine."

EWGordon: Ryan uses stories very effectively. When we first started talking yesterday, I had a hard time finding hooks on which I could hang the new things I was hearing. But listening to Ryan I see myself finding hooks I can grab on to, that make sense to me. Though I hope I am not distorting what I hear.

Ryan: This is what I was trying to articulate and what I have learned from Narcisse. Story is a way to bridge the gap between the cultures.

EWGordon: Is this about metaphor or analogy?

Dawn: Story can be transmitted in many ways. It can be narrated. It can be seen in a visual form in art such as painted images or woven designs. It can be told or transferred through a ceremony that alters the experience of reality. In each case a person who might not have been part of the original event – the telling of that story -- can become a participant in it through the transmission. In the dominant culture, we expect someone to tell us what a story means. But the Indigenist way of looking at it is that we may not always be able to articulate what it means even though we experience that meaning in a relational way. Nevertheless, as N. Scott Momaday writes, we still know *that* it means.

Shawn: I was talking with Elders about how do we communicate cross-culturally? How do we create protocols for talking with other Elders in other nations in ways that can still be true with us? We came up with that memory that if you were to make a physical journey the appropriate way to approach that other space would be to sit on the border and light a fire and wait. You have not left your own territory, but you have created a sacred space you can wait in, for someone from the other nation to come over and grant you permission to come onto their land and visit with them. If you carried the right songs with you, those would be your passport. Can we transplant that into a modern context? How do we create a space where people on both sides feel safe to share our understanding and to cross one another's lands?

EWGordon: Would you see the camp fire as universal?

Shawn: Symbolically, yes. Though I am reluctant to say it would work at all boundaries, given the presence of wide oceans that are sometimes between nations.

Kavitha: It seems to me there is an act of empathy being offered here, that the people building the fire and sitting down to wait are making themselves vulnerable.

EWGordon: If we try to translate that into action, it says to me we need to find more universals we can use.

Ryan: Making offerings and bringing gifts, closing distances, and building and maintaining relationship are really important.

As it was now 3 o'clock, the group took a break. The plan was to reconvene briefly for a final summarizing session before dinner, but Dawn was deeply uncomfortable with the thought that things were about to be wrapped up when it did not feel to her like they were done yet. Disturbed, she went outside and picked a careful way down the icy driveway to a patch of bare ground that had miraculously melted in the field of deep snow at the foot of an enormous hemlock pine. And there, the cold earth soothing inflammation from travel and too long sitting in chairs, she sat with legs outstretched on the damp earth and looked up at the blue sky, inhaled the sweet pungence of the wet woods surrounding the house, and prayed for the courage and wisdom to navigate the slippery interface between the reasonable expectations of two different cultures.

An extra morning of discussion the next day had presented itself as an already existing reality. It was so present she could feel it circling on the crisp air like a hawk rising on thermals. But the meeting was scheduled to end in little more than an hour. To reconvene the next morning wouldn't impact anyone's immediate air travel, at least, but hotels and meals would be affected. How would such a suggestion be met, especially after Real Time had already made so many incursions on Priya's carefully-made plans, and taken such a toll on the long-suffering travel agent who'd been improvising steadily for three days now? As she sat beneath the hemlock tree reflecting on where everything stood, the day's progress in mutual understanding, and what she ought to do, Dawn exchanged several emails with Ryan.

Dawn to Ryan, email

Fri, Mar 6

Ryan, thank you for bringing your voice to the discussion today. You really turned it around the way it needed. You changed the tenor of things just as we needed. It felt like rescue.

Ryan to Dawn, email

Fri Mar 6

That's good to hear that my contributions were appreciated. Thanks, Dawn. This is the most uncertainty I've ever had in travelling. Totally not the norm. Narcisse must be having a chuckle.

Dawn to Ryan, email

Fri Mar 6

Oddly, I can relate a little. When I was coming here I had a similar set of weirdness that only reluctantly quit doing whatever it was doing. That's why I got in at 2:00 am. I'm not sure what that was about. But I think we have pushed through it now. Your wisdom in going to ground so you could do Skype turned the tide.

I know we both missed Narcisse's voice and presence today, but I have to tell you I think you did your joint work so proud that he is filled with joy. What you do is *so* important. And I think the power it bears is vitally important. Thank you again for participating.

Ryan to Dawn, email

Fri Mar 6

Narcisse used to talk a lot about how education is messed up today because it's based on Henry Ford's factory model. Curiously, my hotel is right in the middle of the Ford factory complex.

Shawn had gone out walking in the bright afternoon, the snow and cold air a brilliant delight that reminded him of childhood and his homeLand. When Dawn went back into the house, he wasn't far behind her, cheeks glowing and eyes sparkling from the joy of his brisk excursion. They sat down at the kitchen table to have hot tea and compare notes, and at once realized they were in agreement that there were things moving that needed more time. When Dr. Gordon came in and sat down at the table with them, they started to explain the need to extend the meeting through Saturday. But, "There is no need to justify it," he said firmly, cutting them off with a raised hand and a hint of a smile. "If it needs to happen, then it will happen."

The afternoon break was extended through the hour remaining until dinner as a result, to give everyone a chance to rest since there was now no reason to rush. Several meeting participants took short naps on the sofas scattered through the wide, welcoming house and two even laid down in guest bedrooms. Dawn went from shelf to shelf and wall to wall to finally visit all the pieces of art that filled the wonderful house with their presence, from massive paintings to miniature carvings from distant lands. Far away in Detroit, Ryan shut down his phone connection once he learned our new plans and walked to the local market for groceries for dinner – and then raced back to his hotel room to record what happened in a video.

By the time he finished, Dawn and Shawn were at dinner. So neither she nor Shawn saw Ryan's email and video until later that evening, after leaving the Gordon residence for the day.

Ryan to Dawn, email

Fri Mar 6, 5:08 PM

Subject Line: "Why Did I End Up In Detroit?"

Attachment: Video

Dawn to Ryan, email

Fri, March 6, 2015

I'm going through mail kind of sideways so I just saw your video. Somehow this feels as turning-rightside-up as other things today. Like it's all shaking itself out the way a horse shakes the dirt out of its fur when it rolls and then stands up. Something mysterious and powerful is moving. And it apparently has a sense of humor. It feels like part of our shared experience of this event even though you are there. . . Or maybe *because* you are there.

Ryan to Dawn, email

Fri, Mar 6

I think definitely 'because' I am here -- which is nowhere near where I intended to be, lol

-- SATURDAY --

Dawn: I was anxious as we headed to the Gordon residence on Saturday morning. The time had come to talk about the report we were to prepare, and that was a job I already knew would land in my lap. I'd felt queasy whenever I thought about it the past two days. Despite Ryan and Shawn's reassurances, it was one thing to say we needed to be sure our dissemination method reflected our epistemic and pedagogical systems but another to actually do this. My own experiences and memories of the meeting were already feeling the pressure of the pages of helpful notes, many in outline format, that various members of Dr. Gordon's team had produced.

And then there was Ryan's video, which Dr. Gordon didn't even know about yet. It told a powerful story that put the meeting and even the travel problems we'd had in a new and very unexpected context. What would happen when Ryan shared that story with Dr. Gordon and the others on his team? I knew only that the understanding embedded in Ryan's experience had laid a very clear obligation on my shoulders -- and that this obligation might well be contrary to Dr. Gordon's expectations for our report. I did not want to fail him. But I also did not want to fail Knowledge.

While everyone exchanged pleasantries at the breakfast table and Ryan's connection was established, I took a croissant from the bread basket and began to pull it apart. And as I listened to a conversation in which neither Ryan nor Shawn brought up what had happened the evening before, I methodically ate the pieces one after another without making eye contact with anyone. Finally I wiped my fingers slowly on a napkin and looked around the table. This was a meeting Dr. Gordon had asked me to organize, and one I was supposed to write up. I took a deep breath and asked Ryan if he would share the story of what had happened on his way back from the store.

Ryan: Dawn is referring to a short video I made and sent her last night called "The Implication of Camping in Fordland." What happened is that of course I am in Detroit and I guess I hadn't really quite realized where I was staying. But yesterday morning I took a little walk around before our meeting and realized that I was camped right in the middle of the Ford factory -- I mean right in the middle of the old Ford factory complex. And I don't have any interest in the history of automobiles or anything like that. So, some people would probably be very excited to be camped here. But, myself, it's not any place that I've ever intended to visit and it wouldn't have mattered to me. If I was on the other side of town I wouldn't be thinking, "Gee, I wish I was over where the Ford stuff was so I could see that." Then after our meeting yesterday, I took another walk to go grab groceries. And it hit me:

If someone was to go back and watch all the presentations that Narcisse and I used to give together, they would see that in probably 90% of those, if not more, Narcisse would refer to the history of American education, and the way that what happens in our schools is modeled off of Henry Ford's production line -- the Ford factory. He used to talk about this almost every time we did a talk, if not every time.

And it's just dawning on me how coincidental it is that in this last think-tank that he was supposed to be traveling with me to, I'm unable to get there. Because a plane has crashed in La Guardia, and there's a chance that our planes, the plane that I'm on, will crash on the runway as well, because it's iced over. And so instead they dropped me into Detroit. And they put me in a hotel that is right smack dab in the middle of the Ford factory. I mean, all I have to do is walk in any direction off of the grounds of this hotel and I'm in Fordland.

I kind of feel like, now, like the reason that I came to Detroit was not necessarily because I was in any danger in New York, but that this is just kind of a prompt that I've been given, to reflect on what Narcisse's contribution to this think-tank probably would have been. Which would have included his discourse about the way that the Ford factory model for education is very problematic.

And so I think Narcisse is probably having a good chuckle from wherever his spirit is, about this matter of forcing me down into Detroit. Because I got no interest here. None. Zero. He and I both think this is basically where it all went to hell. Where education went to hell, and where the environment went to hell with the combustion engine. This is like the heart of where all the badness came from. And where it kind of like took off in this flaming development over North America.

So it's pretty ironic that I'm here. And it all means something.

EWGordon: *Yes!!* Industrialization in this country and the Ford assembly line with its emphasis on efficiency and profit, has greatly shaped the way we produce knowledge. Most of our testing is based on standardizing the process for reasons of economy to maximize the profit that is made from it. And that has influenced the ways in which we have thought about measurement and even knowledge production itself, at least as much as the search for truth or understanding. And I would not have thought about that if you had not been reminded to tell us of Narcisse's position! I don't know whether you needed to be in Detroit to be reminded that this was a central part of his message. But as you try to capture it, I hope you will also capture the relationship between that set of circumstances and the ideas we're trying to work on here.

Dawn: I think I must point out that what strikes me here, very deeply, is that a beautiful living Story is telling itself through this meeting. What Ryan just told you shows us this. It makes it clear at last. The first moment I was consciously aware that something like this was happening was when we were sitting at the table Thursday night, and Ryan was talking to Priya. And she hung up and said he had told her his gut told him to stay there but he would come on if the plane flew because he felt it was appropriate. I had just had a similar experience so I happened to know how he felt. So I backed him up. And then I heard myself say to him: "You're demonstrating one of the main points we've been talking about, which is valuing all different ways of knowing, and taking them seriously, and living with integrity out of that." And I've realized, thinking about this all night after learning of Ryan's experience, that the very story of us meeting has within it *all* of the things we talked about – not just that one part. If we tell the story of what happened here, it *tells* about Indigenist knowledge.

Ryan: Yeah! I wonder if we can capture Beatriz's frustration in the story as a point of humor. That poor travel agent! I'm getting emails from her right now about my luggage...

Shawn: Ha! Contrarywise! We should ask where's the Trickster figure playing itself out here.

Ryan: I think Narcisse is the Trickster!

Everyone laughed. Outside, loads of snow fell heavily from tree limbs starting to warm in the sunlight.

Storms had rolled over New York all winter, like surf on the nearby Atlantic, heaping deep snow over everything. Then between the time Shawn arrived and Dawn's plane landed, a few hours of inexplicable warm rain dissolved the top layer of snowpack. Before daylight the temperature fell and the rain fluffed up into snow again. It started to form a soft frosting over the ice-crusting mass left from previous storms. By that afternoon, driveways and walkways were interlaced braids of packed snow and broad satin ribbons of ice. Ryan's plane was due in La Guardia at 1:30 that day. But he went to Detroit instead. And camped in the middle of Fordland.

Dawn: Story tells. The really important, meaningful stories tell themselves through our lives. The people who live those stories, or who are participating in them, understand at a very deep level – even if they cannot articulate it – what they've learned. The problem is taking that, and putting it in a form that can be shared with people who did not participate in the original telling. And that is a particularly difficult task if it's done in writing. The issue isn't how people learn from story; it's about how stories teach. It's an active principle.

Narcisse's voice saying our education system is modeled off Ford's production line is ringing clear from the center of the factory, the same way Ryan's voice is coming to us out of the middle of the table here, where the speaker phone has been sitting for two days. Our voice, the voice of our group in this report, emerges from that same place. It comes from the Story.

Shawn: I like that idea. I think it rings true for me because I don't know if you remember, if it was yesterday or the first day, and I was saying that part of creating meaning or part of knowledge production or building Indigenist knowledge is the process of transferring the short story of the personal experience into the long narrative, into the creation story. Ryan talked about it again yesterday, explaining that someone can bring a vision they've received to the group and there's a process for incorporating that into the creation story as held within the Beaver Bundle. So that rings true: a sense of using the short story of our experience as a way of trying to incorporate this knowledge into the big picture using the processes that allow an individual to pick it up and use it.

Another thought I have, that can maybe also be included, is that there's a difference between a storytelling in a more formalized sense, and a conversation that is growing and evolving. And that's something I've really appreciated, being here, is that I couldn't have just sat here and - even though maybe I've talked for three hours all together - talked for

three hours and gotten anywhere near the depth that I got out of the back and forth of the dialogue. Because the living process of the dialogue helps the knowledge to evolve and to expose itself more freely. So if possible, we could even use the dialogue process so that there's the story of how this knowledge was helped to be articulated through the story of this meeting. But the problem is how to do that in written text because it generally comes from one voice. So how can we maybe make it have multiple voices interacting with each other so that there's an element of process within the text. I think this is especially important with cultural issues, when there is dialog between different cultures.

It's nice when you see things falling into place, so that you feel like: yes, this was meant to be. I see how thoughts have progressed on an intellectual level, but on a spiritual level I see things have progressed as they were meant to.

EWGordon: Is storytelling a communal act?

Dawn: It can be. It traditionally was. Shawn was saying, the first day, there are certain stories for which there are rules for when they can be told or not told, and that's an expression of the community ownership of the story.

Shawn: Well . . . I would think if it's a communal act you're not telling a story; you're sharing a story.

EWGordon: If there is a purpose behind a story, it is to maintain us rather than for personal gain. Yet knowledge in the hands of the dominant culture can be distorted by politics.

Shawn: At the same time there's this juxtaposition that you can't have pure communal knowing, shared by everyone equally, because there are certain things that have to be earned. It makes me think of the concept of unearned versus earned privilege. You can't be a carrier of certain types of knowledge without earning it first. But even then you don't own that knowledge. You're just a person carrying it for a while. It's like you have custodianship of it, maybe, a better way of thinking of it. Yet you are carrying it, you earned that, so there's still the individual thing that way. Certain gifts are given to an individual for whatever reason and they carry it on behalf of the community.

Dawn: In a lot of Indigenous nations, the people who are strongest, who are best able to take care of others, have as their responsibility taking care of others in more difficult situations. But when we talk about differences of strength or ability, we're talking about individual variation. Not everyone is the same -- and that's natural. Even different animals have different abilities.

EWGordon: My father always said if you have a privilege, you have a responsibility. I recall hearing him, one night, discussing the matter of a young Black man who had developed an intimate relationship with a young White woman. Both of them had been arrested. The young man was in the local jail. A restive mob was gathering on the courthouse yard. Fearing the Black man would be lynched, my father was asking help of his friend, a prominent White businessman who was also an alderman. The next day the

word got out that the jailed Black man had disappeared. We feared that he had been spirited from the jail and killed. We later learned that he had indeed been spirited out of the jailhouse, but he had also been spirited out of town and was safely above the Mason-Dixon Line. My father and his establishment friend had engineered the rescue of this man from a potential lynch mob.

Shawn. I think that's the difference between equity and equality. You don't treat everyone the same; you treat them equitably. Maybe that's what I was trying to get at. Thanks for helping me tease that out.

EWGordon: My strategy in this project is to try to find those commonalities that the dominant culture either takes for granted or honors as part of the cultures that we have been ignoring or suppressing. And again I am thinking of it in the context of where the dominant culture is going to have to move if it is going to survive. I'm trying to establish the importance of things we may claim. My continual message will be if we have excluded these things, then this is where we've got to go look around and notice, "Gee, traditional cultures embraced this a long time ago and we stamped it out." And I think this has been stamped out primarily because of the way in which we've organized the economy for exploitation – which goes right back to Narcisse, and to Ryan's experience in Detroit.

Dawn: I wish you could have met Narcisse, Dr. Gordon. He was a native speaker. Somehow that makes such a powerful difference.

EWGordon: I understand, Dawn. It's because a native speaker is a Native thinker. I wish I could have met him, too.

Narcisse: The basis for our relationship with the new-comers was fear. The fear was in the form of the forts, and those big walls they put around themselves to keep them safe from the natives and thus the environment. That metaphor of a fort, for me, is really, really played out with universities. Universities think they know everything. They're afraid to go out of those walls, especially here in North America. "Hey, there's knowledge out there," you know. It becomes a vested interest. It is no different than the corporations worrying about their bottom line. Knowledge gets sacrificed when universities become businesses.

So, what we try and come from is what has sustained us all these years – that you're a *person* first. If we can teach the new-comers of what they should have paid attention to, then the whole notion of citizenship and community would be prevalent, that we are in fact all related and that we should take care of each other, not look down on each other. It's not about being Blackfoot. It's about becoming Blackfoot throughout your life. In other words, become a human to its fullest.

One of the things when we take our students out, as we're going to these sites, I tell them: "I want you to be aware and look for what you're not seeing. Right? What aren't you seeing?" They ask us that we should have a well-defined literature to describe some of these sites, especially at the University of Lethbridge. They want the literature. "OK, what is this site," they ask me. I tell 'em, "Hell if I know!" I don't know. That is one of

the biggest research questions of learning from Place is the ability to say, “I don’t know. But you know what? Let’s learn.” Our students become our teachers, too. And when we’re driving up to this place, especially in Southern Alberta, what they don’t see, obviously, is the buffalo. Anywhere. There’s no buffalo. There’s no grasslands. There’s no wolves. There’s no vultures. You know. But I don’t want to give them the answer. I just ask: “Please think about what you’re not seeing. Because what you see is important. But in today’s world, what is more important is: what *aren’t* you seeing?”

One of the biggest research questions we have is in our language. And that word is *aikiwa*: what are we doing? Growing up, I was told that a lot. When you’re in trouble, when you’re doing something you’re not supposed to do, my parents, my grandparents, my uncles, aunts would ask me “*Kitaikiha*: What are you *doing!*?” See, one of the obstacles when we outsource our knowledge to Western institutions is, one of the biggest aspects of that, one of the biggest criticisms that’s coming from within those institutions is: critical thinking is so discouraged. In the Blackfoot paradigm, it is *everything*. And that word *aikiwa* is a part of it. You need to be so critical in your understanding of what you’re seeing and what you don’t see. Right?

My two sons, we went to Oxford. And the person that brought us there asked my son Joey to give a presentation about Kainai Studies. And I got all worried, you know, being a parent: ‘I gotta rescue my son!’ And he was quite nervous. But he got up there with a slide presentation of what he was learning at Kainai Studies. And he *mesmerized* everybody. Including me. I didn’t have to rescue him once. Those students were eating out of his hands. And his mom and dad, you know. Because what he was talking about was experiential learning, *getting right back* to the Land. Engaging with the Land. That’s who we are. Because that is a real old university, Oxford. They learn from the neck up. And they *crave* for that knowledge. And moreover, it didn’t end there. They asked him and his brother, they took them out to lunch so that they can continue that discussion. And these MA and Ph.D students, they wanted to enroll in our program.

Shawn: Who we are and our ways of thinking, doing things, and of being in the world, carry an inherent beauty without needing to be compared with others - we are incomparably beautiful. Our cultures, our art, our languages, our ways of being on Land – they are beautiful and worth preserving. If we can’t recognize this beauty then really there’s no need to carry on as Indigenous people, we might as well just assimilate into the mainstream. At least we’d then get the health benefits!

And then the meeting ended, with a little burning of sweetgrass in the sunroom of that wide and welcoming house in Pomona. After that Shawn and Dawn took a car east to New York to begin their journeys home. Down the black cliffs of the Palisades they went, and across the cold dark waters of the deep Hudson River. The slot canyons of Manhattan funneled a cold ocean wind through the streets, that tugged on pedestrians’ coattails and scarf ends, but the airports were all opened again. So that night Ryan went east to New York as well, his original booked tickets the most practical way back to Alberta -- however contrary that seemed.

The Elder rocks of the highlands west of the Hudson, who had received ritual offerings and prayers with such solemn dignity and given so much back in return, watched patiently all through that night and the dim blue twilight before daybreak the

next morning. The bristling towers of New York City were lost against the mists of darkness that still lay upon the sea beyond them. Then the eastern light began to grow, pink and coral that brightened to yellow, and at last a glittering gold that was the rising sun itself. The first warm burst of morning struck the crests of Eagle Rock and Panther Mountain far away west across the river while all the rest of the world still lay in a blanket of shadow. Then blazing shafts of light flickered through the canyons of the city, danced along the walls of schools and factories, and spilled westward to pour in a rising flood tide across the urban corridor towards the mountains' feet. The Elders' long blue shadows retreated before it, warmed and melting, pulling back. Finding their own way home again.

Ending the ceremony.

Though the Story goes on.

Makvlla.
("It is done.")

Epilogue

Ryan to Dawn, Shawn, Dr. Gordon, Kavitha, and Priya, email
Tue, March 17, 2015 1:40 pm

Oki Dawn, and all,

I apologize for not yet responding to the draft material you've sent. As I had expressed so much concern over, the Kainai Studies Program at Red Crow College is still very much under neocolonial attack by our recently appointed president and his chosen executives. I came home from our consultation to some very unfortunate news in the form of an intercepted invoice from a legal firm that had spent the entire month of February researching, drafting, editing, and rewriting a letter of reprimand for Narcisse (right up to the day of his death) and a letter of termination for me. My letter was delivered on Friday. There was no concern at all extended to our students, who are still deep in grief over the loss of Narcisse. I'm obviously embarrassed to burden you with even these rough details of this drama, which I plan to publish as a comparative case study with colleagues who underwent similar processes with the Blackfeet Studies Program in Montana. But I felt like I needed to explain my silence over the past several days, as I'm aware of the need to document and draft our story as soon as possible. My initial shock at the sudden shift here is already beginning to subside, so I'm sure I will be able to get back to our work soon.

Narcisse: Unfortunately, we're challenged today because of the effects of that building that Red Crow College occupies, formerly St. Mary's Residential School. Those traumas linger, unfortunately, with our own people. And we're at a neo-colonial state right now and we're being challenged right now. People look at our ways the same way the settlers saw us. And that is, that our ways are lesser than the mainline institutions. And they tend to refer to our ways in the context of a higher education center as "the cultural component." It's pitiful. It's sad. But I understand where they're coming from because that was my own journey about decolonizing. And I don't know if I'll *ever* completely decolonize. But I've come a long, long way. To appreciate that our strength is in *who* we are. And that doesn't always apply for our own people, especially when people get their Western credentials. But, at the same time, we have people that know *better*. That know *who* we are, that it's in what we've always had. It's there. It's beautiful. And you see it here, right? *Narcisse smiles, his gentle face warm with love as he gestures to the trees, the river, and the mountains behind him.*

And: "That's what I want to add," he says.

Citations for resources in the order information appeared in the text.

Additional information and insight about traditional Indigenous narrative structures may be found in: Paula Gunn Allen. *Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat*. HarperSanFrancisco. 2003. pages 1-23.

Navajo rug used in frontispiece and end-piece illustrations is owned by Tapestry Institute. See <http://tapestryinstitute.org/about-tapestry/name/>

Geology and geography of the meeting site in Rockland County, New York.

- Thiells Quadrangle, New York, Topographic Map. 7.5 minute series. 2013. United States Geological Survey. U.S. Department of the Interior
- Volkert, Richard A. 2011. Bedrock geologic map of the Ramsey Quadrangle Passaic and Bergen Counties, New Jersey and Rockland County, New York. New Jersey Geological Survey. Department of Environmental Protection, Water Resource Management. Prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey, National Geologic Mapping Program. available online at <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/njgs/pricelst/ofmap/ofm87.pdf>

Narcisse Blood statements of greeting and introduction are from:

- Blood, Narcisse and Ryan Heavy Head. 2014. "Learning from Place." Presentation to the American Indigenous Research Association annual meeting at Salish Kootenai College, Flathead Indian Reservation, Pablo MT. Available online at <https://skc.wistia.com/medias/154r3fgbwo>.
- Burns, Bob and Charlene. 2015. "Tribute to Tatsikiistamik, Narcisse Blood." *Indian Country Today*. Available online at <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/02/14/tribute-tatsikiistamik-narcisse-blood>.

Ausubel, D.P. (2000). *The Acquisition and Retention of Knowledge: A Cognitive View*. Springer. A summary of David Ausubel, M.D.'s ideas on Advanced Organizers (as well as Meaningful Verbal Learning and Subsumption Theory) may be found online at <http://www.lifecircles-inc.com/Learningtheories/constructivism/ausubel.html> (accessed 4.18.15). *"The advance organizer is a tool or a mental learning aid to help students integrate new information with their existing knowledge, leading to 'meaningful learning' as opposed to rote memorization. It is a means of preparing the learner's cognitive structure for the learning experience about to take place. It is a device to activate the relevant schema or conceptual patterns so that new information can be more readily 'subsumed' into the learner's existing cognitive structures. Ausubel believed that it was important for teachers to provide a preview of information to be learned. Teachers could do this by providing a brief introduction about the way that information that is going to be presented is structured. This would enable students to start with a 'Big Picture' of the upcoming content, and link new ideas, concepts, vocabulary, to existing mental maps of the content area."*

The Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education has a three-fold mission: (1) study the best of extant educational assessment policy, practice and technology, (2) consider our best estimates of how education will change in the future and what it will need from educational measurement during the 21st century (3) generate recommendations concerning the design of future models for and uses of educational assessment to support the demands and needs of education as these varied needs can be anticipated to be in the next quarter century and beyond. . . The Commission will explore ways in which emerging developments in pedagogical, cognitive and technological sciences can be leveraged in the design of educational assessment instruments, procedures and systems that are more powerful accelerants of student learning, of effective teaching and of effective educational system management. Commission Reports are available online at <http://www.gordoncommission.org/index.html>

Work on Intellectual Competence cited by Dr. Gordon:

Gordon, Edmund W. and Beatrice L. Bridglall. 2006. *Affirmative Development: Cultivating Academic Ability*. Critical Issues in Contemporary American Education Series. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Cole, Michael and Sylvia Scribner. 1974. *Culture and Thought: A Psychological Introduction*. John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Story of the flood experience inspired by a combination of personal accounts from a major flooding event in river canyons of the Colorado Rocky Mountain Front Range of Boulder and Larimer Counties, September 2013. More information about this event may be found here:

“Eight Days, 1000-year rain, 100-year flood: the story of Boulder County’s Floods 2013” by Charlie Brennan and John Aguilar. Boulder Daily Camera. 9.21.2013. Available online at http://www.dailycamera.com/news/boulder-flood/ci_24148258/boulder-county-colorado-flood-2013-survival-100-rain-100-year-flood (Accessed 4.23.15).

“Colorado Floods 2013” by various staff reporters. Archives of The Denver Post. Available at <http://www.denverpost.com/2013coloradofloods> (Accessed 4.23.15).

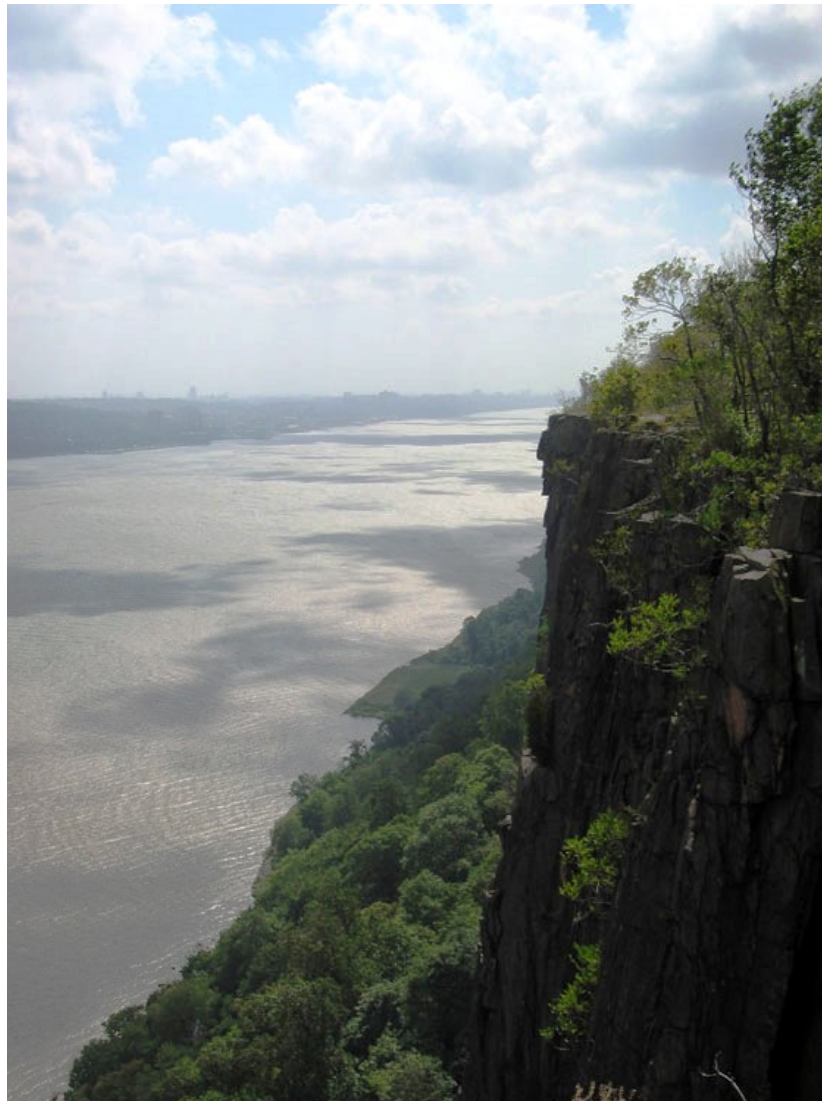
A biographical memoir of anthropologist Clark Wissler is available through the National Academy of Sciences. The biography, by Stanley A. Freed and Ruth S. Freed, published in 1992 by the NAS, summarizes Wissler’s life and work. It is available online at <http://www.nasonline.org/publications/biographical-memoirs/memoir-pdfs/wissler-clark.pdf> (Accessed 4.25.15). Wissler was an ethnologist whose studies particularly focused on Indigenous cultures of North America.

N. Scott Momaday quote. Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday writes about the petroglyphs in Barrier Canyon, Utah: "We do not know the story, but we see its enactment on the face of the earth, that it reaches from the beginning of time to the present to a destiny

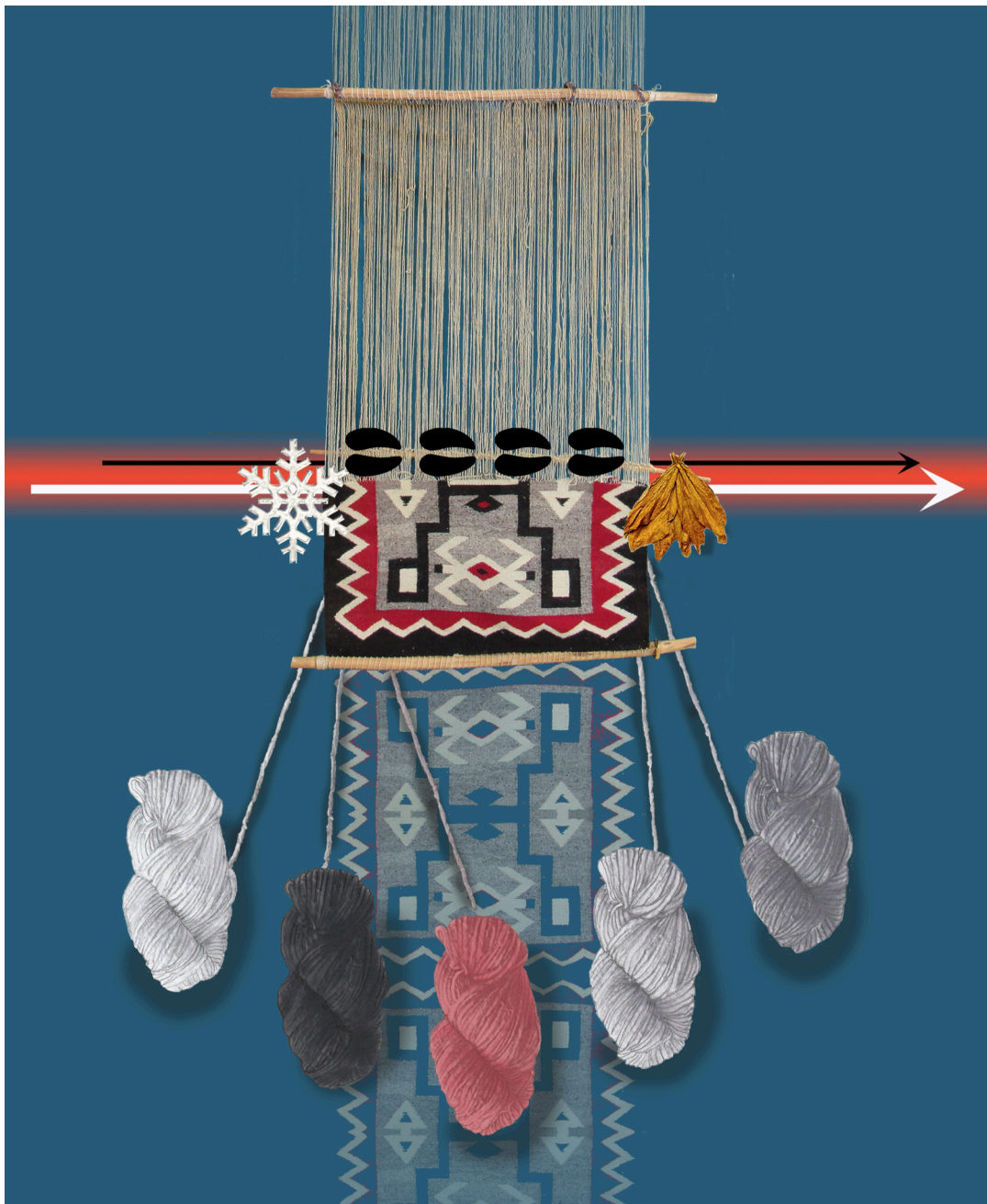
beyond time. We do not know what the story means, but far more importantly we know *that* it means, and that we are deeply involved in its meaning. The sacred is profoundly mysterious, and our belief is not less profound." N. Scott Momaday. *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, and Passages*. St. Martin's Press. 1997.

Narcisse Blood statements at the end of the story are from:

- Blood, Narcisse and Ryan Heavy Head. 2014. "Learning from Place." Presentation to the American Indigenous Research Association annual meeting at Salish Kootenai College, Flathead Indian Reservation, Pablo MT. Available online at <https://skc.wistia.com/medias/154r3fgbwo>.
- "Relearning the Land: A Story of Red Crow College." Multi-Sense Media. A production of Enlivened Learning. A film by Udi Mandel and Kelly Teamey. 2015.



Palisades over the Hudson River near Pomona, New York. Photograph by Erhudy. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



Translation of image: Vertical line of weaving is the Long Story. Red horizontal line is the three days of ceremony that were the consultative consultation meeting in this report. White horizontal arrow is the Snowstorm: TIK asserting Agency through Nature. This resulted in flight diversions plus early and late arrivals that brought us together “on time” and in the “right place” for ritual. Horizontal black line is ritual offering of tobacco and prayer, which resulted in the miracle of enlightenment: the Agency of knowledge felt through understanding. Skeins of yarn are Gordon, Blood, Wilson, Heavy Head, and Adams and the gifts they brought to the ceremony. Gordon brought his work on the Gordon Commission and the NSF grant that funded our meeting, as well as the participation of his colleagues. Blood brought the Ford assembly line story. Wilson brought the Research is Ceremony story. Heavy Head brought the Beaver Bundle and all its knowledge, as well as the Buffalo Rock story. Adams brought the Science & TIK story. The immediate outcome of this ritual is new knowledge that becomes part of TIK once we learn how to use it. Then we can understand how to recognize and use TIK in STEM knowledge production and assessment. The ongoing outcome of this ritual is a process of incorporating the lessons learned into the Long Story. Diagram conceptualized by Shawn Wilson, rendered by Dawn Adams. Image of rug © 2015 Tapestry Institute. Used with permission. Rendered illustration © 2015 Shawn Wilson and Dawn Adams.