Negotiating Two Worlds: Learning through the Stories of Haudenosaunee Youth and Adults

Michelle Bomberry

with the

Student Success Research Consortium

Abstract

The Creation Story comes from the earliest time in our Language – a time when our language, symbols, beliefs, the world we saw around us, and life as we understand it – were completely different from the way we understand them now. We lived in a complete world. (North American Indian Travelling College, 1984).

Elaborating on this form of knowledge I will share the interconnectedness epistemology as a philosophical understanding for the Haudenosaunee community. Premising the The Kashwenta (Two Row Wampum Treaty) as a foundation, this paper will examine Six Nations' cultural connectedness through the Tree of Peace analogy and offer an understanding of the disconnected realities occurring at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. Sixty-eight Six Nation youth and adults participated in discussions about educational experiences and related issues facing Six Nations youth. The themes were placed within the Haudenosaunee Creation Story's Tree of Peace's growth stages: Planting the Seeds/Germination, Supports, Branching Out, Threats, Fulfilment, and Journeying On. The participants' stories illustrate areas Haudenosaunee epistemology can contribute to holistic community strategies and approaches.

Précis

S'exprimant sur cette forme de connaissance, je vais partager l'épistémologie de l'interdépendance comme une compréhension philosophique de la communauté Haudenosaunee. Posant en principe le Le Kashwenta (deux rangs traité wampum) comme base, ce document examinera liens culturels Six Nations à travers l'Arbre du Paix et d'offrir une meilleure compréhension des réalités déconnectées se produisant à Six-Nations à Grande Rivière. Soixante-huit jeunes et adultes de Six-Nations ont participé à des discussions sur les expériences éducatives et les questions connexes confrontés jeunes de Six-Nations. Les thèmes ont été placés dans la hiérarchie des stades de croissance de paix de l'histoire de la création Haudenosaunee: Planter les graines / Germination, soutient Éclaircie, les menaces, la réalisation, et en chemin à. Les récits des participants illustrent les

zones Haudenosaunee épistémologie peut contribuer à des stratégies et des approches communautaires globales.

Negotiating Two Worlds:

Learning through the Stories of Haudenosaunee Youth and Adults

Introduction: Reconnecting Community

The purpose of this article is to examine cultural connectedness among community members at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory (Six Nations). Drawing upon the Kashwenta[1] as a foundation, I consider how community members negotiate two worlds within daily life. Individuals residing in the Six Nations community often face the challenge of being true to their own cultural beliefs (one world) and navigating mainstream Canadian society (another world). This article offers more than cultural awareness, it is an intentional bridging between two empowering environments of understanding, Indigenous[2] and non-Indigenous ways of thought that are experienced by members of the Six Nations community.

For this article, I drew upon research conducted by the Student Success Research Consortium[3] (Consortium) conducted with Six Nations community members (see Styres, Zinga, Bennett, & Bomberry, 2010; Zinga, Styres, Bennett & Bomberry, 2009). Six Nations has the largest Aboriginal population in Canada (Chiefs of Ontario, 2010) and is located in the hub of southwestern Ontario. Six Nations is a rural community that is surrounded by urban metropolitans. Urban cities such as Hamilton, London, Toronto and Buffalo are within an hour drive of Six Nations. Six Nations is the

---

[1] Kashwenta is often used to refer to the Two Row Wampum Treaty, although Kashwenta may more accurately refer to the principles of peace, friendship and mutual respect that form the basis of the Two Row Wampum Treaty and the foundation for future treaties (see Muller, 2007).

[2] For the purposes of this paper the words 'Indigenous,' 'Native' and 'First Nations' will be used. Native is used to refer to members of the Six Nations community as that is a preferred term within the community. First Nations will be used to refer to the community and other communities within Canada that are recognized having historical pre-colonial societies. Indigenous will be used to refer to communities, peoples, and nations around the globe who are recognized as having historical pre-colonial societies.

[3] The Student Success Research Consortium is a group of Six Nations community organizations, Six Nations community researchers, and Brock University researchers engaged in collaborative research.

only First Nation community with 6 diverse First Nations. As the name suggests, Six

Nations is comprised of six distinct Nations; Mohawks, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas,

Senecas and Tuscaroras.

Positionality is an important consideration in research and within this research I

am both a researcher and a member of the Six Nations community. I am from the Cayuga

Nation and of the Turtle Clan. I have resided in the Six Nations community for the

majority of my life. My first exposure to others' constructed identity of First Nation

people was transferring to an off-reserve Catholic elementary school (the transfer was a

result of an asbestos contamination of our elementary schools). From my friends on-

reserve, I was viewed as one of the "rich Indians" (I assume because both my parents

were employed, we owned a large home and I remained off-reserve to attend school),

while my newfound acquaintances in the off-reserve school viewed me as "an Indian—

the people who do not work." Upon entering high school, I was exposed to the blatant

racism and Otherness of being called an "apple" (meaning I was red or Native-looking on

the outside, but my friends and choices were white in thought) by some Native students.

My postsecondary experience was a time of independence, a time of confronting racism

and dispelling stereotypes. More importantly for me, I was defining my identity and my

personal aspirations. Following university education, I returned to Six Nations to live and

work.

I have created a life for myself within my community. This is where my two

children were born and where I have chosen to raise them. My vivid recollections of

growing up at Six Nations and my experiences as a community member have influenced

and confused my definition of what it means to be culturally connected. On one hand, I

feel I am a contributing member of Six Nations by following the cultural principals of

being respectful to others, mindful that my decisions today effect positively in the future,

and mentoring and sharing my knowledge to bridge community members' and non-

community members' knowledge. On the other hand, I do not attend longhouse

(longhouse is the place ceremonies occur) and by some community members' standards,

I am not culturally connected. These are two of the many differing definitions of cultural

connectedness playing out within Six Nations. This article is my interpretation of "living

it" and understanding historical impacts and current realities from an insider rather than

an outsider perspective.

I obviously have a unique perspective and interpretation of this research. My

research draws upon the 68 participants from the 12 focus groups that were part of the

Consortium research. While the 68 participants provide a good cross section of Six

Nations youth and adults, it is important to note that the voices included in this research

do not represent all of the Six Nations community.

Before I describe the stories of the Haudenosaunee participants and provide

recommendations to bridge and navigate both worlds, it is important to understand the

historical epistemology of the Kashwenta that provides a foundation for navigating

relations between nations. The Kashwenta is also referred to as the Two Row Wampum

Treaty - an agreement of parallelism with which to guide Canadian - Aboriginal realtions

(Muller, 2007). The Kashwenta informs how I conceptualize cultural connectedness

within the context of negotiating two worlds. I also draw upon another foundational

Haudenosaunee belief, the Creation Story, which predates and informs the Kashwenta.

The Creation Story reflects Haudenosaunee evolution, connectedness, balance and co-

existence. I draw upon a particular aspect of the Creation Story, the Tree of Peace, as a

way of understanding the participants' and my own lived experiences navigating two

worlds and negotiating cultural connectedness.

Utilizing the Tree of Peace, I plot the words of the participants' natural growth

process that can be paralleled to human and environmental development. There are 6

stages of development that were taught to me by an Elder: Planting the

Seeds/Germination, Supports, Branching Out, Threats, Fulfilment, and Journeying On.

The Elder taught me that all creation (e.g. humans, animals, trees, weather, etc.) has

cycles of birth to death that are associated with these six stages of growth. The stages of

the Tree of Peace were evident in participants' personal stories and are used as a

framework to capture themes that emerged out of my analysis of the participants' stories.

A working understanding of the Kashwenta and the Tree of Peace are essential to

understanding how Six Nations youth and adults negotiate both worlds.

The Kashwenta/Two Row Wampum Treaty

The Kashwenta (Thomas, 1998) was negotiated in the early 1600's, as an

agreement between Haudenosaunee and European societies to co-habit synonmous of one

another's culture. Muller (2007) provides a description of the Two Row Wampum

Treaty:

> According to contemporary Haudenosaunee oral tradition, a related treaty that
>
> also encompasses Haudenosaunee-European relations, the Two Row Wampum,
>
> predates the Covenant Chain alliance as the oldest treaty ratified between the
>
> League and the Europeans in the early seventeenth century. Cayuga Chief Jake
>
> Thomas, one of the foremost authorities in Haudenosaunee culture, described how
>
> the Two Row Wampum outlines a guarantee of independence in its structure and

metaphors. The wampum's parallel purple lines represent the Haudenosaunee

canoe and the European ship, comprising the laws, traditions, and customs of their

respective people. Each vessel travels down the river of life, represented by the

white wampum background, never interfering with the other. The underlying

principles of both these relationships flow from the Haudenosaunee epic of the

Great Peace, in which the Peacemaker Deganawidah united the warring Mohawk,

Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations in a League of perpetual

brotherhood. Today evidence of a treaty relationship incarnated by the Two Row

Wampum and the Friendship Belt helps provide the foundation for assertions of

sovereignty and self-government, as the Haudenosaunee call upon the Canadian

and American governments to respect their historic pledges (p.131).

Today, the Kashwenta serves to confirm historical negotiations between the Crown and

Haudenosaunee peoples. The Kashwenta recognized and supported Haudenosaunee

epistemology- a paradigm based in balance, connectedness and co-existence with all

entities.

Haudenosaunee Epistemology

According to the Haudenosaunee Creation Story, the Tree of Peace is a great

white pine (Hill, 1990) that reaches into the sky so that all people see it and know of it.

At the base (land) of that tree grow four white roots in the four cardinal directions of the

earth; north, south, east and west and any nation that can embrace the concepts of peace,

power and righteousness, can follow back one of those roots to the Tree of Peace (Hill,

1990). To understand the realities of the research participants, I incorporated

developmental stages of the Tree of Peace: Planting the Seeds/Germination, Supports,

Branching Out, Threats, , and Journeying On.

Planting the Seeds

Planting the seeds refers to being rooted into the ground or rooted in ideologies as

new life begins. Haudenosaunee cultures revere the sacred relationship between the

stages of germination or spirit world and planting the seeds (McGregor, 2000). In the

culture there is a connection with the Spirit. The Spirit World or the germination stage of

life is an understanding that all people who move into the Spirit World (i.e., who pass

away) will always have a spiritual presence. Therefore, to plant the seeds, we must first

recognize our Ancestors and Elders who have gone on before us. In relation to human

life, we give thanks to our Ancestors and continue bearing children to carry on new life.

Supports

Support is analogous to the hearty, breadth of a tree trunk. A tree's trunk is as

important as the planting of the seeds. The trunk ultimately supports the growth of the

tree, has a responsibility of flowing nutrients and is the protection for the internal system.

Human resources, health, and social program supports do the same for Six Nations

children and youth. Sharing knowledge and mentoring young people is paramount to

nourishing a healthy balanced individual.

Branching Out

Branching out refers to the opportunities and experiences people experience. As a

tree branches emerge in various ways, shapes, and forms, and so too do human

experiences. People branch out (try various paths); some branches will break, some will grow into another branch (just as some paths may not be strong or appropriate). The paths that are not appropriate are viewed as threats.

Threats

Threats are simply, outside forces impeding one's path. In Haudenosaunee culture, threats equate to life's lessons. Elders have always encouraged our people by sharing, "the Creator only puts lessons before you that he knows you can handle." Therefore, regardless of one's path travelled, all experiences good and bad have meaning and are meant for that person. Experiencing threats leads to the fulfilment or blossoming stage. As a tree blossoms with leaves and adapts to change seasons, humans do as well.

Fulfilment refers to the recognition of happiness and wellness. This stage is a response to being nurtured, taking the lessons put before you and growing. Fulfilment comes at different stages and for most people nearing the latter part of the Life Cycle (McGregor, 2000). The brief explanation of the Life Cycle is all individuals are born into the Physical World as infants, gradually grow through the toddler, child, and teenager stage. From adolescence, individuals physically become young adults, followed by an adult role and then become parents. Grandparents and Elders are individuals we hold with high regard, although there is fulfilment in all areas, Grandparents and Elders are part of the life cycle of highest fulfilment. The elderly provide encouraging words, share their life's lessons, and are respected for being the Creator's gift until they return to the Spirit World.

Journeying On

Journeying onward means having fulfilled the Creator's Physical World role and returning to the Spirit World. Celebration of one's life honours each individual.

These six stages of human development are the guiding framework for this research and an approach to navigating both worlds. As suggested by Smith (1999), the way in which we as researchers conduct our research needs to be informed by the custom of the very people for whom the research would serve and be centred upon their concerns. I have combined the Creation Story's Tree of Peace and The Kashwenta to offer a framework for understanding how the participants negotiate both worlds and struggle to maintain cultural connectedness admist the demands of both worlds.

Methodology

The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards set out by the Brock University Ethics Review Board and Six Nations Band Council Ethics Committee, which reviewed and approved ethics documents pertaining to the study.   In the early spring of 2008, organizing and planning the focus groups started. Following the completion of the focus groups, transcription occurred. The focus groups were transcribed with all identifying information removed and pseudonyms assigned.. Due to political realities within the community, the occupations of adult participants were kept confidential to ensure their anonymity and economic safety. Participants had an opportunity to review their own transcribed comments and ensure the accuracy of the transcription as well as removing or adding comments as necessary. Some participants

chose not to review their transcribed comments and others reviewed them but did not add anything.

Participants

The 68 participants were drawn from the following stakeholder groups: youth who experienced success at school, youth who experienced challenges, community stakeholders and parents and/or caregivers. The youth ranged in age from 16 to 25 as we included those in their twenties who were enrolled in higher education or who had recently completed higher education and identified more with the youth population than the adult/parent population. The adults who participated ranged in age from 30 to 70. Participants had to be members of the Six Nations community either through working in the community or living in the community (at least part of the time) and be willing to share their experiences with us.

The Voices of Six Nations Youth and Adults

The initial research commenced with the development of the Student Success Research Consortium (SSRC) which was a collaborative group consisting of: 2 school boards, 11 Six Nation community agencies: Six Nations Elected Council departments (Health Services: Therapy and Speech Services, Early Childhood Development, Children's Roundtable: Social Services; Welfare and Innovations and Economic Development; Community Planner); Grand River Employment and Training; Grand Erie District School Board; Native Advisors; Six Nation District Schools; DAM Studio, a private media company; Six Nations Police Service; Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Native Liaison department: Duke of Edinburgh Award program; and Brock University's

Faculty of Education and Faculty of Child and Youth Studies, was an exploration of how

the community could achieve Student Success and decrease Six Nations' high drop-out

and truancy rates (Grand Erie District School Board, 2009).

This research is connected to the SSRC research as if I took a row out of the

SSRC wampum belt. The entire scoping exercise is the belt and it has its own pattern

and weave that has been explored in the SSRC final report (Zinga, Bomberry, Bennett

& The Student Success Research Consortium, 2010). In examining the row that I have

chosen, I am exploring the voices from a unique perspective that allows me to look at

the voices and nuances in the stories that they share in a more detailed way. I used the

Tree of Peace analogy to frame the extensive picture of the participants' voices.

The Tree of Peace Findings

Overall, common themes were identified under each developmental stage except for the

Journeying On stage. As participants seemed to interpret "Journeying On" as a stage

individuals reached later on in life, there are no findings reported for that stage. I present

participant stories within each of the other five stages. These participant stories are

significant because they are repeated often within each focus group and more importantly

illustrate frames of thought that both support and contradict The Kashwenta.

Planting the Seeds

Drawing on the Tree of Peace's development stages, "home, school, culture and

community" were described as four seeds Six Nations children are rooted in. I consider

each of these four research findings in turn.

Seed #1: Rooted in the Home (Home Seed). Adults and youth agreed discipline and cultural teaching "starts at home." Both youth and adult participants suggested that "parents need to establish expectations, have structure (set rules), be firm (have consequences) and respect their children." Participants suggested parents are not the only individuals that root youth, extended family plays a significant role in planting seeds and indicated by the following comments: "I've called aunties and uncles when I see kids falling of the rails" and "I've called grandma and grandpa, the people I know in their lives that could be positive. I ask the youth first and it's almost like they are happy when you want to call one of their family members and get them on board." The sharing of child rearing across parents and extended family was common practice at Six Nations. Many participants shared their cultural understandings that "aunties were as important as a mothers in child rearing" as well as indicating that teachers and other community members also had a role to play.

Seed #2: Planting the School Seed. Many of the adults identified schools as the place to start to address some of the issues facing youth. School was seen as being a place where the young "spent a lot of time and a place that had potential to make a difference in young people's lives." There were some contradictions about the seeds being planted at school. Parents talked about how "respect has to be earned" and that "'white' teachers and other teachers sometimes assume or demand respect just because of their position." Many participants expressed concerns about non-Native teachers. One participant shared her experiences with a non-native teacher:

When I went to take my business administration, there were four or five of us

Natives in the class and the teacher asked, what do I call you? I asked what do

you mean - my name (states her name). The teacher said well yes but what do you

like to be Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous, you know. I commented I like to be

called (states her name) and I what do you like to be called, Honky, white woman,

Caucasian? She said I see your point, you like to be called your name.

Other adults shared that non-native teachers "always try to be culturally appropriate or

sensitive" and at times it goes too far. Yet, there are times when non-Native teachers need

to understand and respect Haudenosaunee culture and they don't." Analogous to teachers'

planting seeds, adults viewed curriculum as a seed. As one youth suggested, "we needed

to learn more about our own culture, especially in mainstream school where we need the

right information about Native culture and history." Many youth expressed similar

sentiments and agreed with the important of cultural learning within school settings.

Seed #3: The Seed of Culture. Culture was as important as the home seed.

Participants discussed how the community has been impacted by "residential schools,"

and claimed that residential schools attributed to the transformational shift and stripped

Haudenosaunee identity. Adults and youth alike suggested that teaching our

(Haudenosaunee) culture needed to "start in the school." There was a brief comparative

discussion of how Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (previously

known as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada/INAC) operated reserve schools

perpetuating provincial standards. The schools on reserve followed the provincial

mandates except for the private immersion school, which developed their own

curriculum. However, youth voiced concern regarding the immersion curriculum, "we had a solid base and were proud of who we are but we weren't prepared when we hit high school." Not being prepared was only one concern for youth at Six Nations as they also spoke about how trying to define culture was difficult.

Culture seemed to be synonmous with language, ceremonies and identity and there was much diversity. Participants voiced "community has a role to play "but this was a complex reality since the diversity of six Nations (Cayugas, Mohawks, Senecas, Onondagas, Oneidas and Tuscaroras) impacted the variety of interpretations. Although there are divisions within the Nations, the participants asserted that there was pride and support at Six Nations. There were plenty of discussions regarding important Seeds being planted in the home, at school and in the community. The Seeds than need to be nourished by Supports.

Supports

Incorporating the Tree of Peace's (Hill, 1990) stages, I chose to theme the breadth of supports within the four roots of west, east, north, and south barks, all bark was an imperative protection of the growing tree. The four themes have specific abilities in guiding and supporting an individual's life and although I categorize Supports into different themes, each is mutual and beneficial to the whole tree's development. I conceptualized the supports as follows: the West Supports were individuals; the East Supports were programs that assisted one's cognition; the South were ways of engaging one another; the North supports were related to identity. Youth and adults talked about many of the different supports.

Support #1: Participants shared there were many supports within Six

Nations. Youth and adult participants were aware of many supports offered at Six

Nation. West supports were teachers, police officers, parents, friends, high school

counselors, sports and programs. Both youth and adults spoke about a police program

where officers interacted with youth in sports and other active contexts. They discussed

how the police needed more support and personnel to outreach to the community. Adults

thought these positive interactions with police went along way and that the end of the

year trip was an incentive to have students attend school and do well. The East supports

were immersion, elementary schools, homework programs, and extracurricular activities

and South supports were counseling, homework support, and peer mentoring. The adults

talked about a number of supports, including financial supports. Adults questioned

whether using "financial incentives" were effective. Adults were concerned about

whether financial incentives were the right approach and questioned the message that

these incentives sent to youth.

Interesting, all participants except the immersion students, suggested there was a

piece missing which was the North support, which seemed to relate to identity, language

and culture. Immersion students were surrounded by culture, which made them "proud to

know who we are." Although immersion students knew the cultural teachings, there was

a concern that the elders that knew the cultural facts were not going to be around much

longer, "the young people don't know like the older ones do." They felt connected to

North supports whereas other youth did not and adults worried about how connected

youth were to their culture, traditional beliefs, and norms. Adults were concerned that

North supports were not strongly present for many youth within the community and that furthermore there other influences that threatened youths' cultural connectedness. One influence that adults were particularly concerned about was the introduction of technology and the increasing emphasis on materialism. As one adult put it, "... the technology and wanting that, not being able to have that provided for them and their self esteem is all wrapped up into that because its not who you are internally in their mind, but what you wear, what your parents drive and stuff like that."

Support #2: North Supports, Not As Evident. Students who attended immersion admitted there were certain transitioning and curriculum struggles but they were very proud to have attended immersion because "all through elementary school, they instilled in us to be proud of who you are and where you came from so you don't want to lose that." Another difference between immersion and non-immersion students was learning Six Nations culture, which students associated with history, ceremonies and language. "We would do the history of the Iroquois but we wouldn't learn the history of the rest," and "teachers would speak in the language all the time," whereas in the non-immersion school culture and spirituality was seldom discussed in the school setting. Youth participants' supports were crucial when youth branched out.

Branching Out

The seeds planted in the home, schools, and community, along with nourishing supports were imperative when branches started to emerge. The participants introduced three primary branches: feelings of ambiguity, encountering stereotypes and racism, and school experiences. As the research was focused on youth experiences the branching out

experiences tended to focus on the youth transitions into high school. Transitioning to off-reserve high school was the first time that some of the youth directly experienced mainstream thought.

Branch #1: Feelings of Ambiguity. Youth and adults spoke of the challenges in the community when you know everyone and also the benefits of being someone who is in touch with the community and cares about it, instead of an outsider. One adult recalled her feelings engaging mainstream thought, "Is it hard? Yeah it is hard because you know a lot of people, I think it would be easier if you were from somewhere else, but at the same time you don't really care as much because it is not your community." Youth talked about needing to be away sometimes to get away from "all the stuff that is going on," yet sometimes felt as if they might not be able to "make it off the reserve." One youth summed up the uncertainty some of the youth experienced, "I know at least I'll be able to survive here whereas if I'm out there all alone, I don't know."

All participants referred to branching out as a time of facing assumptions that all Natives are the same and having to know everything about being Native, "yeah and whenever I would go to school and you know they would do socials I would feel uncomfortable like cause I didn't know what that is, I was never taught that or I never grew up with that so like other kids would like say I was white." Youth also talked about how at times they were expected to speak for all Natives, as one youth put it "you are the only Native so they think you know everything." One adult shared how media impacted the feelings of ambiguity, "you never see what the good Natives did, it was always the bad things, all the fighting and that is put on the news all the time." Such media coverage not only made Six Nations members confused but attributed to stereotyping and racism.

Branch #2: Encountering Stereotypes and Racism. All youth reported
experiencing racism and stereotypes throughout their educational experiences. In their
discussions of these experiences the youth indicated that more education is needed to
address the racism. Youth indicated that mainstream communities needed to learn about
Native history, as well as every student learning about all cultures. One youth shared
thoughts about the Native Studies class, "there wasn't more factual history it was more
like a mythological history like when we do things culturally, like the reason for certain
ceremonies, more along those lines. It was never about factual," "There was a real sense
that through the teaching of history that a more realistic version of what it is to be Native
would emerge for students.", and "I think they should {teach Native history} because if
more people knew what happened, they wouldn't think that we are all just drug addicts
and they a lot like, oh that stupid land protest." The lack of Native awareness attributed
to stereotypes and racism of both Native and non-Native individuals.

The topics of racism and stereotypes were heavily discussed by all participants.
Youth and adults were mixed on their experiences of racism but most were able to talk
about the different aspects of racism. For example, they spoke about racism within the
schools, racism directed against Native people, racism directed against non-Native
people, invert racism (Natives directed at other Natives). One youth said, "It's not like
non-Natives are all bad and we're all good or anything. Like everybody has bad people,
like every race has good people." Much of the talk centered on stereotypes like "all
Natives do drugs and are on welfare" or "Natives live in trailers or teepees" that non-
Native youth held because they did not have any understanding of Native life.

Branch #3: School Experiences. Youth felt they received differential treatment within the school system, and there were some who elaborated that there is fair treatment by teachers and principals. Although youth did not come right out and say it, their experiences of exclusion within mainstream education were clear in their discussions about their school experiences. A number of times youth mentioned in high school some Native students did not stand for the national anthem. Two schools instituted a Native homeroom and one youth explained her thoughts about what would happen when the school played the national anthem and the Natives students would go to Native homeroom and say an opening prayer instead, she indicated that " a lot of people would be like well why do you get to sit out of the anthem?" Branching Out seemed to occur during adolescence for most of the participants (there were youth that had earlier exposure to mainstream nuisances because they had played sports) when they transitioned off reserve to school. Both adults and youth were concerned about youth's school experiences and how those experiences might impact their future opportunities. Adults often shared their own school experiences when expressing their concerns for the youth.

Threats

Threats were defined as experiences that impacted Six Nations identity and culture. The participants identified four threats: the decision to challenge the assumptions; special privileges; Native awareness, curriculum and identity; social storm clouds.

Threat #1: The Decision to Challenge the Assumptions. There was a common thread of discussed by both youth and adults that some Six Nations members did not leave the community often and frequently when youth tranistioned out of the community, they experienced culture shock. Since there was only an immersion high school located on reserve, most youth attended off reserve high school or remained at the immersion high school on reserve. Youth seemed motivated to attend off reserve school because there was a stereotype that Six Nations people do not leave the reserve:

> When we had the option to go to high school off reserve, six of them went to (names school) because they didn't want to go off the reserve. Well that is life you have to go off at same point. I always thought, they are afraid that they are going to forget who they are if they go off and integrate with the non-Natives. The differences from them going (names school), a lot of the students who did go there were the ones that dropped out.

One adult offered an opinion that many of the other adults shared, when indicating that Six Nation youth have an added layer of culture shock when they leave the reserve, "I think that it has a lot to do with, just that whole moving from a reserve school to high school is a really big thing. I don't think parents realize how big it is."

Youth felt that their experiences within immersion or non-immersion Six Nation schools did not prepare them for mainstream high schools. While youth clearly felt that they were unprepared in some areas, youth believed that there were always exceptions or special considerations for Native people.

Threat #2: Special Privileges. Youth and adults shared that there were assumptions that people from Six Nations were not comparable with mainstream. Participants discussed there were special considerations in place for Native students. For example, Six Nation community members were concerned with the watering down courses for Native people at the college level. One youth described how, "They were trying to change the curriculum, to gear it towards Natives and makes it easier. I don't like the whole concept of making it easier for the Natives." There were a few assumptions but curriculum was the most significant subject discussed. Participants seemed to be feel that with many assumptions and queries coming from mainstream there should be Native awareness and education provided.

Threat #3: Native Awareness, Curriculum, and Identity? The lack of awareness about Native people within current contexts was also an important topic of discussion for youth and adults. Adults tended to talk about how mainstream individuals relied on what they had been taught in school and they there was little awareness of the current complexities faced by Native people. Youth spoke about their experiences with other students. One student shared, "I liked the diversity because when I first started grade nine a lot of people were shocked that Natives are still around. I like meeting new people and if you play sports, I noticed when I started playing rugby I hung out more with the team than the Natives and they started to call me apple." Youth indicated that there was a risk when connecting with mainstream students and activities that other community members would start to think you'd become more white than Native. There were concerns about being connected as a Native person to one's culture and about having mainstream individuals have an appreciation of what that might mean.

Educating "others" and "our community" about Iroquois culture were suggested by youth. A few youth commented, "in high schools off reserve we don't even learn anything about Natives at all, we learn about how the white people did stuff about their history. One student added, "in ten and eleven we never heard anything about Natives we just heard about French and stuff like that." Two students shared their thoughts on a Native studies class, "I took a Native art class and we did some Native crafts but that's it" and "I signed up for a class that was to based on Native literature and there were a few books but that's it, there's not a whole lot." Culture and identity or as the all participants explained "there is a piece missing" and "culture is fading away." Culture was seen as important and needed immediate attention.

Youth offered recommendations to learning and bridging cultures, the youth wanted the high school to teach about "longhouse" but it that was frowned upon. Students suggested "all Natives had to learn their (western) history" and it should be reciprocal for "non-Natives in a class to be made to learn Native history." One adult suggested, "encouraging Native youth to be a part of a team" and that would help both Native and non-Native to get to one another in another context. Being taught all cultures' histories was the general consensus. At a young age, youth understood the differences occurring within on and off-reserve educational and community contexts.

Threat #4: Social Community Issues. All participants mentioned the recent emergence of smoke shops and easy money as a social issue threatening Six Nations. One youth said, smoke shops were "ugly and made the community look bad." They were aware of the connection between easy money and the tendency to measure success by the material goods (e.g. Escalade) a person had. Easy money was a short term fix and youth

participants talked about how the community isn't looking at the larger picture. For example, "Like I just think our community is always in the short term, always the quick fix. We don't ever think about the long term of what things are going to do. You know like this has probably been going on for generations, you know like and we just progressively get worse." Although there were many Threats, participants also found fulfilment at Six Nations.

Fulfilment

Fulfilment for youth dealt with identity, connectivity to the community and accomplishments. One youth spoke about the community, " I take a lot of pride for who I am as a Native and I would never shut being a Native out." Six Nations youth felt fulfilment towards community commitment was huge for students and made comments such as "I have bigger dreams than the rez" and the fact they all mentioned "I would always come back, you wouldn't forget who you were or where you're from" illustrated their fulfilment youth envisioned.

Youth also felt content if "they passed" or "finished high school." Overall, the young people saw the community as positive. One youth said, "I don't want Six Nations to fade away because we are a strong community to be proud of around here." Adults shared how regardless of the cultural differences, it is common practice to "share" or be "community minded." One parent shared a story about giving to others, "its family, its your neighbour that is included in your close circle and I've seen people will give you their last twenty dollars and go without if they know that person is going to put it to good use." Six Nations members not only share but enjoy laughter. One group mentioned "we like to joke and kid around." There was always a lighter side to discussions and most

people teased others. These areas illustrated the ways Six Nations people interact with each other that remain distinct.

Discussion

From participants' stories, continued European influences have impacted the ways and definition of what it means to be Haudenosaunee. Haudenosaunee participants (One World) suggested the influences of mainstream ways have attributed to the diluting of their cultural and impacted their community and some Six Nations individuals have paddled into mainstream thinking, (i.e., highly qualified educators, specialized men and women and numerous resources/ technology) are the solutions to the concerns impacting Six Nations. It is evident the original premise of The Kashwenta, which was a political, friendship agreement based on respecting one anothers's world has been ignored and both worlds have crossed into each others' Canoe - mixing ideologies. With the interference of residential school and provincial curriculum, Six Nations members have seen significant shifts in their cultural definitions and ramifications for Haudenosaunee culture.

The Tree of Peace stages, illustrated the complex cultural connectedness at Six Nations. There were different ideas of what it means to be culturally connected - language speakers, elders who have traditional knowledge, attended immersion school, those that participate at longhouse, individuals that reside on-reserve and those who follow Haudenosaunee principles. From the participant's voices is was clear those who participated had a cultural foundation and used the supports available. It was when community members started to branch out and went off reserve that they needed to negotiate both worlds (i.e., school preparedness, racism, and stereotypes). The Branching Out stage was influenced by a variety of Threats. The Threats challenged

Haudenosaunee philosophy and caused participants confusion and uncertainty.

Fulfilment bloomed at times once individuals overcame the Threats but Threats seemed

to loom over the balance and connectivity of Six Nations.

With the mixing and melding of Six Nations and mainstream ideologies,

Haudenosaunee cultural ambiguity is indicative of attempting to bridging two worlds.

Participants provided an extensive picture of the realities facing Six Nations youth. They

asserted Haudenosaunee culture and community were the root to success at Six Nations.

However, since the establishment of residential schools, it seemed Haudenosaunee

teachings and culture were misinterpreted or even lost. Residental schools were

detrimental to the cultural and social fabric of Haudenosaunee people. Focus groups

commonly mentioned parents' lack of culture and the disconnected diversity of Six

Nations was an impediment to progress and growth in Haudenosaunee people, at the

same time, identified culture at a high regard. Such high regard for culture, was

motivation to use traditions and values to engage youth and support their learning and

growth development. Various factors such as cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes

would lead to the wellness and growth of Six Nations. Graham H. Smith (2010), an

Indigenous professor shares how Indigenous people must bridge both worlds and

negotiate through a decolonizing lens, he writes:

> University setting is a promising practice and understanding more shifts need to
>
> occur as when you look critically at such struggle, there is an obvious
>
> contradiction of being simultaneously inside an institution that is dominated and
>
> controlled by non-Indigenous interests. That is we need to appreciate the limits
>
> and capacities of what can be achieved and indeed, what should be achieved

within an institution that we do not own or have much power in. Thus, doing a

degree in a dominantly white institution requires Indigenous scholars and faculty

to make compromises all over the place. The problem arises when Indigenous

people do not own up to this fact. Developing sovereignty and self-determination

in an institution where we do not have the power just doesn't ring true. We need

to know the terrain on which we are struggling. We need to know the limits and

capacities of what can be achieved in particular sites. I think we need to make

strategic concessions to win what we can, but the critical understanding here is

that this is only one site of struggle, we ought to be developing transformation in

many sites (p. 215).

Developing transformation in many sites does not only put the onus on school to break

down systemic barriers; Haudenosaunee people need to understand their identity, hold

true to their value system, and respect their tree developmental stages.

Battiste (2000) explains education is not only the arena in which academic and

vocational skills are developed but also the arena in which culture, mores, and social

values are transmitted to the student. To respond to the needs of Six Nation youth and

increase academic levels, numerous studies emphasize the importance of others having an

understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing (Ignas, 2004), however, Indigenous

knowledge is not found in the secondary arena. Wexler (1982) writes, the restructuring

of society takes people who are not afraid of change and Binda and Caillou (2001)

elaborate and suggested the postmodern perspective need not reflect societal goals but

could evolve around worldview and peoples' personal goals. Teachers and school boards

need to be able to understand systemic barriers within their own context and identify the effects of these barriers to the success of First Nation learners.

For teachers to learn about First Nations, knowing issues such as racism must be addressed and researchers argue that feelings of guilt and anger are important parts of anti-racist education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Battiste (2009) suggested "that without working through these feelings, racist ideas about Aboriginal people cannot be addressed. Without addressing racism, it is difficult to understand the implicit power relations that affect pedagogy and curriculum that often times dismisses or renders irrelevant Aboriginal worldviews, epistemologies, and knowledge" (p. xi) and found teachers often blame families, communities and students for low academic achievement levels. Again, the crossing of Rows has occurred and there needs to be a revitalization of paradigm.

Conclusion: Planting Future Seeds

Academic literature details historical treaties, residential schooling, and assimilative educational policies as the sources of transforming Six Nations culture and identity. Paquette and Fallon (2010) propose and support a convincing hypothesis that the choice of an educational paradigm is based upon the choice of a sociocultural paradigm; oppressive policies have been disseminated to First Nation communities and detrimentally impacted First Nation people creating cultural disconnect. Is the answer to rid oppressive and othering influenced ideologies and reconnect to Haudenosaunee culture? I suggest it is impossible to erase or ignore the negative experiences Haudenosaunee people have been through and considering the vast intermingling and influences of mainstream occurring, Haudenosaunee people need to focus on their Tree

of Peace development and believe in themselves as culturally located individuals that are
self-reliant, resilient and contributors to their learning and community. Although,
mainstream knowledge (e.g. schooling) is important, the learning must be broader,
focusing interconnectedness and respect of one self.

Haudenosaunee people need to focus and strengthen their assets of culture,
resiliency and connectedness to land. Rather than attributing blame on mainstream,
Haudenosaunee people can bring about change by adjusting their practices respective of a
cultural mindset. Six Nations elementary schools can look forward to decolonizing
curriculum inclusive of parent, family, social, political, and spiritual connectivity. Some
community agencies are moving towards a holistic approach through incorporating
Haudenosaunee philosophy and many are working towards doing more than writing
guidelines and practicing this daily. There are more seeds that need planting and
nourishment, so that fulfilment will be met.

Despite the systemic nature of the countless oppressive forces that continue to
burden many First Nations people, First Nation communities are making great strides.
There are now many Indigenous scholars, artists, activists, and leaders working to
challenge the status quo for First Nations and other Indigenous peoples and create a
world that offers meaningful opportunities. During my research, I learned a great deal
about resiliency, my community, myself, and cultural transformation. I am armed with
new broader realities and tools, tools to bridge my transforming or decolonization. It is
not by chance that schools are structured as they are—it is how mainstream culture
perpetuates itself, one that Six Nations has adapted to and needs to negotiate. I
understand having fundamental values and interconnectedness with family, schooling,
culture, land, and spirit can ground, impact, and support individuals. There are two

significant lessons I have learned through this research: first is to bridge my ways of knowing and walk hand-in-hand with others because we all have been impacted by various influences and regardless of our race, we share many parallel realities; and second to continue navigating my world while respecting mainstream world and set an example for my children, my family, and the Six Nation community. I am a content, proud First Nation woman who continues to uphold The Kashwenta ideology and strives to maintain First Nation identity and culture in a modern society.

The intent of The Kashwenta was not to create One Row; it was to respect one another's Row. The Kashwenta and the Tree of Peace, promotes Haudenosaunee distinct culture and an epistemological interconnectedness of spiritual, physical, and intellectual worlds. Newhouse and Belanger (2010) write, "Indians want a future that will take into account spirituality and traditional forms of government which will allow us to live the kind of lives we desire" (p. 15). This research is a prelude to future research examining the future of Six Nations connectedness, balance and co-existence. Haudenosaunee ancestors had a solid cultural understanding and entered into forward-thinking, relational treaties. As Barnhardt and Kawagley (2009) explain, "Our challenge now is to devise a system of education for all people that respects the epistemological and pedagogical foundations provided by Indigenous as well as Western cultural traditions" (p. 244). Sayers (1980) sums up the duality occurring in contemporary society:

Nothing comes into being except through struggle; struggle is involved in the development of all things and it is through struggle that things are negated and pass away. Conflict and contradiction are inevitable. …Struggle and the negativity involved in it, are not merely destructive, but also productive. Struggle is a good thing, not a bad thing. (p. 23).

I leave you with lingering questions. Where do we go from here? Is it possible to

reestablish the Kashwenta or have we melded ideologies so far that our community has

become complacent? Alfred (2009) suggests:

> As is becoming evident in the (supposed) decolonization processes already
>
> underway in colonial countries - which are fantasies of liberation obscuring the
>
> hard realities of persistent colonialism - structural change negotiated in a
>
> colonized cultural context will only achieve the further entrenchment of the
>
> social and political foundations of injustice, leading to the reforms that are mere
>
> modifications to the pre-existing structures of domination (p.180).

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1]The group author "Student Success Research Consortium" consists of the following individuals and organizations: Sheila Bennett; Michelle Bomberry; Terry Lynn Brant; Jeff Cooper; Pam Davis; Evelyn Martin; Sharon Martin; Deneen Montour; Steve Montour; Arlisse Skye; Sandra Styres; Leslie Thomas; Faye Williams; Dawn Zinga; Brock University; Child and Family Services, Native Services Branch; Grand Erie District School Board; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada; Oliver M. Smith School; Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Six Nations Police Services; Six Nations Social Services; Six Nations Welfare; Tecumseh Centre for Aboriginal Research and Education.

[2]The data described herein were collected as part of a scoping exercise conducted by the Student Success Research Consortium, this research should only be considered as suggestive due to the small number of participants and does not represent the voices of the entire community at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. It should not be considered reflective of the community at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory at large nor should it be considered to reflect the experiences of any larger groups.

References

Alfred, T. (2009). Wasase. Indigenous pathways of action and freedom. North York, ON: University of Toronto Free Press.

Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A. O. (2009). Indigenous knowledge systems and education. In D. L. Coulter & J. R. Wients (Eds.), *Why do we educate? Renewing the conversation* (Vol. 1, pp. 223-241). Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell. doi:10.1002/9781444307214

Battiste, M. (1998). Enabling the autumn seed: Toward a decolonized approach toward Aboriginal knowledge, language and education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *22*(1), 16-27.

Battiste, M. (2000). *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Battiste, M., & Barman, J. (1995). *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Bazylak, D. (2002). Journeys to success: Perceptions of five female Aboriginal high school graduates. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, *26*(2), 134-151.

Binda, P., & Caillou, S. (2001). *Aboriginal education in Canada—A study in decolonization*. Mississauga, ON: Canadian Educators Press.

Brayboy, B., & Maughan, E. (2009). Indigenous knowledge and the story of the bean. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*(1), 1-17.

Brigham, S. M., & Gouthro, P. (2006). Cross-cultural teaching and research in adult education. In T. Fenwick, T. Nesbit, & B. Spencer (Eds.), *Contexts of adult education Canadian perspectives*, (pp. 81-90). Toronto, ON: Thompson

Educational.

Cadwallader, T. (2004). Hwunitum and Hwulmulw or my experiences in an

organizational change project. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 28(1/2),

92-101.

Grand Erie District School Board. (2008/2009). *Report of the Grand Erie District School

Board to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Six Nations of the Grand

River*. Brantford, ON: D. Montour.

Haig-Brown, C. (1995). Taking control: Contradiction and First Nations adult education.

In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle

unfolds* (pp. 262-287). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Hill, Richard. "Oral Memory of the Haudenosauee: Views of the Two Row Wampum.

Northeast   Indian Quarterly, *Spring 2000*, 21-30.

Hodson, J. (2007). *Learning and healing: A decolonizing research methodology*. Paper

presented at the AERA Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific SIG, Chicago, IL.

Jake Thomas Learning Centre. (2004). *The two row wampum treaty belt*. Retrieved from

http://www.tuscaroras.com/jtlc/Wampum/The_Two_Row_Wampum.html

Mc Gregor, L. (2000). Cultural Teachings. Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship

Centres. Ontario: Toronto.

Muller, Kathryn, V. (2007). The Two "Mystery Belts of Grand River. *American Indian

Quarterly, 31(1),* 129-164.

Newhouse, D., & Belanger, Y. (2010). Beyond the Indian problem: Aboriginal peoples

and the transformation of Canada. In J. C. Courtney & D. C. Smith (Eds.), *The

Oxford handbook of Canadian politics* (pp. 339-360). New York, NY: Oxford

University Press.

North American Indian Travelling College. (1984). *Traditional teachings*. Cornwall

Island, ON: Author.

Paquette, J., & Fallon, G. (2010). *First Nations education policy in Canada: Progress or*

gridlock? Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Riley, D. (1984). What Canada's Indians want and the difficulties getting it. In L. Little

Bear, M. Boldt, & J. A. Long (Eds.), *Pathways to self-determination: Canadian*

Indians and the Canadian state (pp. 159-160). Toronto, ON: University of

Toronto Press: 159-160.

Sayers, S. (1980). On the Marxist dialectic. In R. Norman & S. Sayers (Eds.), *Hegel,*

Marx and the Dialectic: A Debate (pp. 1-24). Sussex, England: Harvester Press.

Smith, G. H. (2010). Protecting and respecting indigenous knowledge. In M. Battiste

(Ed.), *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 209-224). Vancouver, BC:

UBC Press.

Styres, S., Zinga, D., Bennett, S., & Bomberry, M. (2010). Walking in Two Worlds:

Engaging the Space Between Indigenous Community and Academia. *Canadian*

Journal of Education, 33(3), 617-648.

Swisher, K. G., & Tippeconnic, K. W. (1999). *Next steps: Research and practice to*

advance Indian education. Charleston, WV: Eric Clearinghouse on Rural.

Tuhiwai -Smith (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies—Research and Indigenous Peoples.*

London, England: Zed Books.

Weaver, H. (2009). The colonial context of violence. Reflection on violence in the lives

of Native American women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *24*(9), 1552-1563.

Zinga, D., Styres, S., Bennett, S., & Bomberry, M. (2009). Student Success Research

Consortium: Two Worlds Community-First Research. *Canadian Journal of*

Native Education, *32 (1)*, 19-37.

Zinga, D., Bomberry, M., Bennett, S. & The Student Success Research Consortium.

(2010). *Final Report – Student Success: A Community Initiative to Support the*

Success of Aboriginal Students In Education. Six Nations of the Grand River

Archive.