

Connections, Challenges, and Clayoquot Sound Community-Based Research in an Indigenous Context

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Hishuk ish ts'awalk: An Uncomfortable Introduction

We arrive at the dock of the remote island community of Ahousaht, greeted by half-sunken boats, pre-fab houses, and the silence of mourning that hangs around the reserve. An Elder had died the day before, say our professors, we might not stay. But the coordinator of the youth center that we are to visit insists that we can come as planned. I am one of sixteen Environmental Studies students from the University of Victoria who had come to Clayoquot Sound to learn about "community-based research." As part of our studies we visited the reserve of the Ahousaht Nation, one of the five First Nations that make up the Central Region Nuu-chah-nulth peoples of Western Vancouver Island.

At the reserve we meet with some of the youth from the center, and hear about the inspiring and difficult work they are doing. I chat with some girls at the bar where they sell pop and chips. They tell me their till has been stolen three times in the past two months. Several small boys are too focused on video games to hear my tentative remarks.

Outside we pick up litter along the beach, to make at least a symbolic stab at the community's garbage problem – a problem that inhibits their attempts at joining the tourism economy and perhaps points to a deeper loss of pride in, or care for, the community. Perhaps. Who am I to judge?

We are set to work on a number of tasks that had been languishing in the backyard of the youth center. Throughout the afternoon we attract a small crowd of curious children and adults, wondering what we're doing there and why? Good question. The best answer I can come up with is, "trying to lend a hand?" Or, more precisely, trying to understand. Getting a taste of rez life as if it's a new ice cream flavour, or a new pair of jeans – just trying them on for size.

But Ahousaht doesn't fit, nor does anyone pretend it does. Our white skins, our university education, and our copious amounts of expensive gear, born before us by an obliging hired pick-up truck, mark us like an invasive species. We weren't born there, we don't live there, and we don't understand. Thousands of years of culture and hundreds of years of colonization underline my instinctive reaction: I don't belong here. I feel uncomfortable and out of place, not knowing what to do. I feel pain and pity at the torn clothing and stories of addiction, theft, and death. I feel shame and guilt at being born of British ancestors on stolen land. And I feel the desire to do something about it.

What that something is exactly, I have no idea. As a member of the dominant North American culture of European descent, any work with and in First Nations communities is riddled with social, cultural, economic, and educational differences. How can I help undo the effects of colonialism that I see this

community fighting, without reproducing those differences? I don't want to be the savior or the expert, but I do want to use my privilege in any way I can to address the problems facing First Nations communities today.

Everywhere we went in Clayoquot Sound we were reminded of the Nuu-chah-nulth phrase, hishuk ish ts'awalk – everything is one, everything is connected. I returned home filled with the question, if everything is connected, where do I fit in?

Connections: Community-Based Research in an Indigenous Context

In this paper I will examine the challenges facing non-indigenous university researchers working in First Nations communities, and some of the protocols and ethics standards being developed to overcome these challenges. I will focus specifically on community-based research (CBR), an evolving approach to research in and about communities.¹ CBR encompasses a broad range of methodologies, ranging from purely archival research to active participation and involvement with a community. While all forms of research are valuable in the appropriate context, I believe that research in indigenous communities must focus on the participatory and democratic end of the CBR spectrum. Community-based research has the potential to help researchers and indigenous communities overcome the damaging legacies of colonialism and move towards a process of mutually respectful and enriching collaboration.

First, I will discuss the challenges of conducting CBR in indigenous communities, and the reasons behind these challenges. Secondly, I will examine the potential benefits of outsiders conducting CBR in indigenous communities. Thirdly, I have synthesized some of the guidelines and ideals currently presented by protocols and ethics standards in an attempt to envision how CBR could best be conducted in these communities. Finally, I will examine the realities of community-based research in an indigenous context by drawing on two recent examples of research projects involving the Nuu-chah-nulth language revitalization in Clayoquot Sound.

Challenges: Navigating Colonial History

There are many reasons why I felt uncomfortable on the reserve in Ahousaht. These are the same reasons that non-indigenous researchers must closely examine their motivations and methodologies before approaching an indigenous community. Researchers working in these communities may have to contend with the deep mistrust of many indigenous peoples resulting from past and present colonial associations with research.

Historically, research was a key part of the colonial process that transformed indigenous peoples from independent communities into objects to be examined, written about, and judged. As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith observed, “[t]here is a direct relationship between the expansion of knowledge, the expansion of trade and the expansion of empire” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 88).

The intellectual and psychological conquest of colonized peoples is just as powerful as physical control and with much longer-lasting effects. By studying, naming, and classifying indigenous peoples, researchers reduced them to objects, lists of data, and cultural curiosities. This was

¹ Throughout this paper I will often use the word “community.” I prefer not to strictly define this term, but to let its vagueness encompass the wide diversity that is present in real communities. Communities can be groups of people thrown together by geographically defined borders, common interests, or circumstance. When I refer to “indigenous communities” I am referring both to geographically defined communities like the Ahousaht reserve, and geographically dispersed communities such as the Ahousaht Nation as a whole.

combined with the systematic destruction of indigenous cultures through the banning of language and cultural practices, the removal of children from parents and their enrollment and abuse in residential schools, and the appropriation of land and resources. Researchers were complicit in this process, and examples of exploitative research of indigenous peoples still occur today. Consequently, for indigenous communities, research is not, and never has been, a neutral academic endeavour. As Smith observes:

Research in itself is a powerful intervention...which has traditionally benefited the researcher, and the knowledge base of the dominant group in society. When undertaking research, either across cultures or within a minority culture, *it is critical that researchers recognize the power dynamic which is embedded in the relationship with their subjects*. Researchers ... have the power to distort, to make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgments, and often downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or to perpetuate ignorance (Smith 1999: 176, italics mine).

Consequently, the widespread mistrust of research is unsurprising, and poses a serious challenge to non-indigenous researchers today. It is this awareness of the power of research that is prompting many indigenous groups to establish protocols and ethics committees to control research done in their communities. Both the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council and the UVic Indigenous Governance Program (IGOV) begin their *Protocols and Principles for Research* documents with an acknowledgement of the power of researchers:

1.1 Researchers are knowledge brokers, people who have the power to construct legitimating arguments for or against ideas, theories or practices. They are collectors of information and producers of meaning, which can be used for, or against Indigenous interests (UVic IGOV 2003: 2; Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council Research Ethics Committee 2004: n.p).

It is this power to create or discredit meaning that makes research in indigenous communities such a delicate and contentious pursuit. Research is further complicated by the cultural, social, and economic differences that mark relationships between non-indigenous, university-educated researchers, and indigenous communities still struggling with the effects of colonialism. In order to go beyond these challenges, researchers must conduct their projects with sensitivity, honesty, and a genuine desire to benefit the community in ways that are defined by the community.

Motivations: Where Do I Fit In?

In light of the challenges and issues surrounding non-indigenous researchers working in indigenous communities, the question that all researchers must ask themselves is, "Why am I here?" What motivates me to place my body, my mind, and my career in the midst of hundreds of years of colonial injustices and current inequality? Why do I willingly face the discomfort and distrust of working in this community?

Researchers must then honestly examine their responses to these questions: Am I motivated by guilt over my ancestors' part in colonization? Or over my present enjoyment of the spoils of colonization (land, natural resources, wealth, privilege)? Do I feel an altruistic desire to help fellow humans in need? Am I trying to undo, or at least mitigate, the wrongs of the past and injustices of the present? Is this research project simply a good career move? Or am I just really interested in the topic?

Most community-based research projects are motivated by a diversity of interests, emotions, and desires that extend far beyond the few I have listed. It is essential that researchers examine their motivations, so that they can be conscious of any preconceptions, emotions or hopes they might have for their research experience and outcomes. This process of honest self-examination and questioning is particularly vital in work with indigenous communities because of the challenges already examined. Researchers have the power to create and define meaning. Thus we must be aware of the danger of reproducing colonial power structures and work towards creating new kinds of relationships with indigenous communities.

To this end, researchers must ask themselves other questions: “What can I offer to this community?” What do I have that they need? What justifies my presence in their community? Why involve outside researchers at all?

This is a question that I have struggled with, and I have found my own personal answer for the present. Outside research is not always an appropriate way to meet the needs of a community, and this must be decided on a case by case basis by those who would be affected by the research. However, I believe that non-indigenous, outside university researchers do have much to offer to indigenous communities.

Firstly, researchers have knowledge and expertise that a community may find useful for such things as environmental impact assessments, archaeological excavations, or technical support. This kind of research produces different results from conventional methods, and can help communities operate within the broader governmental, legal, and scientific structures that affect their lives. Outside researchers lend their credentials and authority as “experts,” trained in the specific kinds of knowledge that are respected by policy makers, judges, universities, and the broader society. The researcher can act as mediator between the community and the university or other institutions, and between indigenous and non-indigenous community members. Also, partnerships between scientific or other outside knowledge and indigenous knowledge often produce significant mutual benefits for both parties.

Secondly, researchers can use their academic credentials and knowledge of the established institutional and political system to help communities secure funding and institutional support for research projects. This should not be underestimated, since, except for those rare occasions where the community or an individual is able to fund the project, funding essentially decides what is researched and what is not. There is still much work to be done on this subject, as the academic funding system in Canada and around the world is largely not designed to support cooperative projects between researchers and communities. I will examine this issue in further detail later in this paper.

Thirdly, researchers can devote the time and energy to a project the community might want to see happen, but for which it has been unable to provide the human resources. This lack of time and energy is particularly acute in marginalized communities where people are already stretching to make ends meet. In situations such these, researchers must be careful not to overtax their partners with the demands of the project.

Finally, researchers have access to resources that are not readily available within the community, such as university libraries and search engines, academic journals, and archives. Thus non-indigenous university researchers can provide these and other benefits to indigenous communities. However, they must be constantly aware of the challenges surrounding their research and their presence in those communities. In recent years there has been an increasing recognition of these challenges and a movement within indigenous and academic communities

alike to create protocols and ethical standards to guide future research. These standards will help guide researchers from the first question of “Why am I here?” to the second vital question: “How should I be here?” How should non-indigenous researchers conduct themselves and their research in indigenous communities?

Guidelines: Ideals and Ideas for Research

I have attempted to answer the question of “How should I be here?” by analyzing and synthesizing various protocols, articles, and ethical guidelines. I draw from protocols by indigenous authors, such as the *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in an Indigenous Context*, the guidelines for the University of Victoria’s Indigenous Governance program (IGOV) and the Faculty of Human and Social Development, and the *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in a Nuu-chah-nulth Context*, produced by the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council Research Ethics Committee. I have also drawn from indigenous authors from around the world, most notably Linda Tuhiwai Smith of the Maori in New Zealand. In addition, I have included principles from non-indigenous researchers trying to develop respectful approaches to research, such as participatory, community-based, and anti-oppressive research.

From these texts, I have highlighted six recurring values that could guide community-based researchers towards appropriate, respectful, and productive relationships with indigenous peoples. I believe that researchers should strive to uphold these values throughout the research process as well as in the outcome. It is also essential to realize that community-based research is never neutral, but embedded in politics and power relations.

I am not an indigenous person, nor can I presume to speak for indigenous communities. The following principles are the result of my struggle to understand how I, as a privileged university student, could begin to engage with indigenous communities in the most respectful and conscious way possible. These principles represent ideals to aspire to in community-based research, but these ideals are rarely achieved. Researchers must strive for balance among diverse community interests and opinions, funding and institutional restrictions, deadlines, and infinite other factors that pull and push them away from their best intentions. It must also be noted that not all six principles are appropriate in all contexts. Nevertheless, I believe these ideals are worth thinking about and striving for in any research that involves indigenous communities.

1. Partnership and Participation

After centuries of being treated like objects, indigenous peoples are adamant that any research that affects their communities must include them as equal partners and informed, empowered participants. Central to this is the idea of informed consent, in which those involved in research are fully aware of the parameters, implications, and future uses of the information they provide. The UVic Indigenous Governance Program (IGOV) *Protocols and Principles for Research* states:

Indigenous people have a right to participate in and enjoy the benefits that might result from research, and Indigenous involvement in this research...Research should empower the community involved and excluding Indigenous people from the research project might simply serve to marginalize them further (UVic IGOV 2003: 4).

The Nuu-chah-nulth *Protocols and Principles* places a similar emphasis on partnership and participation not just in research that directly involves Nuu-chah-nulth people, but also in projects in which Nuu-chah-nulth-aht “have a major interest in the outcome of a research project” (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council Research Ethics Committee 2004: n.p). This extends the reach of these protocols and principles to include research based on historical documents,

census data, and any previous research projects. It could also potentially affect research done in other indigenous communities that might affect the Nuu-chah-nulth.

2. Empowerment

Closely connected with participation and partnership is empowerment, and the idea that research must benefit the community. Empowerment might come through the content of the research, which might underline the integrity or validity of indigenous knowledge or practice. Empowerment might also come through community education and training that would enable indigenous people to conduct their own research. Indigenous peoples are also empowered when they see that outside researchers do not have all the answers, and that their knowledge and expertise is vitally important.

Research can support empowerment, but ultimately the community must empower itself. Many indigenous groups are doing this by writing their own protocols and establishing ethics committees to take control over research done in their communities and on their people. By controlling this research and learning how to perform research themselves, indigenous peoples are reclaiming the production of knowledge and the definition of meaning. They are moving from historically subjugated objects to capable, empowered subjects in control of their own lives and communities.

3. Control Over the Results

What happens after the research project is over is just as important as how it is conducted, and many indigenous communities are now demanding at least partial control over the results of research projects. This includes the protection of sensitive information and the assurance that due credit is given to indigenous participants in the research. Many indigenous communities have felt betrayed by the uses and conclusions of past research projects, which could be seen as disrespectful or misrepresenting the community.

Equally important is how the research is presented and disseminated. Research can become empowering when the results are available and comprehensible to everyone involved. To accomplish this, the researcher must reach beyond the jargon of his or her discipline and the well-respected academic journals. The research findings must be disseminated in a variety of ways, including public presentations, feedback sessions, newsletters, local newspapers, and so on. Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith emphasizes the importance of sharing research findings with the community in which it was conducted:

Sharing is a responsibility of research. The technical term for this is the dissemination of results, usually very boring to non-researchers, very technical and very cold. For indigenous researchers sharing is about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 161).

One of the major causes of mistrust of research in indigenous communities comes from past experiences where the results of research were taken out of their control and presented in ways that were not relevant to their lives. Community-based researchers can help overcome this mistrust by working with indigenous communities to ensure that the research is relevant and beneficial to the communities, and that indigenous communities will have ultimate control over their knowledge, culture, and environment.

4. Respect Indigenous Worldviews and Protocols

The respect of indigenous worldviews and protocols, both written and unwritten, is central to a respectful partnership between indigenous communities and non-indigenous researchers. As previously mentioned, many indigenous communities are developing their own protocols, such

as the *Protocols and Principles for Conducting Research in a Nuu-chah-nulth Context*. Different communities have different, complex protocols, and researchers will undoubtedly make mistakes. However, if the researcher follows whatever written protocols there may be and takes responsibility for consulting community members about appropriate conduct, it will build a strong base for a mutually respectful relationship.

The researcher must also be willing to learn about the perspectives and worldviews of the community, and attempt to understand and respect them. This is true of any community-based research, but it is of particular importance in indigenous communities because of some fundamentally different values and worldviews. Like any inter-cultural experience, it is important to listen to the perspective of “the other” and to respect them on their own terms.

The IGOV Protocols suggest, “Indigenous values must be acknowledged by incorporation within the research design and methodology of a project...when and where appropriate” (UVic IGOV 2003: 6). For example, in the Nuu-chah-nulth culture, *hishuk ish ts’awalk*, or “everything is one” is a central belief. If this value is to be taken seriously in a research design, it could shift the scientific approach of isolating variables to collect data towards a more integrated approach that attempts to take into account the interconnectedness of all living things. This could fundamentally change the research methodology and results in interesting and productive ways.

5. Social Justice

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith observed, “...research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 5). With this recognition comes responsibility; the responsibility to examine the power structures in which one’s research is embedded, and to choose not to support those structures that negatively affect the community the research is about. It is the responsibility to fight for social justice and to address the historic and present injustices affecting indigenous communities.

Social justice is not something that will be often found in institutional ethics standards, nor is it appropriate in every research project. However, it does thread throughout articles on community-based, anti-oppressive, participatory, and indigenous research. In “Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Researcher,” Leslie Brown and Karen Potts articulate three tenets of anti-oppressive research:

- Anti-oppressive research is social justice and resistance in process and outcome
- Anti-oppressive research recognizes all knowledge as being socially constructed and political
- The anti-oppressive research process is all about power and relationships (Brown and Potts 2005)

These tenets are equally applicable to community-based research in an indigenous context, particularly the dedication to “social justice and resistance in process and outcome.” These tenets are not easily attained by any stretch of the imagination. However, research that is not placed in a broader social, political, economic, and institutional context, risks irrelevance. Community-based research should address issues of importance to the community, and it cannot fully achieve this goal if it ignores the structures in which the community operates.

Brown and Potts also underline that “[a]s anti-oppressive researchers we recognize that usually the first target of change is ourselves” (Brown and Potts 2005). Here again researchers must closely examine their answers to the question, “Why am I here?” And ask, are my motivations strong enough to sustain the fight for social justice?

6. Self-Determination

Finally, and intricately connected with social justice, is the fight for political, economic, and psychological self-determination. If researchers are to gain the trust of indigenous communities, they must support their right to determine their own needs and values, and to control the production of knowledge about their community. In her article, "Ethics of Aboriginal Research," Marlene Brant Castellano states:

Fundamental to the exercise of self-determination is the right of peoples to construct knowledge in accordance with self-determined definitions of what is real and what is valuable. Just as colonial policies have denied Aboriginal Peoples access to their traditional lands, so also colonial definitions of truth and value have denied Aboriginal Peoples the tools to assert and implement their knowledge. (Brant Castellano 2004: 102).

If research is conducted carefully and respectfully, community-based researchers can break the control of colonial power structures by helping create the space for indigenous communities to "assert and implement their knowledge." Linda Tuhiwai Smith also calls for self-determination in research agendas:

Self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural, and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the processes of transformation, of decolonization, of healing, and of mobilization as peoples. (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999: 116)

Research in this context goes far beyond an academic exercise, to become something that can work for social justice and cultural revitalization. As an Elder quoted by Brant Castellano suggested, "If we have been researched to death, maybe it's time we started researching ourselves back to life" (Brant Castellano 2004: 98).

From Ideals to Reality: Community-Based Research in Clayoquot Sound

I have presented the above principles as ideals to be aspired to in community-based research in an indigenous context. However, there are many ways to interpret and enact these principles, and not all of them are appropriate for all research projects. Contemporary society owes much of our knowledge and inventions to research that upheld none of these principles, and this debt must be acknowledged.

Moreover, the everyday realities of research often interfere with the attainment of these ideals. The institutional and financial structures that regulate research (such as universities and funding bodies) are not specifically designed to support collaborative community-based research.² Academics do not receive grants and degrees for building lasting relationships with community members. On the contrary, they receive support for research that can be done within a specific time frame with tangible results that can be documented and proven by conventional research methods and widely published in academic forums.

²According to President Marc Renaud, approximately 8% of budget of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council supports community-based research as broadly defined (Renaud 2005).

The reality of community-based research is that it does not fit easily into the institutional box labeled “research.” It is slow, unpredictable, and often intangible. The success of a CBR project can be measured in terms of relationships, longevity, and understanding. In indigenous communities, I would argue that a successful CBR project supports the community’s right and ability to determine their own present and future.

Despite institutional disincentives, collaborative CBR is becoming more common and accepted in academic circles. The protocols, philosophies, and methodologies examined in the previous section indicate a fundamental shift in the way research is done today, particularly in indigenous communities. Research is moving away from projects done in isolation from the community, towards more integrated approaches that respect indigenous worldviews and work cooperatively with the community.

I will now return to Clayoquot Sound to see how my ideas and ideals play out in a real community, with all its diversity of cultures, opinions, hopes, and personalities. I will examine how different researchers are dealing with the challenges and possibilities of CBR by drawing on two examples of projects working towards the revitalization of the Nuu-chah-nulth language.

Contested Definitions

In 2005, Canadian-born and England-based professor John Stonham released *A Concise Dictionary of the Nuu-chah-nulth Language of Vancouver Island*. It was the result of 20 years of work learning and compiling words from the various dialects within the Nuu-chah-nulth language. Stonham based his research primarily on the writings of Edward Sapir, a linguist and anthropologist who recorded indigenous languages in North America between 1910 and 1924 (Herbert 2005: n.p.). The creation of the dictionary was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of England, which awarded the project a grant of \$710,487 CDN (Wiwchar 2005: 1).

The resulting dictionary may be what one New Zealand newspaper called “salvation” for the Nuu-chah-nulth language, of which only about 300 speakers remain (Herbert 2005: n.p.). The dictionary has been hailed worldwide as a significant step in the fight to save many dying and endangered languages. Stonham’s ultimate goal is to “provide a complete collection of texts, which cover the gamut of Nuuchahnulth culture and history, a description of the phonetics and phonology, and a grammar and dictionary of the Nuuchahnulth language” (ELLL 2005: n.p.).

The principle website for the project, “Corpus of Nuuchahnulth Language,” outlines the research imperative and objectives of Stonham’s work:

This research will be of significance not only to theoretical linguists interested in the properties of a little known language and their theoretical consequences for our understanding of human cognition, but also to cultural anthropologists, specialists in Native American studies, linguistic typologists and fieldworkers, and furthermore to the general public. (<http://www.magma.ca/~stonham/nuuchahnulth/overview.html>).

In stark contrast to these positive media reports, however, the dictionary has been less warmly received in Nuu-chah-nulth communities. Ha-Shilth-Sa, the Nuu-chah-nulth newspaper, published an article criticizing the dictionary for its lack of consultation with the community, its high cost of \$177.50, and for several incorrect entries.

Larry Baird, chairperson of the Nuu-chah-nulth Research Ethics Committee, said in the article that the project should have gone through the Committee’s review process, which would have

“insisted that copies be made available to Nuu-chah-nulth Nations and schools.” Ha-Shilth-Sa also quoted Baird as saying, “This is ridiculous. Here’s another academic who has made his money and career on the backs of Nuu-chah-nulth, and gives nothing back in return” (Wiwchar 2005: 1).

Henry Kammler, a German anthropologist and member of The Working Group on the Nuuchahnulth Language, expressed similar concerns about Stonham’s dictionary. Kammler has been working with Nuu-chah-nulth communities on language revitalization since 1996, and questions Stonham’s almost exclusively archival approach. Ha-Shilth-Sa quoted him as writing, “There is no doubt that Stonham’s work is an important contribution to NCN [Nuu-chah-nulth] linguistics but it raises the question: where are the priorities — archival materials or living speakers?” (Wiwchar 2005: 3). Kammler also notes “the problem goes much beyond Stonham’s project.” He proposes that the funding policies in Europe must also be questioned for their lack of support of community-based research projects such as his own work with the Nuu-chah-nulth:

...exposing yourself to a community slows the research process down (written pages don’t talk back to you, people do) but the funding agencies want to see quick results. They still seem to believe that you can’t do sound scholarly work on language while also looking at the people behind the language (Wiwchar 2005: 3).

Stonham has responded to this criticism in a letter that was posted on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s website. He begins this letter by reaffirming his dedication to the language revitalization process, saying:

I was quite sad to hear about the distress that the publication of my dictionary may have caused members of the Nuuchahnulth community, when my intention was to help raise the profile of what I have always considered an important language and culture and to provide those individuals who are working tirelessly on trying to preserve the language with a source of information [archival texts] that would otherwise have remained relatively inaccessible (<http://www.cbc.ca/ontheisland/letters.html> 2005).

Stonham points to the preface of the dictionary, in which he acknowledges that it may contain flaws. He also notes that he did provide Nuu-chah-nulth Elder Katherine Robinson with a copy of the draft dictionary a year before publication, and that he “...would greatly appreciate any observations/corrections from users of the dictionary and will make every effort to incorporate all suggestions into a revised edition of this dictionary in the future” (<http://www.cbc.ca/ontheisland/letters.html> 2005).

Stonham also points out that he has no control over the cost of the dictionary, nor does he receive any royalties from its sale. The high cost of the book is unfortunate, but not unusual for a limited print-run published by a small academic press. He suggests that the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council seek funds from the government to buy the dictionary, and indicates his willingness to work with the community on the future creation of educational materials. Stonham concludes his letter by saying:

Truth be told, had I chosen the path that most academics in my field take, writing research papers on theoretical issues in obscure journals, I believe I'd have progressed in my career more rapidly, but

I've never felt bad about my choice to take a different path and devote what time I could to a cause I believed in, at least until now. (<http://www.cbc.ca/ontheisland/letters.html> 2005).

The story of *A Concise Dictionary of the Nuuchahnulth Language of Vancouver Island* presents a fascinating opportunity to delve into the rights and responsibilities of researchers in indigenous contexts. The dictionary raises many questions that I will leave up to the reader to answer.

Firstly, in light of the emphasis placed on informed consent in the protocols and ethics standards, what are the implications of using information that was collected before formal consent was a common practice? Who has control over this information? Once it was published, does it become public domain without any restrictions? Is it ethical to use this information without the consent of the descendants of the research subjects? Can there or should there be a process of retroactive consent? And what are the ethical implications of this for the many academic works that have already drawn on information that was gathered without formal consent?

Secondly, what are the implications of creating a dictionary of a language that consists of many different dialects? The *Concise Dictionary* is based on the work of Edward Sapir, the majority of which is focused on the Tsishath variety of Nuuchahnulth spoken in Port Alberni, with some documentation of the Hupachasath, Ucluelet, and Huiath varieties as well. Stonham also incorporated other material from Kyuquot and Ahousaht, among others (Stonham, email communication June 10, 2005). But even with the best of intentions and the most thorough archival research, he still exercises the controversial power of the researcher to choose and define meaning. Whose language will be preserved and taught while others are lost? And what are the implications of this decision being in the hands of a non-indigenous researcher without the input of the Nuuchahnulth peoples?

The creation of the *Concise Dictionary* accessed and organized a wealth of archival knowledge that could provide tremendous support to the Nuuchahnulth language revitalization process. However, the dictionary was compiled without the input of living Nuuchahnulth speakers, in a computer database by a non-indigenous researcher in England, based on information gathered by a European linguist during the early colonial period of 1910-1924. Was this approach appropriate given Stonham's goals, location, time frame, and funding source? Does this approach reinforce the colonial power dynamics of the non-indigenous researcher reserving the right to study and define indigenous objects? How might the project have been different?

Bringing Back the Language

One possible answer to the latter question can be found amidst the numerous efforts by Nuuchahnulth communities to keep their language alive, most notably the work of the Central Region Language Group, also known as "Bringing Back the Language" or *Hu?aciiyu'w'ap Ciqy'ak*.³

The Ciqy'ak Group is a non-profit society working to preserve the Nuuchahnulth dialects within the Central Region of the Nuuchahnulth territory. There are 14 Nuuchahnulth nations, five of which are included in the Central Region: Hesquiaht, Ahousaht, Toquaht, Tla-o-qui-aht, and Uclulelet. The society was founded in 2002 as the culmination of a partnership between the

³ Nuuchahnulth fonts have been approximated as closely as possible.

University of Victoria (UVic) and the Central Region Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (NTC), facilitated by the Clayoquot Alliance for Research, Education, and Training (CLARET).

CLARET is a partnership of the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust (CBT) and UVic, with funding from the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) Project, an initiative of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). CLARET was designed to facilitate research, education, and training between the university and the diverse communities of Clayoquot Sound.

Initially, CLARET had approached Nuu-chah-nulth representatives with the idea of Elder-youth camps to facilitate inter-generational transfer of traditional knowledge. Although the Nuu-chah-nulth were open to outside assistance, they identified language revitalization as a more pressing concern for the community. CLARET accepted an alternative project proposed by the Nuu-chah-nulth and hired consultant Natasha Thorpe and UVic graduate student Towagh Behr to work on developing educational materials for language learning.

The Language Group was established in May 2002 with representatives from all five Central Region nations. They received an official Nuu-chah-nulth name, *Hu?aciiyu^wap Ciqy`ak* and were registered as a non-profit society by November of 2002. During the first seven months the Ciqy`ak Group produced an interactive CD-ROM with definitions of, and cultural information about, various significant plants and animals in the Clayoquot Sound region, with audio recordings of Nuu-chah-nulth Elders pronouncing the words. The Group also hosted a conference on language revitalization, with local representatives and members of other First Nations working on similar projects (Behr 2002: 4).

The project successfully combined traditional knowledge and language with the technical expertise provided by Towagh Behr. The project was directed by the Nuu-chah-nulth participants, who also received training in PC digital audio editing, interviewing, transcribing, and grant writing. Thus community control was maintained, while a non-indigenous researcher helped build the capacity needed for the Ciqy`ak Group to complete future projects with minimal outside assistance (Behr 2002: 7).

However, the Language Project was not free of the challenges and realities previously discussed. The outside researchers were greeted with suspicion by many community members, particularly because of concerns surrounding the control of traditional knowledge. The process of building mutual confidence and trust between universities and indigenous communities is never a fast or an easy one.

In his report on the project, Behr noted the significant challenges of “maintaining open channels of communication with all five First Nations and ensuring that they continue to be represented in the decision making process” (Behr 2002: 6). Ultimately, Elders from the Toquaht and Uclulet Nations were much more involved than the other three nations.

This connects to the problem of differing dialects already mentioned in the discussion of the *Concise Dictionary*. When creating an educational resource for all the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations, it is extremely difficult to create definitive material that takes into account the linguistic varieties of all five nations in the Central Region. The Ciqy`ak Group dealt with this difficulty by including both Central Region and Barkley Sound dialects, and sent the CD-ROM to all five nations for review before it was released. Nevertheless, coming to agreement on the spelling and even the exact meaning of words continues to be a challenge.

The project also encountered conflicts between the university researchers' obligations to their academic program and funding sources, and the priorities and needs of the involved community members. In particular, Behr notes that the importance and large size of Nuu-chah-nulth families meant that family emergencies often took precedence over work on the project. While these interruptions could be frustrating, Behr underlines the lessons that can be learned from this experience:

Missed deadlines and cancelled meetings are but minor annoyances in the grander scheme of things and it is only through patience, understanding, and perseverance that we can establish good relationship in spite of intercultural barriers. The practical expression of patience and perseverance is often that work plans must remain flexible and extensions on completion dates will often be required. (Behr 2002: 6)

Finally, Behr mentions the challenge of sustaining the continuity of funding and personnel in the future. Funding cycles are generally four to twelve months, and require much time and effort to report to funding organizations and apply for new grants. This puts pressure on the Society's projects and members that can be difficult to support.

Despite these continuing challenges, I believe that *Hu?aciiyu^wap Ciqy'ak* is an example of the positive changes that can result from partnerships between communities and academic institutions. Through CLARET, UVic was responsive and responsible to the wishes of the Nuu-chah-nulth communities. Researchers remained flexible, and contributed their technical, financial, and personal resources to help address an issue that the community identified as important. By working together in an equal and mutually respectful manner, the researchers and the community members were able to create a resource and an organization that can be sustained long after the university is gone.

These two examples present opposite ends of the wide spectrum of community-based research, from research done on a community through academic texts, to research that is initiated and directed by community members. Both contribute resources to the effort to revitalize the Nuu-chah-nulth language; however, I would argue that the Ciqy'ak Group was more effective in achieving this goal because it involved language revitalization in the process as well as the outcome of the project. The activities of the group not only produced a CD-ROM for use in schools and at home, but they raised awareness within Nuu-chah-nulth communities of the importance of their language, and empowered community members to take control of the revitalization process. The university provided the funds and technical expertise to help community members achieve their own goals and define their own reality.

Hishuk ish ts'awalk: A New Beginning

Back on the shores of the Ahousaht reserve, I play stealing sticks with the children, running along the beach, laughing and falling. For this last precious half hour, the economic, social, and cultural differences that separate me from my teammates disappear in a burst of energy and a cloud of sand. In the smiles we exchange lie the seeds of relationships that could go beyond these differences.

I know there will always be a level of discomfort for me as a non-indigenous outsider, and building trust and respect is hard and time-consuming. If I want to undertake community-based research in Ahousaht there is much I have to learn, and much I have to unlearn.

I must first understand why I feel uncomfortable and why everyone in the community might not be eager to have me working on their reserve. I must also ask myself, "Why am I here?" and examine the results with painful honesty. The process of decolonization must begin with me.

Then I will ask myself, "What can I contribute to this community?" I will assess what skills I have, and try to match them with a need expressed by the community so my research will be relevant and helpful to them. Then I will ask myself, "How should I be in this community?" I will examine the protocols and ethics that guide my research and my conduct in Ahousaht, and endeavour to follow these ideals in process and outcome. It will not be easy, comfortable, or fast. That is the nature of community-based research that works towards participation, empowerment, control of results, respect for indigenous cultures and knowledge, social justice, and self-determination.

Despite the many challenges of respectful, collaborative community-based research in an indigenous context, I believe that these ideals are worth striving for. I know that I do have something to offer those children on the beach if I am open-minded, respectful, and committed to research that is relevant and empowering to their community. From my vantage point on the beach, I can see that all things are one, all things are connected. From the tides lapping the shore, to the eagle in the sky, to children playing, and to me. Hishuk ish ts'awalk encompasses us all.

I am not sure exactly where I fit in yet. It may change, and it may take a lifetime to find out. But there is a place for me in this inter-connected web of culture, place, history, and difference. The web has been torn by colonization, racism, and exploitation, leaving a hole full of poverty, pain, and mistrust. But communities like Ahousaht are slowly sewing the torn edges back together, and perhaps, somewhere, there is a thread for me.

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