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EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH DREAMING, WAMPUM AND VISUAL ARTS

BY DAWN MARSDEN

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Gitche Migwetch! Thank you, Creator, Great Mother, Grandmothers and Grandfathers, Teachers, Elders and All My Relations, for my life, the gifts, your guidance, your prayers, and the protection that you have brought into my life, without which I would not be here, or know anything.



Figure 1: Poster presentation of *Wampum Research Model* and research paintings, at the University of Alberta's "Listening to the Voices" Conference on Aboriginal Health (June 4, 2004).

Indigenous people have demonstrated a way of knowing and relating that must be regained and adapted to a contemporary setting — not only for the benefits of those cultures themselves, but for all human kind. Learning and becoming whole are, at every level of expression, intimately intertwined. (Cajete 1994)

To validate dreaming as a research tool, we must remember that dreaming is where we symbolically process, synthesize and resolve the information, questions and experiences that we have had each day, with the understanding we have accrued so far, to produce understanding “new-to-us.” Some dreams, which we may call visions or gifts, are especially helpful in answering our questions, guiding our actions, or making sense of the world. Below are a few observations about the roles dreaming and painting have played in my research process, in the provision and development of a research model that is meaningful, relevant and useful for doing research as an Indigenous researcher and with Indigenous people.

Dreams have always played an important part in my life — providing information or bringing resolution — but until recently I kept the knowledge I’d obtained from them out of my academic life. When I think about it, dreaming is a normal aspect of being, a way of knowing that all humans possess, but which has been eclipsed by other, more dominant, ways of knowing (e.g., medical science). If it can’t be touched, it’s not real. Why should physical evidence as foundation for research be validated more than non-physical evidence? Isn’t it generally true that our psyches can’t tell the difference between what we see when awake and what we see when dreaming? Isn’t it also true that we respond emotionally, mentally, spiritually and even physically to dreams in the same ways as we do waking experiences?

I’ve had all kinds of dreams, some ordinary and some with deep significance. Some made instant sense and others have required years of experiences and teachings to make sense. Time is different in dreams, where we can spend many years in a dream-world, while only hours pass in this waking world. Sometimes dreams are reenactments of our waking lives and sometimes they are prophetic. Sometimes dreams guide us about what we should do, teach us things we need to know, or let us know that things are as they should be. My dreams used to trick me; thinking I’d woken from one dream, I’d realize I was in another, again and again, until I questioned reality. In hindsight, this was good training and preparation for a conscious, critically questioning adult and academic life. What stayed with me as significant were the physi-

cal, emotional, mental and spiritual impressions that dreams left with me. While ordinary details varied or even shifted mid-dream, these impressions, along with important animals or symbols, continued to resurface in different dreams, to provide continuity and a sense of connectedness.

DREAMING RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

When I decided to continue my education, I tried to switch from the path I was on (studying First Nations education) to apply some of my prior background in environmental health studies to the study of freshwater management ethics. I love water and would have liked to aid in maintaining its health to benefit the beings and things on this planet. Applicants to graduate school, at the Ph.D. level, need to present their ideas for research in a well thought out proposal. I tried to write that proposal for two months straight. Most people consider me a good writer, but it just wasn't happening. Then I remembered prayer. I believe strongly in prayer, for gratitude, for guidance, for protection, for many things. I decided to pray for guidance in writing my proposal.

That night I woke up around 3 am, still filled with a dream about a traditional healing lodge on the outskirts of Vancouver. As in other powerful dreams, I wrote down what I had seen and asked myself questions while the dream was still in my "mind's eye." The dream was so detailed that I even recorded who was supposed to fund the healing lodge services, and what the work shifts would be like. Then it hit me, why not do a Ph.D. on something that I believed strongly in? All my life I've had experiences that only Indigenous healers have been able to understand, see as natural, and put into perspective. In contrast to my twin brother, who was drugged and incarcerated for his ways of knowing, I was saved by Indigenous healers; they taught me about other versions of reality, about walking in other worlds, differentiating between them, and about our responsibilities in this waking world.

RELATIONAL VALIDITY AND PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

In counseling theory, the process of knowledge arising from multiple sources is called convergence (Gibson and Mitchell 1999). This is appropriate when considering a research emphasis on relationships in multiple domains of being, and when referring to a focus on what I call *relational validity*, as opposed to concrete, discrete or absolute considerations of validity in knowledge. For example, if many people agree that something is important, then

it probably is. *Relational validity*, in this example, is different from quantitative validity if we understand that the key word in the previous sentence is *agree* rather than the word *many*. Working with this concept has led me to consider three kinds of relational validity: personal, internal, and external. These correspond to domains of knowledge generation and issues of property, which are rooted in the individual and private, moving through the community and communal to the academic and public domains.

Personal relational validity is about questioning the resonance between the knowledge being received and the knowledge already gained during prior experiences, which is the test which I apply to both my dreams and to what people say. When dreams are shared within a community, they are examined for relevance and importance, and given new meanings and position within that community's knowledge-base; they are a common-sense. Among many Indigenous groups, dreams are still considered relevant and important to day-to-day life; there is an internally consistent perspective which validates dreaming. In other groups, dreams are marginalized as fanciful distractions from the real-world, they are internally invalidated. If we examine the relationships between these two groups, in context, we can determine the external relational validity of dreaming and its relevance to issues of equity and social justice. The assumption is that an egalitarian society is ideal. For example, if dreaming is important to Indigenous people, and dreaming is marginalized within a society that includes Indigenous people, then if we want that society to be equitable and just, we must raise the status, role and place of dreaming within that society.

If we are to be inclusive, all domains of knowledge — personal, communal and academic — must be acknowledged as valid. We must resist the consistent pressure to give more value to knowledge gained from texts or other disconnected processes. Knowledge needs to be balanced by admitting the relevance of knowledge generated by individuals and communities, as well as by academic theorizing.

One of the most important sources of knowledge in my life was a near-death experience. In that drowning experience, as I left my body, I was given the opportunity to feel, see and experience this world, other worlds, and other non-physical beings. With a deep sense of belonging, connection and omniscience that I can only describe simultaneously as the Creator and Love, I understood the place of humanity, our ancestors, and other spirits in this universe. All of the teachings of philosophers, religions, traditional knowl-

edge holders, and my own dreams are tested with these “near-death-eyes” to determine resonance, relevance and relationship, which together I sometimes call truth.

Everyone has a personal set of internal truths, which guide and influence decision-making. The people and processes that mirror our lives help to validate who we understand ourselves to be and help us to expand, test and maintain our particular realities. The diversity of world views, realities or ways of experiencing the world should strengthen some of our deeper tenets about the uniqueness and intrinsic worth of every life.

The following situation is an example of applying resonance, relevance and relationship in a learning situation. Last spring, when I was given teachings around a sweat lodge, in Cree territory, three Elders spoke. The first Elder spoke about practical considerations which would have been useful if I was going into the sweat lodge at that time. The second Elder talked about the relationship between the sweat lodge and other traditional teachings, which helps when learning about Cree culture. The third and eldest Elder spoke about humans as spiritual beings, and about the place of humanity in the universe. Because I am interested in how people conceptualize spirit, I was inspired to pay particular attention to this Elder. Each of the teachings shared by the Elders was related to, and supported by, what the other Elders shared, and relevant to learning about sweat lodge ceremonies. All levels of knowledge are useful, but to me, the knowledge that is about spiritual aspects of reality is the most resonant, relevant and related to what connects us as human beings, and thereby has the greatest potential for organizing our lives in ways that will inspire us to become good people and live good lives, for the good of All Our Relations. That the Elders never spoke about specific details or specific people shows congruence with a world view that values the maintenance of an inclusive, spiritually connected community, rather than the creation of exclusionary, disconnected (materialistic, individualistic or competitive) ways of being.

The teachings of my dream about a future healing lodge on the outskirts of Vancouver, and the teachings about reality and responsibility from traditional knowledge holders were validated by their resonance, relevance and relatedness to the knowledge I'd integrated from my near-death experience, and vice versa (personally valid). This reality that I live in is shared by many (internally valid) within North American society (externally valid). Hence, I wrote up a Ph.D. proposal to do research that supported traditional healing

in Vancouver, and I live my life according to the common sense gained by my experiences and by the teachings (inclusive knowledge generation). This common sense dictates that I bring dreaming into my research.

PRAYING FOR GUIDANCE

When starting my Ph.D. program, I realized that, to start sharing what I'd learned, I would have to "come out" in a way that people would begin to know who I was and what I believed in. Even though I felt exposed, I knew it was important to do things in a good way: to maintain my integrity, to be true to my belief in good relationship through respectful processes, regardless of my fears of being in the spot light. After I spoke with the first person to join my research group, I realized the immensity of the journey that I had set myself on. Here I was, overwhelmed by the stories and teachings of one person during an information session, how was I going to respectfully receive, carry and share the knowledge of twenty more traditional knowledge holders? After meeting with everyone in the research group and speaking with everyone individually, my anxiety increased. How could I possibly write a collective story that was both understandable and true to what had been shared with me? The responsibility of carrying that knowledge and representing it in a good way was daunting. Beginning to write was complicated by where to start and what to include. I decided to start with my story of initiating and carrying out the research. When thinking about relevant influences, there were too many variables, spanning from my early childhood, from experiences, to people I'd met or read. I prayed for guidance.

At the same time, I was working on another community based project, during which there was a lot of talk about beading belts. The decoration of clothing and other materials with beads to represent stories, events, relationships, visions, agreements, identities and/or treaties is a tradition that predates colonization. In the northeastern woodlands (territories of the Anishnaabe, Mohawk and Haudenosaune), these beaded documents were referred to as *Wampum*, because they were created with the rectangularized purple and white shells, called wampum in the Algonquin language. Like other traditional-based practices that have been impacted negatively by colonization, beaded pieces and wampum have retained a stigma of betrayal through their use in the co-option of lands and resources, and in the misrepresentation and stereotyping of Indigenous peoples. In a natural process of healing, Indigenous peoples are working to reclaim these practices, to dissolve the misperceptions and to regenerate cultural practices.

PAINTING AND INTERPRETING A RESEARCH DREAM

Around 3 AM the next morning, my prayers for guidance were answered: in a dream, all the influences and decisions of my research — past, current and future — were connected together as beads on a bracelet. The simplicity

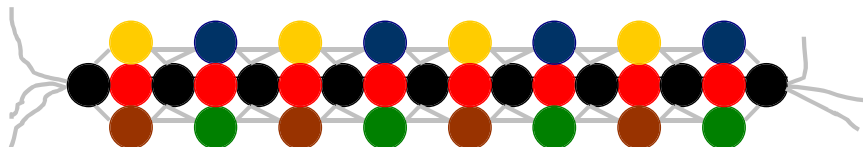


Figure 2. *Wampum Research Model: Community, Academia and Self*

and coincident complexity of this dream-gift was astounding. I'd been gifted with a design for a *Wampum Research Model* which wove together significant and complex strands of influence and relationships within my research. I keep seeing new ways of putting it to use. For me, one of the easiest ways to remember my dreams is to draw or paint them out. Once represented, this dream became concrete, and has been useful for inspiring and guiding me into new areas of thought, and for analyzing my thoughts, logic, and concepts as they arose. Before I could represent any of the accompanying thoughts with words, I had to paint what I'd seen.

In temporal progression, each bead was tied to each other and formed the foundation for weaving in the next beads. This portrays the temporal and interdependent relationships between the seemingly independent variables and processes in life, like fire and water, life and death, youth and elderhood, etc. Likewise, research follows a temporal and relational progression through contexts and decisions, like motivations, methodologies and meaning-making. The black beads can be read as points of decision or synthesis, where pre-existing and current influences are organized, tested for relevance, integrated or culled into a specific form. This is appropriate when we consider that the colour black is widely used to describe the point from which emergence, creation or transformation occurs.

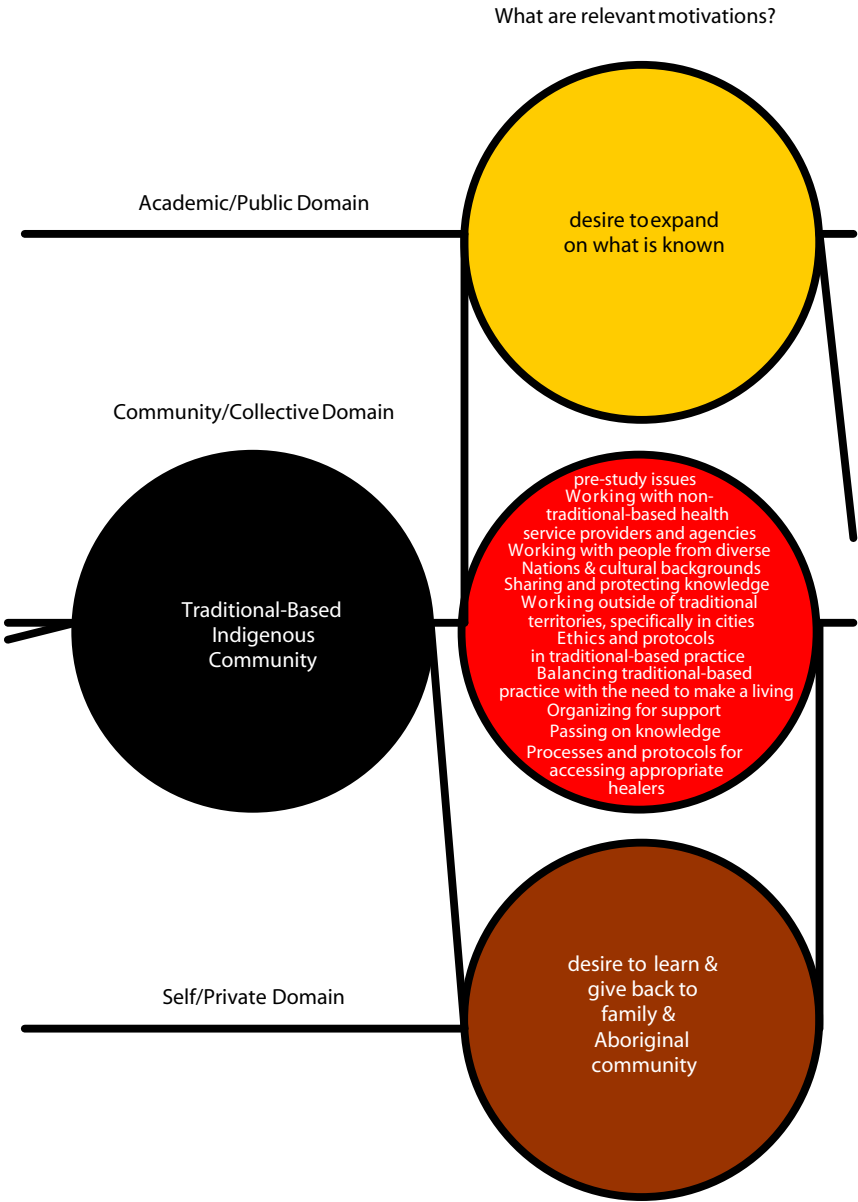
The colour choice was the product of a congruent coincidence between limited colour selection and consideration of the importance of certain colours to myself, the university and the Aboriginal community. Blue and yellow are the rallying colours of the University of British Columbia and are derived from the water and sun representations of the provincial flag; green

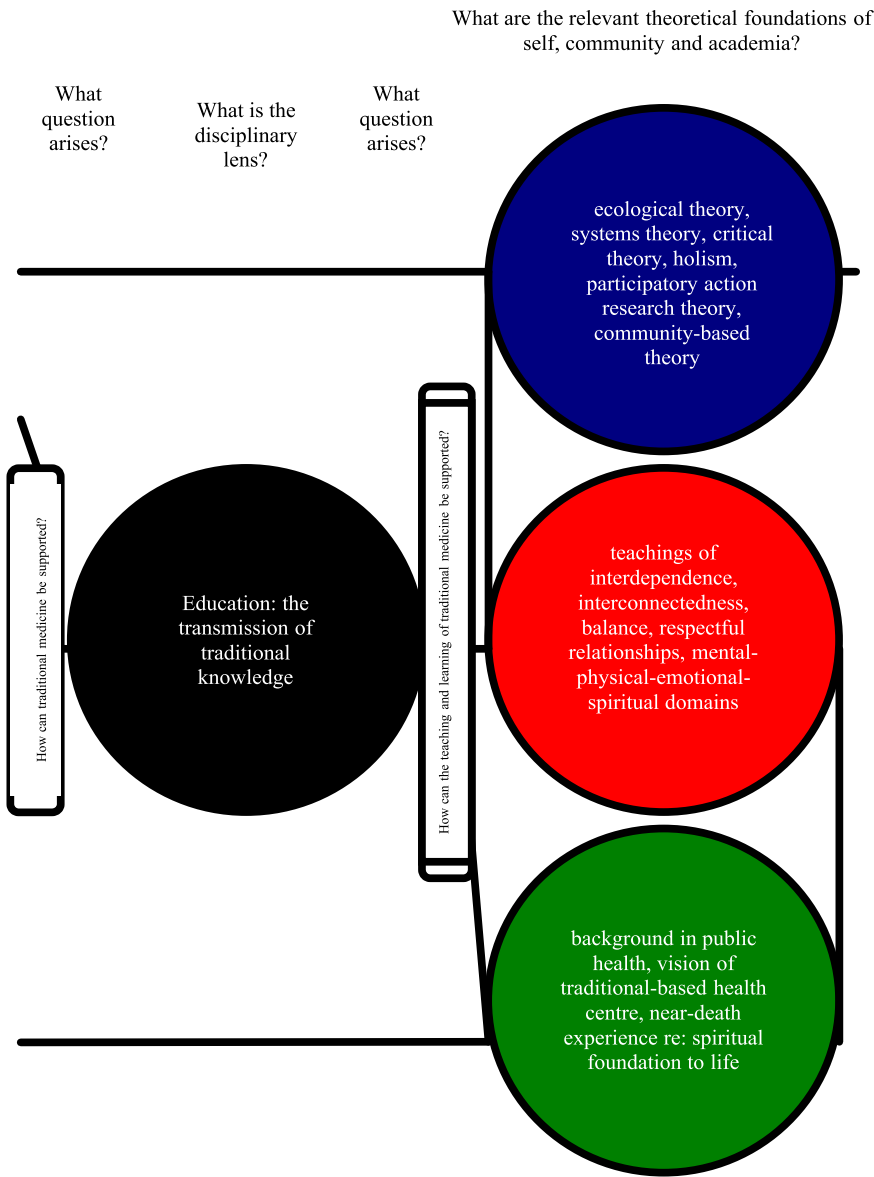
and brown are the colours to which I am drawn for their references to life and earth, and red and black are commonly important in Aboriginal representations of balance between south and north, youth and elderhood, female and male, blood and ash, life and death.

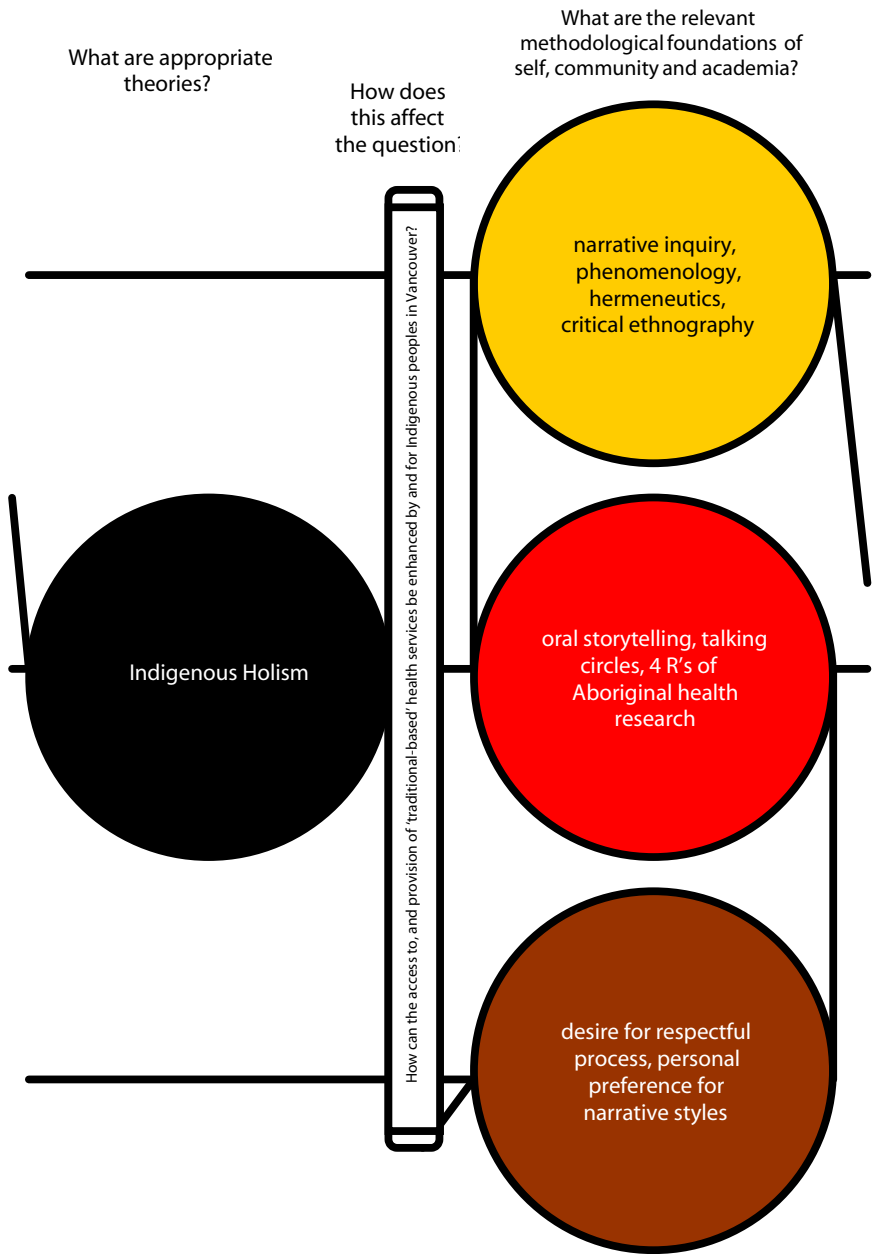
When using the bracelet to visualize a research process, think of the centre strand of beads as the community-influenced process, the top strand of beads as the influences of academia, and the bottom strand of beads as the processes and influences from within the researcher. The centre community strand, where decision-making takes place, appropriately is the strand which pulls and holds the bracelet together. As in bracelets where bone, metal or wood spacers are used, the spacers in the research bracelet are the research questions which change according to the language most preferred at each stage. In the case of this research, the question has evolved from “How can traditional medicine be supported in the city?” to “How can the access to and provision of traditional-based health services be enhanced by and for Indigenous people in Vancouver?” reduced to subquestions and changed back again to “How can traditional medicine be supported in Vancouver?”

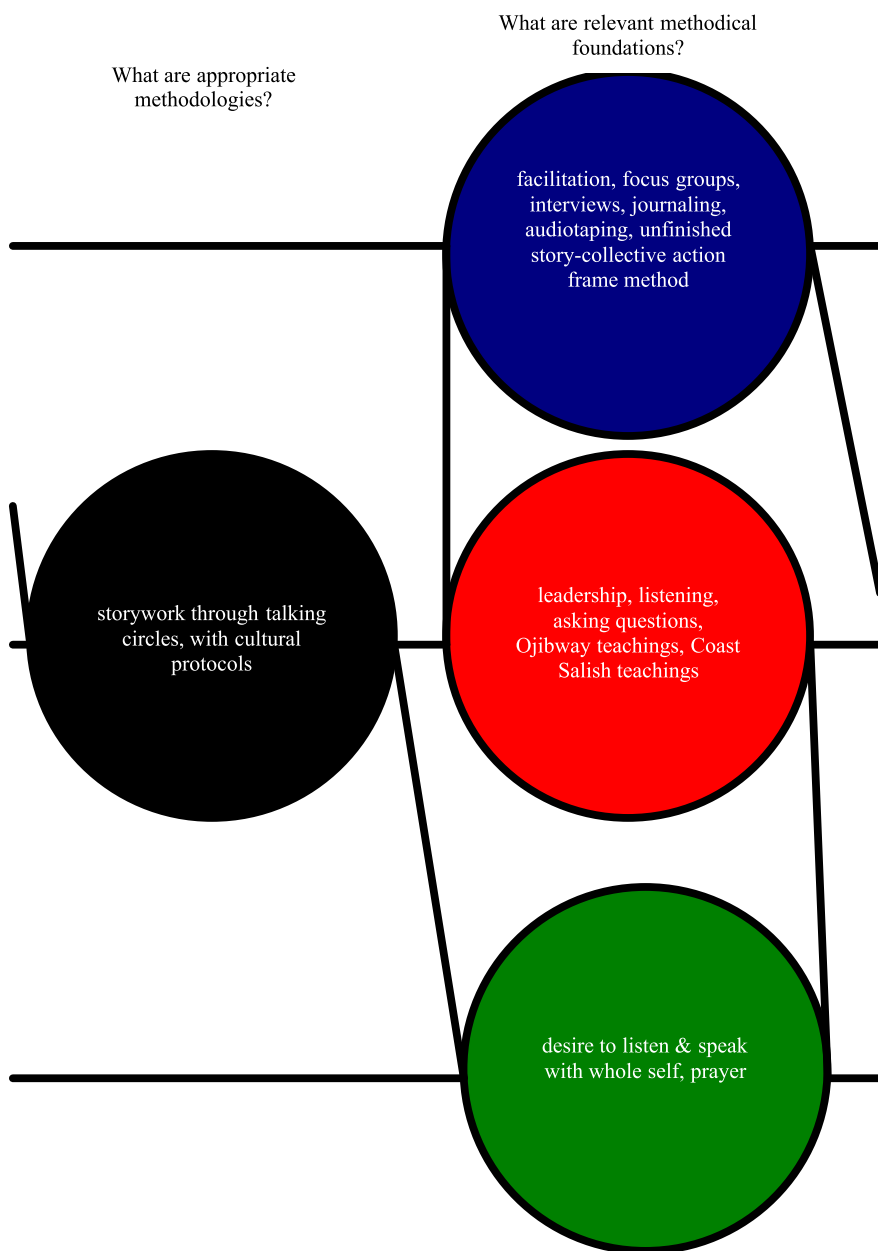
TRANSLATING VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS INTO MODELS FOR DESIGN AND ANALYSIS

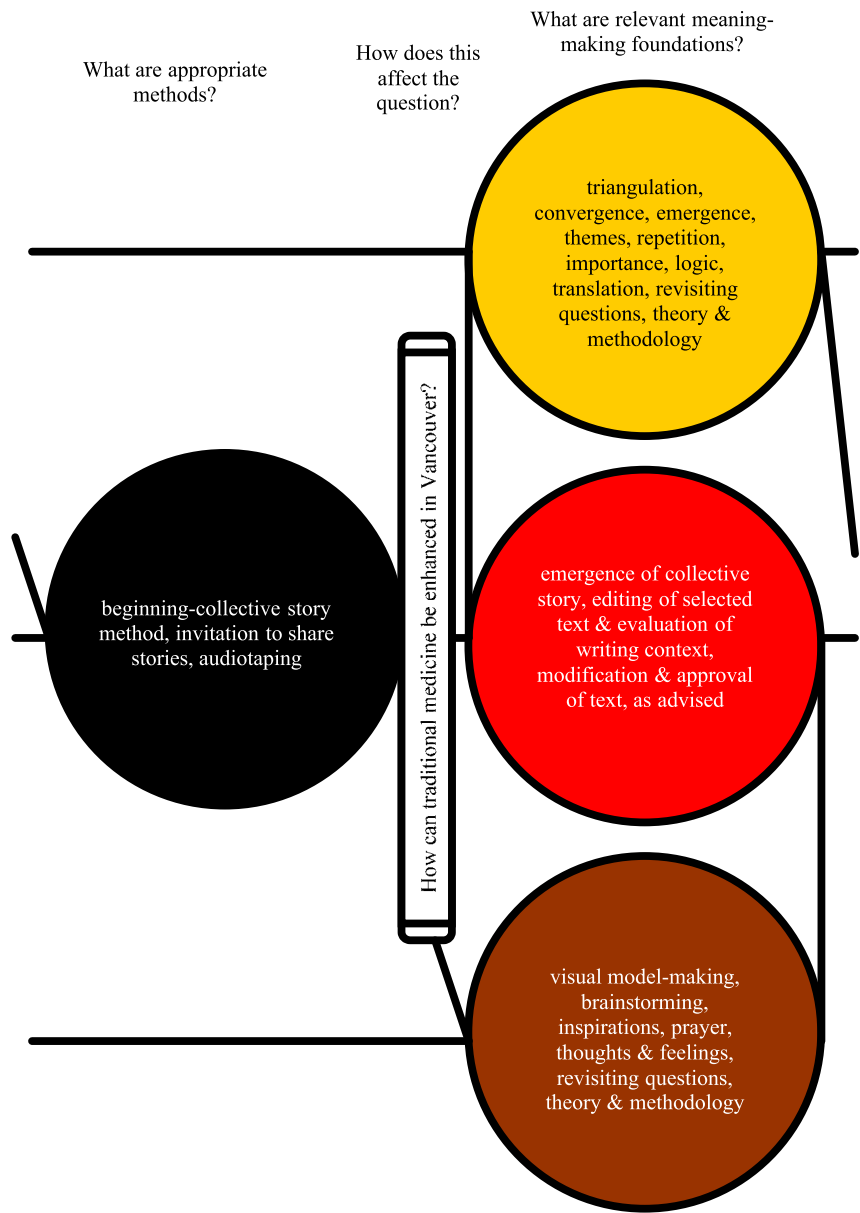
After representing the Wampum design dream in a large poster-painting, and after detailing the significance of each bead, I realized that I had come up with a process that could be used to design, analyze and represent responsible research with Aboriginal communities. In this case, I am defining responsible research as that research which is responsive to and resonant with the needs and context of a community, while meeting and incorporating the standards of the university, and maintaining the congruency and integrity of the researcher. In the following section, the process represented by the beads has been translated into a series of process questions. The coloured beads are process points, the spacers or research questions are underneath the black beads, and the black beads are decision points. Each question is answered in the different domains of *self*, *community* and *academia*. It's interesting to note that the processes of dreaming and painting the relational beading model were all generated during the “meaning-making” stage represented by the model. It will be informative to revisit this model after I have reached the end of this research project, to see if “appropriate meaning-making,” “utilitarian foundations” and “appropriate use” were implemented as foreseen.

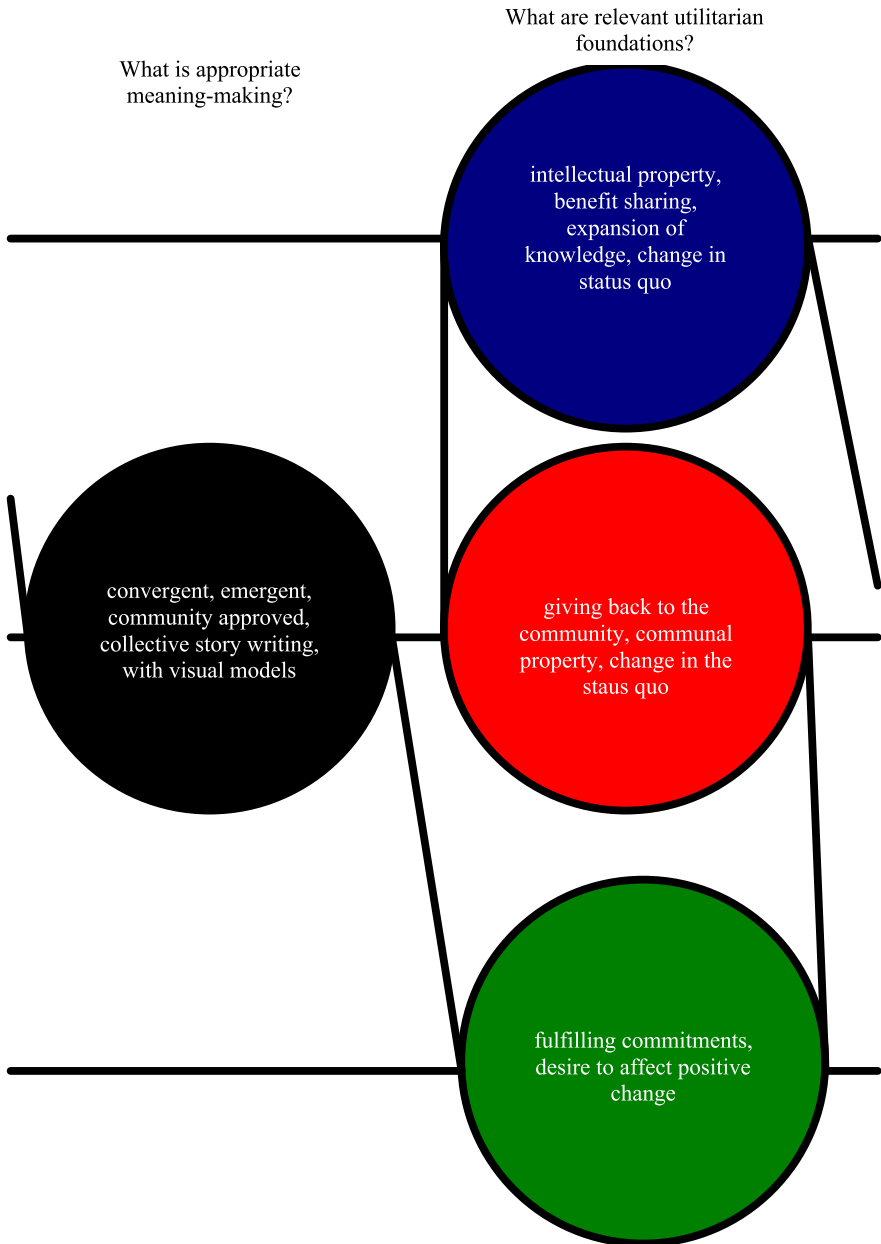


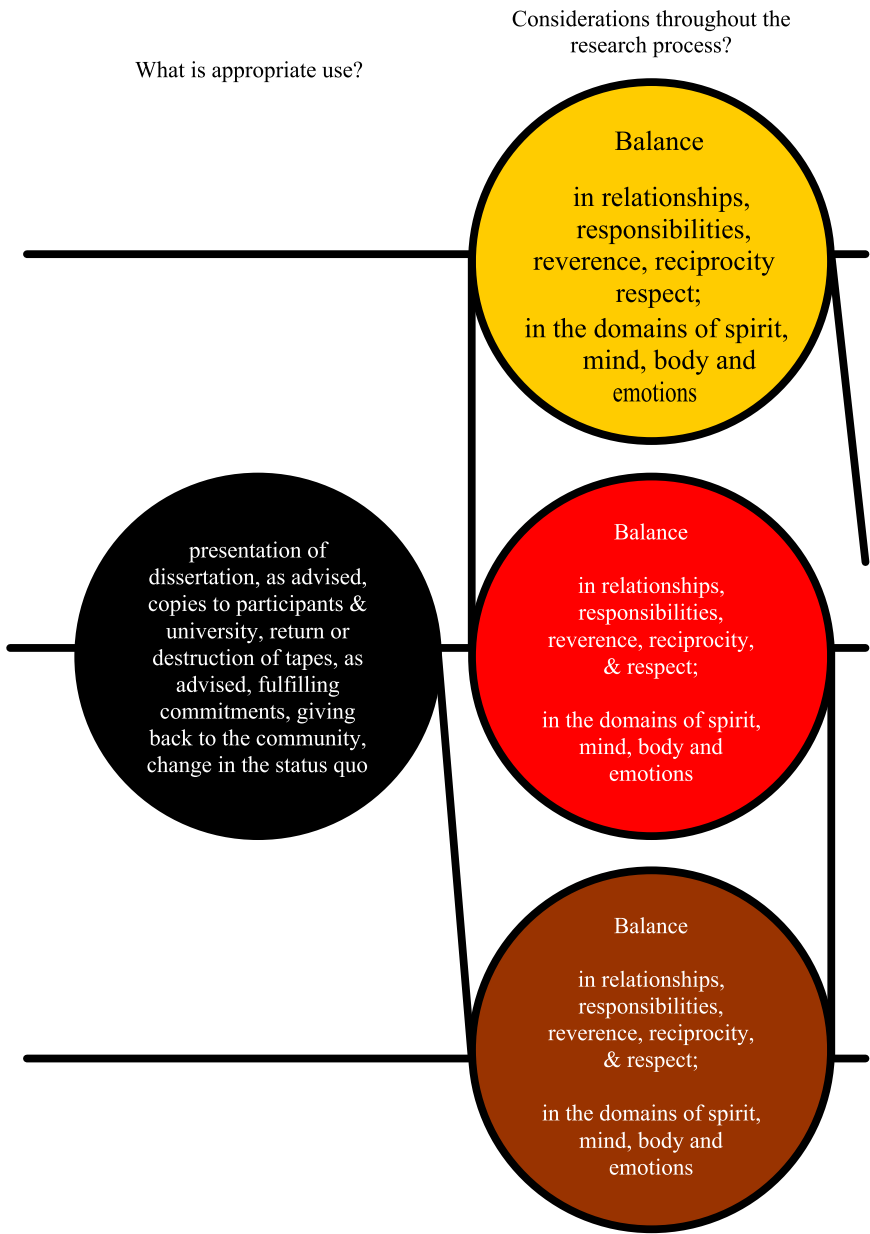












EXTENSIONS OF THE WAMPUM RESEARCH MODEL

One the most exciting things about this model is that it can be used to weave together the influences and relationships of more than three relevant groups, and more than sixteen considerations. Fields of consideration (which I've called relevant or appropriate questions) can be placed in temporal relationship with decision points and modifications to the questions. One or more prioritized groups can be placed in the centre strand positions and patterns can change according to the needs of relevant groups, the design, analysis or presentation. As in older forms of Wampum, important symbols can be woven to deepen the significance of the presentation.

This Wampum model for research, for analysis or for presentation can be easily tested for relational soundness by creating it in physical form, like traditional Wampum. As in bygone days, participants in the research relationship can accept or deny the Wampum, and thereby the research, by returning or destroying it. Wampum can be given in the form of actual bracelets to those working with the model, as a form of documentation, as a mnemonic and as a way of examining both the beauty and the flaws in the project. Visual and physical representations provide avenues for working with knowledge intuitively, emotionally and spiritually, providing knowledge beyond the mental domains, into other realms of human being.

An important thing to consider is that humans have used beads and bracelets and other weavings and patterns for thousands, if not millions of years. Such artifacts express our connection to various domains of knowledge: mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. One of the most persistent examples has been the use of bracelets and beads as religious devices for counting prayers or sacred sounds (eg, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim). These, like many other symbolic tools, provide the focus for change. If we can re-integrate Wampum and other beading and weaving tools back into our institutions of knowledge, and into our psyches, we will be well on our way back to rebalancing who we are as human beings.

APPLICATIONS OF DREAMING AND VISUAL ARTS TO RESEARCH

Dreaming is a fact of human existence. Everyone has dreams, whether we remember them or not. We can train ourselves to remember them, just as we train ourselves to create surveys or design laboratory experiments. It just takes

practice. Dreams can be inspired by our intent or need to learn something, whether through prayer or through specific thoughts. In turn, dreams can give us visual answers or models for what we are trying to understand. These can be diagrammed, written down, painted, or represented in any number of ways. You don't have to be an artist. The important thing is that what you record reminds you of your dream, so that you can analyze the details later.

The shift required to make dreaming a useful tool for research is to accept dreams as a valid way of obtaining knowledge. That we do not understand exactly how dreams work doesn't negate the information they are conveying. Dreams are valid according to the sense they make to you, in the symbols that are important to you. In turn, visual representations of dreams, like this Wampum Research Model, can be used to communicate complex ideas, build relationships and restore ancient ways of knowing.

COMMUNICATING RESEARCH THROUGH VISUAL ARTS

Over the last 6 months, I had decided to get some more practice presenting my ideas, as a prelude to defending my dissertation, and to test my ideas. In the fields of education and health, people usually use Power Point to present their ideas, with the occasional photograph. Not being proficient yet with Power Point, I decided to use the *Wampum Research Model* and paintings that I had been using during my brainstorming work. I was a little worried about how my presentations would be received, but aside from the statements "You're in education, aren't you," and "This is really radical," the feedback was about resonance and acceptance.

My work has never before generated the amount of attention and interest I received after those presentations. In my case, the picture really was worth a thousand words. The *Wampum Research Model* poster and paintings provided a visual model of my ideas which enabled a quick transition from discussions of general ideas, to more in-depth discussions of relationships, theory and process specific to my research. The use of visual presentation of research ideas has provided me with a way of engaging with people that far surpasses my speaking abilities.

NAMING AND COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP

Naming the *Wampum Research Model* was difficult until I remembered the role of Wampum in the history of my people and neighbouring Nations. My

first concern was that I might be profaning the sacred by bringing Wampum into the academic world. After more research, I realized that Wampum was an important communication tool that was not sacred in itself, but only as sacred as the relationships and events that were being represented. That the *Wampum Research Model* might be used as a symbol to both represent and strengthen relationships among academia, individuals, communities, and Indigenous peoples, seems resonant, relevant, and related to the integrity of Wampum traditions.

Lastly, as an Indigenous research model rooted in history, tradition and people, this *Wampum Research Model* is not exclusively mine. In an effort to represent the collective genesis of this model, I've included a chronicle of events and influences that bear on this model.

During work on the Vancouver Aboriginal Community Realignment Proposal with Millie McComber, came a discussion of beading belts as Olympic souvenirs, as a revival of traditional kinship networks and traditional practices. The beading dream came from my spirit helpers, from the prayers of the research group and others.

The motivation to name it came from Maori scholar Graham Smith. As in traditional practices, naming in a research context brings things to life. The choice in name is a continuation of Wampum theory and practice of relationship that predates Canadian Confederation. Wampum has already been applied to a contemporary health context by Joe Jacobs who designed and has carried the Teiakonekwenhsatsikhe:tare (Our Blood is Sweet) Wampum to communities, to aid in the battle against diabetes (Jacobs 2003).

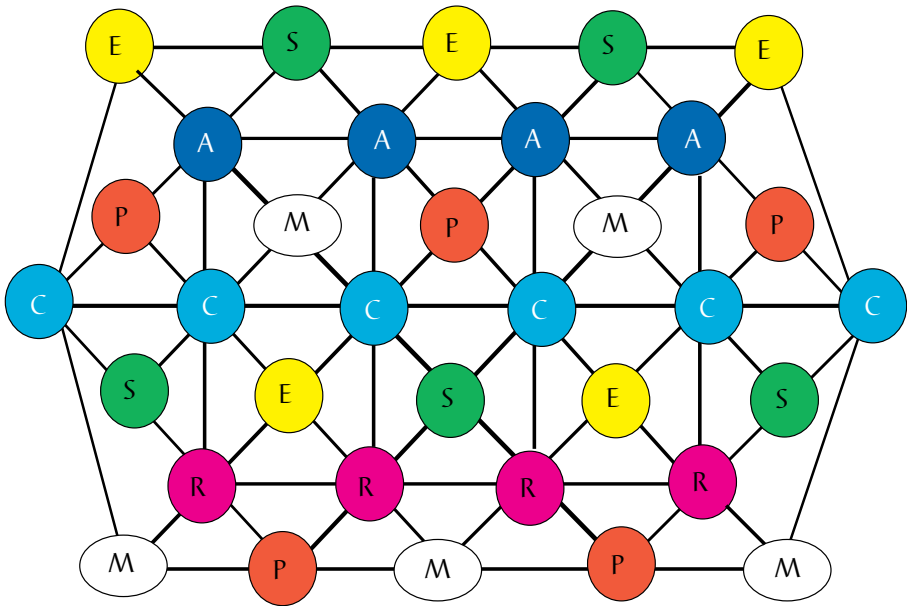
Elder Lorraine Muehlfarth-Hance reminded me of the teaching of humility, which necessitates an acknowledgement of collective creation and therefore, collective "ownership." The managing editor of *Pimatisiwin*, Laura Botsford, gave me the final push to get this story published and provided the technical expertise to get my research example onto the visual Wampum model.

In discussions with Maori scholar Wiremu Doherty Tuhoe, about the similarities between the Wampum model and the Matauranga Tuhoe Framework, he pointed out how the vertical beads provided a genealogy for Indigenous knowledge — from ourselves as rooted in specific lands, through the domains of our communities, and into the domain of academia.

In looking for an appropriate metaphor for Indigenous leadership, Alannah Young spurred me to remember to give this *Wampum Research Model* back to the Indigenous community. In looking for the reference for

the Teiakonekwensatsikhe:tare Wampum, the first article that emerged was written by Alex McComber, of Kahnawake (2000) where that particular Wampum arose. Another circle is completed as the people of Kahnawake and Mnjikaning (where my relations live) come together again, as in our multi-generational meetings at the summer grounds at Port Carling, and through the connections in our peoples’ work to up-hold the traditions of the peoples from the eastern doorway.

Finally, in the process of reviewing and editing this paper, the model was again expanded, by Ed Borchert, to make considerations of aspects of being – spiritual, emotional, mental and physical – much more explicit.



A = Academic C= Community R = Researcher/Team

The Wampum Research Model can be applied by anyone with an understanding of its genealogy, along with efforts to maintain that integrity, with respectful action, in any Indigenous research context.

CONCLUSIONS

Dreaming provides insight into mental, emotional and spiritual processes that are beyond our current comprehension, and can thereby provide cutting edge templates for the analysis of our research processes and findings.

Painting is just one of the ways that dreams can be expressed, but a visual is especially effective as a communication tool or starting point for design, analysis, or discussions. I would recommend that more academics incorporate both dreaming and visual arts into both their research and presentations, because dreaming is able to process, and visual arts are able to communicate so much more than written words.

The *Wampum Research Model* is a research tool that can be used to design, analyze or present complex influences and relationships in qualitative research and is a rich example of the potential of revived traditions and visual arts for expanding and extending perspectives into other domains of being and knowing.

Intellectual space needs to be created in academic institutions for re-validating and restoring these ancient tools, these holistic processes, especially in fields edging into qualitative research where the boundaries and laws of the physical world do not apply. Reduction of our humanity into concrete categories, through isolated observations, does not produce a knowledge base founded on the reality of our holistic human condition. Qualitative research, as research that looks into human perspectives or ways of doing things, needs to incorporate a consideration and validation of all of our ways of knowing as human beings. That we don't understand many things about our psychophysical responses, emotions, spiritual or metaphysical experiences, or even our mental processes, doesn't mean that those avenues are invalid roads to knowledge. It's time to make the shift from knowing our outer worlds, to knowing our inner ones, in ways that expand the outdated parameters of science.

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Migwetch! Thank you for your attention and consideration.

FOR MORE DISCUSSION

If you're interested in discussing the ideas in this paper further, you can contact me at dawnmarsden@shaw.ca , or by writing c/o the Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, B.C., V6T 1Z4.

