# STORYWORK

Jo-Ann Archibald identifies "seven principles" comprising the "Indigenous research methodology" that is "storywork": "respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy."[1] She suggests that what makes storywork "effective" is the "interrelatedness and synergy formed by the storyteller, the story, the listener," as well as "the context in which the story is used," adding: "A transformative learning experience occurs by working with Indigenous stories and these seven principles."[2] This work Archibald likens to "basket making," during which the "pieces of cedar sometimes stand alone and sometimes they lose their distinctiveness and form a design."[3] Likewise, "the processes of research and learning to make story meaning are distinguishable as separate entities and sometimes they seem bound together, losing their distinctiveness."[4]

Archibald proceeds to tell a story of Old Man Coyote who, after "a long hard day of hunting … noticed a hole in one of his favorite moccasins," something he could repair with "his special bone needle."[5] Unable to find the needle, Old Man Coyote enlisted the help of an Owl who, also unable to find it, asked Old Man Coyote where he last used the needle, to which Old Man Coyote replied "somewhere" far away."[6] When asked by the Owl why he was searching for the needle around the campfire, the Old Man Coyote replied, "Well, it's much easier to look for the needle here because the fire gives off such good light, and I can see much better here."[7] Archibald confides: "I have behaved like Old Man Coyote many times, wanting to stay close to a cozy fire, wanting to continue to think, feel, and act in ways that are comfortable, familiar, and easy."[8]

Archibald contrasts such storywork with "the legacy of disrespectful research methods of early anthropologists, linguists, and health academics" which, she reports, "still looms over Indigenous communities," leaving many "community members … skeptical of any researcher who comes to the community," worried that their "stories, knowledge, and even DNA" will be appropriated.[9] This skepticism extends to Archibald herself, as she reports "my affiliation with a research-intensive university shadows my First Nation identity and position."[10] Honored that Chief Simon Baker had agreed to serve as her "guide and teacher," Archibald "understood the importance of the responsibility that research should 'come out for good use,'[11] realizing

> that respect and responsibility must be an integral part of the relationship between the Elder and the researcher: respect for each other as human beings; respect and responsibility for the power of cultural knowledge, and respect and responsibility for cultural protocol, for honoring the authority and expertise of the Elder teacher. The principles of respect and responsibility include trust and being culturally worthy.[12]

While many of us conducting non-Indigenous research would also acknowledge the "principles of respect, responsibility, and trust," being judged "culturally worthy" – an ambiguous phrase - would seem to many if not irrelevant, then possibly threatening to conducting research with integrity.

The source of Indigenous knowledge is "the land, our spiritual beliefs and ceremonies, traditional teachings of Elders, stories, and our lived experiences,"[13] that last source also shared by non-Indigenous researchers, at least in the arts and humanities. Prerequisites for "understanding Elders' teaching" include "knowing the values and interrelated actions of responsibility, respect, reverence, and reciprocity."[14] Archibald also allows – in a nod to European philosophical traditions and specifically to American progressive education – that "understandings and insights also result from lived experiences and critical reflections on those experiences."[15] Not only "many Aboriginal people have said that, in order to understand ourselves and our situation today, we must know where we come from and know what has influenced us"[16]: this insight is shared by many of us working in European and European-descent traditions.

As Archibald continued to work with Chief Simon Baker, the interviews moved from "issues-based process" to a conceptions of research as "conversation" and "chat" (referencing Celia Haig-Brown[17]) and then to "research as storytelling," the first "open-ended," the second implying familiarity and informality, the third "exemplify[ing] leadership and political strategies that had implications for me: thus, research as storytelling."[18]

Elder Vincent Stogan instructed Archibald concerning the conduct of "story research," as well as "traditional spiritual teachings and cultural knowledge … often dropp[ing] by the First Nations Longhouse to ask how things were going," even calling Archibald "his niece, although we are not directly related by kinship," prompting her to stop taping and "follow[ing], for a while, the research as chat approach."[19] She then "switched to a traditional approach of learning from Tsimilano, as he first directed me: learning pieces at a time and not hurrying the learning," watching "him speak[ing] many times and at many different gatherings," engaging in "many private talks," teaching Archibald about "my oral memory and an important part of my heart knowledge and my spiritual being."[20] She acknowledges that "His teachings are reflected on the pages of this publication and often guide my interactions with others."[21]

Archibald concludes that "stablishing relationships within the storywork research context has become a way of establishing and sustaining lasting friendships with deep caring and endless stories and talk," adding that:

> Learning to listen with patience, learning about cultural responsibility toward the oral tradition, learning to make self-understandings, continuing the cycle of reciprocity about cultural knowledge, and practicing reverence are some of the lessons I experienced with Chief Simon Baker and Elder Vincent Stogan.[22]

These lessons became principles.

Archibald lists four. The first is "respect for each other and for the cultural knowledge," the second is "responsibly carrying out the roles of teacher and learner (a serious approach to the work and being mindful of what readers/other learners can comprehend)," the third "practicing reciprocity where we each give to the other, thereby continuing the cycle of knowledge from generation to generation," and the fourth, "reverence toward spiritual knowledge and one's spiritual being."[23]

Those are principles I wish would govern us all.

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## COMMENTARY

Drawing on her 2008 *Indigenous Storywork,* Archibald narrates her own coming to understand the significance of storywork, providing lessons and principles that represent, in Kiera Brant-Birioukov's judgement, "a fruitful methodology in gathering and understanding Indigenous stories in its diverse contexts."

## REFERENCES

Archibald, Jo-Ann. 2012. An Indigenous Storywork Methodology. In the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, edited by J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole (371-385). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Haig-Brown, Celia. 2008. Taking Indigenous Thought Seriously: A Rant on Globalization with Some Cautionary Notes. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 6 (2), 8-24.

## ENDNOTES

[1] Archibald 2012, 373.
[2] Archibald 2012, 373.
[3] Archibald 2012, 373.
[4] Archibald 2012, 373.
[5] Archibald 2012, 374.
[6] Archibald 2012, 374.
[7] Archibald 2012, 374.

[8] Archibald 2012, 374.
[9] Archibald 2012, 375-376.
[10] Archibald 2012, 375-376.
[11] Archibald 2012, 375-376.
[12] Archibald 2012, 376.
[13] Archibald 2012, 377.
[14] Archibald 2012, 377.
[15] Archibald 2012, 377.
[16] Archibald 2012, 377.
[17] See, for instance, Haig-Brown 2008.
[18] Archibald 2012, 377.
[19] Archibald 2012, 379.
[20] Archibald 2012, 379.
[21] Archibald 2012, 379.
[22] Archibald 2012, 379-380.
[23] Archibald 2012, 381-382.