



INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

By Paula MacDonald

What is Indigenous Knowledge (IK)?

In the article *Indigenous Knowledge and Technology* the writer quotes a scholar named Louise Grenier who works in the realm of IK. Grenier explains Indigenous Knowledge; what it consists of and how it is handed down.

"Indigenous knowledge refers to the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area....The development

of IK systems, covering all aspects of life, including management of the natural environment, has been a matter of survival to the peoples who generated these systems. Such knowledge systems are cumulative, representing generations of experiences, careful observations, and trial-and-error experiments.

Indigenous knowledge is stored in peoples' memories and activities and is expressed in stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dance, myths,

cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language and taxonomy, agricultural practices, equipment, materials, plant species, and animal breeds. IK is shared and communicated orally, by specific example, and through culture. Indigenous forms of communication and organization are vital to local level decision making processes and to the preservation, development, and spread of Indigenous knowledge."⁴



Environmental Justice

- "AMERICAN COURTS HAVE MANY TIMES IN THE PAST CRIMINALIZED, WHETHER CONSCIOUSLY OR NOT, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE."⁴
- "WHEN WRITING ABOUT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, THE EXCLUSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES ALSO ESTABLISHES AN INJUSTICE BECAUSE IT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AMONG ALL HUMAN BEINGS."⁴
- "NATIVES PEOPLES WHO HAVE NOT BEEN INCLUDED IN DECISION-MAKING CONCERNING THE POTENTIALLY ENVIRONMENTALLY DEVASTATING IMPACT OF CORPORATE INTRUSION UPON THEIR LANDS ARE CRITICALLY THINKING ABOUT, ASSESSING, AND DEMANDING THAT THEIR VOICES BE HEARD AND NOT DISCOUNTED OR IGNORED AS IN TIMES PAST."⁴

Perspectives

Indigenous People

- "All parts of the environment-plants, animals, fish or rocks- are views as gifts from the Creator."⁴

- "Traditional Ecological Knowledge assumes that humans are, and always will be, connected to the natural world, and that there is no such thing as nature that exists independent of humans and their activities."²

- Have "no clear[ly] defined boundaries between philosophy, history, sociology, biology, and anthropology in indigenous thought."²

Westerners

-Exclude IK as a unviable way of knowing since it is not based off of proven scientific ways.

-Westerners "assume that humans are autonomous from, and in control of, natural world."²

- "[N]atural resources are perceived largely in terms of their economic value to humans."²

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Current Teachings

Leech Lake Tribal College (LLTC) in Cass Lake Minnesota has a curriculum to teach about Indigenous Knowledge in a higher education setting. "Leech Lake Tribal College is aggressively resorting its Native language, teaching history from an Anishinaabe perspective, and utilizing Anishinaabe values, ceremonies, and traditions when seeking knowledge from the nature world."³

Typically when a college student takes a general ecology class they think of using

equipment for studies such as; microscopes, computers and other technology based scientific measuring devices. Instead LLTC teaches ecology through tribal stories that have been handed down to talk about the natural world and the sciences.

The Anishinaabe's perspective on observing science is such that "we are not just invisible, objective observers but actual and accountable participants in the complex web of life."³ Reaffirming their belief that we all have

an impact on the Earth, animals, humans and education.

The lesson of spirituality is also encrypted into the classes. Before field studies the students learn about the culture taboos within the Anishinaabe culture as well as the protocol for interacting with the natural world. The student's practice gathering techniques with specimens, the ceremonially use of tobacco to give thanks for the things that are taken, they also never dissect anything since that is taboo.³

"INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IS ANOTHER WAY OF UNDERSTANDING REALITY. IT IS NOT BASED ON MEASUREMENT OR QUANTIFICATION BUT RATHER ON RELATIONSHIPS AND OBSERVATION."³

Vocabulary and Concepts

"Indigenous Centeredness"--The concept of indigenous centeredness means being centered securely, comfortably, and confidently within the indigenous world-view, knowingly and intentionally embracing the indigenous perspective and the indigenous way of life. Acting from indigenous centeredness means that one affirms, asserts, and advances indigenous seeing, relating, thinking and doing as being inherent and central to the indigenous ways of knowing."¹

"Indigenous intelligence" is the wise and conscien-

tious embodiment of exemplary knowledge and the use of this knowledge in a good, beneficial and meaningful way. We can not talk about being an intelligent person without knowledge of and access to all the levels of our intelligence capacity--i.e., the intelligence of the body, the mind, heart and spirit."¹

"Indigenous Value-based seeing, relating, knowing and doing" means that the intelligent indigenous person operated from the core psychology or value system of Kindness, Honesty, Sharing, Strength, Respect, Wisdom, and Harmony."¹



References:

- ¹Dumont, J. (2002). Indigenous Intelligence; Have We Lost Our Indigenous Mind? *Native Americans*, XII(3&4),15.
- ²Pierotti, R. & Wildcat, D. (2000). Traditional Ecological Knowledge: The Third Alternative (Commentary). *Ecological Applications*, 10(5), 1333-1340.
- ³Price, M. (2000). Of Science & Spirit: Leech Lake combines culture, inquiry in the lab. *Tribal College*, XII(2),19.
- ⁴Robyn, L. (2002). Indigenous Knowledge and Technology Creating Environmental Justice in the Twenty-First Century. *The American Indian Quarterly*, 26(2), 198-220.