Tribal Elders’ Perspectives of Indigenous Knowledge Sharing using a Methodology of Indigeneity

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What I will discuss

- Who I am and where I am from.
- The research problem, some background, the significance, and my question that I studied.
- The theoretical framework of Power and Place and how it aligns with Lambert’s Indigenous Research Methodology.
- Question (restated), study results, analysis, and conclusions.
- A bit about the tribal college in California now and it’s future.
Education and work

- Bachelor of Science, Civil Engineering
- Master of Science, Environmental Engineering
- Doctor of Education
- Associate Professor at UMUC
New Tribal University (re-creating D-Q Tribal U)
Storytelling
Kokopelli

(from Chaco Canyon - photo by Daniel Bianchetta of Esalen Institute)
Introduction

• Story

• Indigenous People

• Indigenous Knowledge
Indigeneity with Elders Sharing their Knowledge

- Elders Defined
- Elders Sharing Knowledge
Brief history of California Indians
Indigenous Knowledge Sharing
Indigenous culture and indigenous languages are being lost. With Elders usually of older generations, it is paramount to transfer the Elders knowledge timely.
Research Question

How do California tribal Elders experience sharing indigenous knowledge within their community?
Deloria, Jr. and Wildcat’s Power and Place

Theoretical Framework

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Power: Spirituality, mentoring, & relationships
Place: Storytelling, ceremony, languages, & other traditions

Personality: Improving as a human through higher education

Sustainability: Living so that future generations are not adversely impacted
Lambert’s Indigenous Research Methodology © Lambert 2014 (in brown) with Power & Place Framework © Cargill 2016 (in yellow)

Methodology

Keeping Sacredness for the Peoples

Framework

Elders

History

Learning from Place

Commonalities of Languages

Identity

Learning from Animals

Power: Spirituality, mentoring, & relationships

Personality: Improving as a human

Sustainability: Living so that future generations are not adversely impacted

Place: Storytelling, ceremony, languages, & other traditions

Connections

Relationships

Ecology

Honor

Values

Ethics

Identity

Power: Spirituality, mentoring, & relationships

Personality: Improving as a human

Sustainability: Living so that future generations are not adversely impacted

Place: Storytelling, ceremony, languages, & other traditions
Qualitative Research

• Qualitative Research is an inquiry-based approach that explores a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013).

• It involves interpretation (hermeneutics) and human experience (phenomenology) (Malterud, 2001).

• Philosopher Vico reasoned that the human knower can know only what has been constructed (Ultanir, 2012).
My View of Indigenous Research

• IR focuses on personal meaning for individuals that share a particular detailed experience within the context of indigeneity (Cargill, 2017).

• Like IPA (Smith, 2004), IR is a process for capturing how participants learn their lessons from their idiographic experiences through interpretation of phenomenology (Cargill, 2017).

• IR is rooted in tradition, survivance, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Cargill, 2017).
Tradition

❖ Honor of spirituality and relationships is key to respecting culture.

❖ Seek advice from Elders early and often. Elders helped me with permission and connections.

❖ Study history, stories, and any traditions of the participant Elders of the study prior to interviews.

❖ I met first with each participant Elders to introduce myself and describe the study and give them questions ahead of time.

❖ I gave a gift to each Elder as a thank you.

❖ I later met with each Elder and gave them an opportunity to add anything they forgot, or to delete anything they wished.
Survivance

Nelson (2006)—Survivance is an action about survival with creative development, growth, and evolution.

Vizenor (2008)—Survivance is an act of presence while rejecting absence, nihility and victimry.

Clifford (2013)—Heritage renewal and reconnection promotes a positive response to American Indian/Alaska Natives’ past.

Ramiriz & Hammack (2014)—Generativity is how tribal leaders promote and continue resilience and reenculturalization.
Phenomenology

- Hagel described phenomenology as dialectic, “thing-that-it-it-for-us,” where an individual becomes aware of a thing and the then becomes aware that the individual is aware of the thing.

- Husserl believed phenomenology emphasizes human experiences and its direct lived quality. Phenomenology is descriptive. Husserl established bracketing.
Hermeneutics and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

- Hermeneutics means to interpret.
- Phenomenology is descriptive. Hermeneutic phenomenology is interpretive.
IR is Idiographic

IR focuses on how an individual view’s their world related to an experience.

IR operates with:

- details for in-depth analysis, and
- understanding an experience through the perspective of the group of participants.
Some IR Roots

- Heidegger—“fore-conception” or prior experiences influences lived experiences.

- Gadamer—all understanding is hermeneutic. “Fusion of horizons” means that a human takes known understanding with experiences and culture, then translates or evaluates knowledge and experiences through language for new knowledge.
Question (again)

How do the tribal Elders experience sharing indigenous knowledge within their community?
A bit about the Elders
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Family</th>
<th>Number of Elders with Ties to the Language Family</th>
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<tr>
<td>Algonquin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athapascan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hokan</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Penutian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uto-Aztecan</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iroquian*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siouan-Catawban*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Outside of California
Elders’ Language Families

Algonquin, Uto-Aztecan
(Medicine man)

Yukian
(Gamekeeper, guide)

Penutian
(Educator, nature conservancy expert)

Hokan, Cherokee, Siouan-Catawban
(Conservationist, counselor)

Uto-Aztecan, Iroquoian
(Chef, Literacy volunteer)

Athapascan, Penutian, Uto-Aztecan, Yukian, Iroquoian
(Ethnobotanist)

Penutian, Hokan
(Anthropologist, curator)

Hokan, Uto-Aztecan
(Artist, flutist)
Emergent Themes

1: Saving indigenous languages
2: Elders mentoring experiential learning
3: Sustainable living with nature
4: Storytelling and traditional expression
5: Spirituality and relationships
6: Impact of technology on traditional knowledge
1: Saving indigenous languages

2: Elders mentoring experiential learning

3: Sustainable living with nature

4: Storytelling and traditional expression

5: Spirituality and relationships

6: Impact of technology on traditional knowledge
Theme 1:

Saving indigenous language

- Losing a language
  - Assimilation by forced moves
- Continually building language knowledge
  - Working to build vocabulary
  - Repeating prayers and stories
- Revitalization language projects
  - K-8, high school, tribal classes
- Immersion
  - Schools, camps, or trips
Theme 2:

Elders mentoring through experiential learning

- Elders’ previous experiences as learners
  - All but Elder Two described examples of learning from their tribal Elders.
  - As a teen and young adult, Elder Nine spent weekends with two Elders learning the language, learning about the culture, and learning to make regalia and traditional wares.
Theme 2 (continued):

Elders mentoring through experiential learning

- Elders’ experiences as mentors

  - “We don’t teach, we work together and people learn” (Elder Three).

  - Repeat until perfect (Elder Nine, Elder Seven). “You can’t teach something, just as you can’t learn it in just one time” (Elder Eight).

- Teach literacy and share/gain tribal knowledge (Elder Three).

- Hear stories and humor while learning by doing. “When it is in their hearts, they will remember it.” (Elder Eight)
Theme 3:

Sustainable living with nature

• Living simply with the land

  • “Survival skills are now called art. As they repeat more art skills, they learn just to survive, because weaving a basket, making pottery to eat and cook with, and making bow and arrows to shout our game are part of nature.” (Elder Seven).

• Food for health and medicinal purposes

  • “I know how healthy a vegetable is by maintaining certain protections into the ground” (Elder Four—about composting).
**Elders’ Sustainable living with nature**

1. **Regalia and traditional wares classes.** (Anthropologist, curator)

2. **Provides tribal language for plants and wildlife.** (Linguist)

3. **Composts and grows vegetables. Ocean fishes often.** (Conservationist, counselor)

4. **Cooks medicinal foods that she learned about from her grandmother.** (Chef, Literacy volunteer)

5. **Spiritual leader, collects herbs, wife is herbalist/ethnobotanist, comports.** (Medicine man)


7. **Classes, trips with nature, language learning, music, and art. Collects herbs. Wife is ethnobotanist.** (Artist, flutist)

8. **Nature conservancies, tribal culture. Worked on comparative study—traditional medicine v. Western medicine.** (Educator, nature conservancy expert)

9. **Nature Conservancies including medicinal plants, classes, comports, ethnobotany.** (Ethnobotanist)
Storytelling and traditional expression

- Oral Storytelling
  - “We have the histories and know what happened” (Elder Three). “Youth need to know the true history of California rather than what is presented” (Elder Eight).
  - Stories may prepare youth and adults for life experiences.
Theme 4 (Continued):

**Storytelling and traditional expression**

- Ceremony and dance might embody story- or history-telling or life event celebrations or stories of nature.
  - Elder Nine oversaw and performed in ceremonies, and oversaw regalia-making at and for a National Park roundhouse.
  - “You feel it in your heart, you feel it in your gut” (Elder Three).
  - “Dances meant things about life, forests, fish, grasses, and wild plants” (Elder Five).
Theme 4 (Continued):

**Storytelling and traditional expression**

- Music and art
  
  - “I try to keep art work historically correct” (Elder Seven). Each art subject is researched for it’s story or history. His flute playing has earned him performance tours in Europe and in the US. He also performs at schools.

- Elder Nine creates regalia and traditional wares for museums throughout the U.S., especially in western and mid-west states.
Elders’ Share storytelling and traditional expression

Spiritual leader, ceremonial participant, and now mentor or judge. (Medicine man) 5

Participates in Autumn harvest celebration. (Gamekeeper, guide) 6

(Linguist) 2

(Conservationist, counselor) 4

Tribal dancer in ceremonies. Participates in Rain celebration. (Chef, Literacy volunteer) 3

Ceremonial participant since young. Attends Spring rattlesnake and bear ceremony. (Educator, nature conservancy expert) 8

Attends ceremonies with grandchildren. (Ethnobotanist) 1

Oversaw and performed in ceremonies. Documented regalia and traditional wares. (Anthropologist, scholar) 9

Theme 5:

Spirituality and relationships

- Everything has spirit and is sacred. Everything is related (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

- Spirituality
  - Medicine means power or mystery or spirit.
  - Every living or unliving thing has power.
  - Spiritual healing helps physical healing (Elder Five, medicine man).
  - “It is not what is in your mind that affects you, it is what affects your heart and your spirit that inspires a person to do” (Elder Five).
Theme 5:

Spirituality and relationships (continued)

- Relationships

  - Honor and respect for food—after eating octopus Elder Four honors “the beautiful specimen out of its nature that has provided me life.”

- Honor and respect for family and tribe

  - Elder One honored her grandmother’s requests, even when Elder One did not understand the reasons of the requests.

  - Elder Six said he honors his tribe and ancestors by speaking his native tongue even though it is not perfect.

  - “The Indian way of life as welcoming, with kind words and food” (Elder Three)
Theme 6:

Impact of technology on traditional knowledge

• Positive aspects of technology and indigenous knowledge

  • Communication—used to convey language lessons, games, and vocabulary on computer and smart phones.

  • Documentation—used to save or preserve language. Elder Six suggested that youth consult with Elders and then make films to preserve tribal knowledge.
Theme 6 continued:

Impact of technology on traditional knowledge

• Negative aspects of technology and indigenous knowledge.
  
  • Youth may be more interested in technology and may not take time to spend with Elders (Elder Six, Elder Nine).
  
  • “Not everyone is computer literate or has computer access” (Elder Two).
  
  • Some individuals may not want their Tribal Elders’ words recorded.
Recommendations

• Change California Department of Education curriculum to include more truthful history of American Indians.

• Include tribal languages as a norm in education in areas near indigenous peoples, just as Spanish is taught.

• Infuse tribal knowledge and culture in every class in the California’s new tribal college. Infuse some tribal knowledge and culture in mainstream universities.
Future Research

• Elders in more secluded areas of California due to terrain may have other perspectives which could be researched.

• Interview more female Elders to explore their perspectives.

• Investigate where language revitalization is now progressing in order to determine the effect on traditionalism.
The tribal college continues to serve college and community.

❖ Agriculture — Recent college class, soils health (Amy Uber, Calif. Dept. of Agriculture).

❖ Agriculture — Small livestock class (Sky Road Webb, Robert Chavez)

❖ Cultural Preservation — fire starting with hand drill (Don Cross)

❖ Cultural Preservation — split stick rattle, also called clapper stick (Sky Road Webb)

❖ Cultural Preservation — abalone cutting and beading (Nas Mandujano)
D-Q Tribal University continues and is gaining momentum!

- Trades — Wood Working (Rick Gomez)
- Emergency Response—Tribal Community Response Management Training (Sky Road Webb and Michael Moreno)
- Educational Partnerships — Marysville American Indian Education Programs & Yuba-Sutter Archery Association (Pat Bennett). Identifying Wetlands (Sky Road Webb).
D-Q Tribal University continues and is gaining momentum!

- Educational Partnerships — Marysville American Indian Education Programs & Yuba-Sutter Archery Association (Pat Bennett). Identifying nature at camp (Sky Road Webb).

- Educational Partnerships — Engineers without Borders (Eric Porse, PhD)