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Otipemisiwak (selves-governing), Wâhkôhtowin (all-related) and Manito (good-vibe): A Métis Approach to Teaching and Learning About Place

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ABSTRACT

This article begins with a timeline of the autobioethongraphic method of research and discusses the tenants of the decolonizing Indigenous methodology (Smith, 1999). Given the criteria of the autobioethnography, I provide context of my Métis heritage and apply the Indigenous Métissage (Donald, 2012) method of research that brought forth the Métis wholistic motivational worldview based on otipemisiwak (selves-governing), wáhkôhtowin (all-related) and manito (good-vibe) (OWM) Nehiyaw concepts (Jarvis, 2024). Finally, I provide applications the K-12 educator may use for entry into a wholistic healing process that connects with the local Indigenous language.

Keywords

otipemisiwak, wáhkôhtowin, manito, non-anthropocentric, Métis, autobioethnography, métissage

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Methodology, Ethnography and Autoethnography

Research studies of 'other' cultures is called an ethnography, and they began at the onset of European colonization by explorers and clergy, and later to North American universites.These Western worldview ethnographers explored usually colonized lands such as Africa, the South Pacific, and North and South America. However, Edward Said (1978) highlighted that these Western views of 'others' were skewed because they engaged only their linear perspective on the cultures whose worldview was contextual. The Western lens sees things as separate, category, concrete, and objective, unlike the contextual lens, which sees things as connected, related, abstract, and subjective (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1998). The Western lens dismissed the contextual lens. Thereby, the early ethnographies were incomplete due to their monocultural analysis. As a result, the autoehnography emerged giving voice to Indigenous people and other marginalized ones to tell their own story. The tenet of 'auto'' is for personal experience, for 'ethno' is for a reflexive look at one's own culture and 'graphy' for research (Ellis, 2008) .

I employed an autoethnography method that focused mainly on my childhood memories in the Treaty Six Métis community of rural *manito sakahikan* (MS) (aka Lac St. Anne), which led me to Indigenous methodology. This ceremonial decolonizing process requires responsibility, respectfulness, and relational accountability to one's community/wâhkôtowin, including the animate and the non-animate (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Because of this sense of freedom/*otipemisiwak* from Western Imperialism, my autoethnography became our non-anthropocentric-autoethnography.

FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

Emergenece of the Métis Nation

The early 18th century saw the emergence of Métis ethnicity when the offspring of the Indigenous women, who followed Indigenous spirituality, and French fur traders, who held Catholic beliefs, began their *otipemisiwak*, *wâhkôhtowin* and *manito* (OWM) lifestyle.The 1885 Northwest Rebellion (NWR),arose a few years after the Canadian government began allocating scrip to the Métis instead of their promised province of Manitoba.With their failed atempt of so called 'civilized' negotiations with the Imperilst invaders, the Métis returned to their so called 'primative" governing they had establised for their buffalo hunts- a democractic system (Stanley, 1936). Métis leader, Gabriel Dumont, " in a

land where no established law existed and among a people who lacked political experience" began carrying on Métis democracy (p. 400). By 1875 the "law of the prairie was finally set forth in a code of twenty-five articles" (p. 407). Then in March of 1885 armed police, milita and soldiers representing Ottawa confronted the Métis government.

Following the war, the Métis were sanctioned and labeled traitors (Devine, 2004, pp.169-172) and at the same time, the government of Canada repudiated the terms of the Treaty through starvation. In lieu of treaty rights, Métis received scrip in money or landform (Adese, 2011). Many of my direct and collateral ancestors of Treaty Six and Eight received forms of scrip (in MS and other areas). However, ceding the land of their direct and collateral generations, I think, was an inconceivable Indigenous concept. Then, in 1982, came a new spiral to the circle when the constitution recognized the Métis as Aboriginals with treaty rights.

Emergenence of the Métis Worldview

Initially, I found in the literature that the communities of the Métis, who resided in rural areas on either scrip lands, settled lands, or on road allowances following the NWR, held an *otipemisiwak* (selves governing) and *wâhkôhtowin* (all my relations) worldview (Macdougal, 2006; Gaudry, 2014). *otipemisiwak* means people who govern themselves, free people, selves-reliant and the like (Devine, 2004). The Supreme Court of Canada solidified this identity in the Powley court case (R v. Powley 2 S. C. R. 207, 2003). *wâhkôhtowin*, means interfamilial connection of nurturing relationships with everything the animate and the inanimate. Since the Métis kept their marriages and trading among themselves in the 18th and 19th centuries, nurturing relationships within their community was of high value.

What is important to note about the Métis is that they resided as *otipemisiwak* and *wâhkôhtowin* people and held spiritual beliefs of their own. They are not to be confused with or expected to hold the same beliefs and values as the First Nations or Inuit.

Emergence of an Indigenized Self-Determination Theory

I learned by applying what Dwayne Donald calls *Indigenous Metissage*: "hold seemingly disparate standpoints together without necessarily choosing sides" (2012, p. 3). Thereby, I recognized an overlap of *otipemisiwak*and *wâhkôhtowin* with Ryan and Deci's (2000) three tenets (*autonomy, relatedness, and competence*) that form a Western motivational psychology called Self Determination Theory (SDT). Following this, I thought about what competence is from a Métis perspective.

Initially, I found a *nêhiyaw*perspective of competence, which was *ekichinantak,* and this privileged inter and intra-social emotional competence over the cognitive competence of SDT (Berry & Bennett, 1992; Jarvis 2017, 2019). Leaning on this identification because it resonated, I was guided to a more specific Métis orientated perspective: *manito*(Jarvis, 2021, 2024). Not only is this the root word that the political leader of the Métis, Louis Riel, chose for the promised province of the Métis in the late 19th century, but the word and its meaning came from the land of the promised province. It was the sound the *ojibwa* and *nehiyaw* heard when the wind, rock, and water came together at what is today called Lake Manitoba. For them, it meant spirit, “God The great positive force in the universe,” good vibe, mystery, and vision (Online Cree Dictionary (n.d); Donald, 2009; Jones,1905).

Moreover, although there was a spirit connection to the meaning of *ekichinantak*, *manito* was more closely associated with the spirituality and vibe orientation of competence I felt amongst the Métis MS community. For me, it was a vibe of unconditional love and acceptance while holding the feeling and a vision of this continued good vibe (Adese, 2014; Fiola,2015). The *nehiyaw* terms that represented a Métis worldview and a more holistic SDT became a wholistic conceptual framework: *otipemisiwak, wâhkôtowin* and *manito* (OWM). The Cree Dictionary definition for manito is “God The great positive force in the universe,” and I have added it. If we were to believe the story of the Indigenous coming here from the ice bridge, then for the “good vibe” to come with them, I think, I not too big of a stretch. I see vibe as the science of alpha waves.

For me, as a Métis, otipemismisiw (singular of otipeminsiwak) which means spoiled brat. I think it is/was our way to not be dogmatic in definitions. Words like good, positive, and so on, can be ambiguous since these meanings can differ for different people. Also, the meaning of God for Indigenous people may not be the same as for non-Indigenous, especially for Indigenous people who, when compared from an imperialist perspective, were bad. Maybe a peaceful vibe or force would be a way to describe the vibe/force I knew in our community, and it connects with peaceful alpha waves. Jones (1905) uses the word feeling.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Research Process Circles Again

Given this conceptual framework and an Indigenous Métissage momentum (Donald 2009, 2012), I brought in a Western qualitative analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and a freewriting process (Pennebaker, 1997) to my work as a way for meaning to manifest itself (Jones, 1905). For me,

Indigenous methodology and writing without inhibition (Pennebaker, 1997) followed by identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was the preparation for the Indigenous Métissage way of knowing that braids meaning, metaphor, and place. Kovach (2010) discusses that "some Indigenous researchers have incorporated a mixed method approach…[with] forms of thematic analysis" (p. 131), and she highlights that what is important is keeping it contextualized. I saw *wâhkôhtowin* as the theme(s)/metaphor(s)/voice(s), *otipemisiwak*as as their freedom to come forth, and *manito* as their needed agency.

K-12 Application

How do we bring this into teaching and learning in a K-12 environment with so much diversity and broad capacity levels (Jarvis, 2024)? The participants I have practiced with have predominantly been settler and migrant populations. If the class population has high Indigenous knowledge capacity, much of this may need modifications. Lastly, this can be undertaken in the classroom, but out in nature is preferred. What is foremost when engaging with Indigenous methodology is respectfulness for local ceremonies, language, stories, and circle practices, as well as relational accountability to our animate and inanimate relations in a place (Parent, 2022). Table 1 contains a list of activities for K-12 teachers, and a brief description of each activity follows.

Table 1

Activites for Teaching and Learning About Place

Classroom Activity	Description	Implementation
Ceremony	Preparing one's heart by acknowledging	Gift giving for knowledge depending on the custom of whose Indigenous land you are engaging in your activity
Circle	Relationship building	Story sharing of process of arriving at TRC and ways to build relationships

Connection	Indigenizing	Connecting with *otipemisiwak, wâhkôhtowin and manito* (these are *nêhiyaw* words so locating the local Indigenous language for these words is needed)
Indigenous Language Projects	Making local connections	This is not language learning, but more about making meaning and relationship connections

Ceremony

Ceremony can include hanging up judgements, land acknowledgement, gifts and circle. I have often begun with a suggestion to leave all judgment at the door before we begin, with a brief outline of a land acknowledgment, including how to do one, and an offering of tobacco to an elder or other guide (such as leaving tobacco at the trunk of a tree). Indigenous practices of a place and reason for the ceremony will vary. I talked with my Indigenous community about what kind of gifts to give, and they said to offer a heartfelt gift (you may want to talk with your Indigenous liaison). As a form of respect and relational accountability, what is vital is *an acknowledgment* that we are engaging with Indigenous knowledge and, more importantly, to *always acknowledge* that this is an Indigenous practice; this is part of what ceremony is about- remembering.

Circle

To begin, those unfamiliar with Truth and Reconciliation may need to be given a timeline from the first Residential school to TRC Day, and those unfamiliar with land acknowledgment may need to know the why and how of it. Once this context has been provided, the next step could be identifying what ceremony means for your context (the local context and one's context). Given that Indigenous ways are fluid and generally a social construct process, it begins by identifying what this means to your collective at this time.

Students can be put in small circle groups to discuss these (or as a large group, depending on the time allocated and number of particiapnts). Please keep groups equitable and remember the Indigenous are the marginalzed so equity for them would mean more of them per group. In the circle, participant can agree on an object to hold and pass around (or the facilitaor has one prepared), followed by sharing their connections with the object. They can go around again and provide answers

to a question posed, such as what ceremony, offerings, gifts, thanksgiving, and acknowledgments mean to them. Afterward, each circle can share highlights with the larger group. When doing the circle activity, if one does not want to speak, they do not, and if they want to talk for a long time, it is usually allowed—but respectfulness is the key. This is the ceremony of preparing your hearts.

Connections: otipemisiwak, wâhkôhtowin and manito (OWM)

After participating in circle groups, the class moves into the connection process. They can do any number of creative processes such as improv, drawing, talking to themselves, and so on, but the process I work with is free-writing and the ideas it brings forth:

> Pennabaker (1997), and Lapore and Smyth (2002) found the free-writing process was therapeutic for mental and physical health. The process involved confidentiality, and not worrying about writing mechanics, but to keep the pen moving. The research found that positive emotional, causal, and insight words were the most healing (Jarvis, 2024, p. 3).

Freewriting correlates with Palmer's idea of the hidden soul and providing a safe place for it to reveal itself (Palmer, 2009). Given freewriting instructions, participants begin to free-write for a minute--to start, but when they get more used to it, they can begin to do it longer. Once they finish freewriting, they highlight themes, main ideas or words that strike them. Then, they choose a word from the highlighting, write it on the top of the page, and iteratively go through the process again.

I have adapted this to have participants wander about individually and find something to connect with, such as a tree, plant, or rock. Then, they give the object a gift, such as tobacco, to offer thanks for its wisdom, followed by freewriting.

Indigenous Langauge Projects

Lastly, the word is looked up in 'first voices,' a website dedicated to enhancing Indigenous languages, and participants try to translate their dug-up meaningful words into the local Indigenous language. We reconvene in circle and reflect on the experience of being thankful for, struck by, reminded of, uncomfortable/ pleased with, and curious about. What I have done once the Indigenous word emerged is begin research on the history, meaning, and connections of the word (Jarvis, 2019, 2023). Other ideas could be expressive ongoing projects such as drawings, plays, stories, or vocabulary lists.

Q & A WITH SHARON JARVIS

Question #1

Teacher's Question:

How might a map be incorporated to support readers who may come to this with minimal background?

Sharon Jarvis' Response:

I suggest a medicine wheel might be the best way for this because if nehiyaw/Métis. It would be best to inquire with your local Indigenous group and seek permission to use it since it might not be local. However, explain it purpose and seek their adaptions.

Teacher's Question #2

Teacher's Question:

What scaffolds/extensions might be helpful for further understanding for readers?

Sharon Jarvis' Response:

Make connections with the concepts *otipemisiwak, wâhkôhtowin* and *manito*. Begin with Blooms taxonomy what are the definitions of the concepts can they be identified? Understand wâhkôhtowin is about social construction. *Wâhkôhtowin* is connected *otipemisiwak.* It is how to build the social construct by nurturing relationships with everything. *Manito* connects as it is believing and hearing of the voices of *wâhkôhtowin.* Find ways to make the applications, such as offering tobacco to a tree and seek it wisdom. Hear its wisdom. Apply its wisdom.

I am not suggesting the activities I provided are the way. I am suggesting they are a way.

Question #3

Teacher's Question:

What scaffolds might be helpful for teachers seeking to implement your ideas into K-12 classrooms?

Sharon Jarvis' Response:

There are many ways to scaffold and it depends on your context. For the early grades beginning with ceremony by hanging up judgments is probably not needed. However, making an offering such as a land acknowledgment would be a good start for ceremony. Probably a story book introduction would be helpful. Maybe offering thanks to the book for its knowledge. For circle provide a question and everyone take a turn providing an answer. Where are they from? Where are their parents, grandparents…from? For the connection they can draw whatever they want or the teacher could provide a guide—such as what was the most meaningful for you today. Afterwards in a circle they can name their picture. Find words they look up in the local Indigenous language. These answers can be projects for further study.

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