Applying Indigenous Knowledge to Methods of Indigenous Studies Inquiry

One can see the relationship of Indigenous Knowledge to the course on methods by referring to the “Discussion Topic Examples” located at www.u.arizona.edu/~lerma/students.html. Page 1 and page 2 are two examples of how concepts of organic and mechanistic can be displayed using the concept building method. Page 3 is an example of how carefully constructing a concept continuum will help explain the intersection of various concepts of Indigenous knowledge to western concepts and their impact on tangible objects such as land, rugs, funerary objects, food, or any other material object imaginable. Intersectionality in concepts of Indigenous knowledge are further elucidated on page 4 by using set theory to express overlap more visually. A combination of methodological approaches is exhibited on page 5. Concepts of Indigenous knowledge are plotted on a number grid. Mechanistic and organic can be viewed in relation to one another and any object imaginable that can be ranked according to its mechanistic and organic value can be arranged so as to strategically direct limited resources in protecting it from western consumption. Page 6 is list of all the possible outcomes and is consistent with future research utilizing game theory methods. The above examples build off of the following frame for the definition of Indigenous knowledge.

One of the most innovative, and admittedly, the most underdeveloped doctrines of Indigenous knowledge is the peoplehood matrix, (Holm 1989; Holm, Pearson et al. 2003). Generally, the peoplehood matrix holds that Indigenousness is tied to place territory, ceremony cycle, specific language, and sacred history. Holm, et al, go on to state, “Understanding the interrelationship of the four aspects of peoplehood is essential. No single factor is more important than the others and all necessarily support each other as well as a particular group’s larger sense of identity,” (Holm, Pearson et al. 2003). One of the main strengths, and criticisms, of the peoplehood matrix theory (or method) is that it is so broad as to encompass everything. Yet, the notion of peoplehood can be easily narrowed to fit any subset in Indigenous studies including Indigenous education. A superset of Indigenous education is Indigenous ways of knowing. Consider how Indigenous ways of knowing is tied to the four aspects
In many ways, the aspects of peoplehood give grounding to theories of American Indian education if the two ideas are connected. But first a detour. Consider how the theory of “concentric circles” and “The Asking” operate in isolation, (Cajete 1994). We know that The Asking, “... represents the first stage in the search for meaning and establishment of relationships around one's vision.”. As such, people are instructed to focus their dreams, intuition, and desires toward the objective contained in the questions they seek answers to, (Cajete 1994) pg. 187. Such instructions are hints which point to a relationship between ones dreams, ones intuitions, and ones desires. These three aspects of “Asking” are certainly related and overlap in much the same fashion that is used to describe the theory concentric circles. With the concept of “myth” serving as a miniature case study in concentric circle theory, consider how oral (perhaps sacred) histories are used to connect a time (the past) with a place, another time (the present), an audience, a story teller, and various objects (including the storyteller) which may be used to bring all of these dimensions together, (Cajete 1994) pg. 115-117. The link between “The Asking” and the metaphor of concentric circles assumes that all things in nature radiate a ring with can be observed by the individual as long as the perception of the individual is within range of the object radiating a ring. Therefore, one can see “The Asking” as a question which radiates from the individual. All that is being taught here is that the answer will radiate back to the asker in the form of dreams, intuitions, and desires and the asker must be cognizant of the radiation or the answer will be missed. What do “asking” and “concentric rings” have to do with peoplehood?

The easy answer would be that all things are related in a holistic fashion but I believe such an answer avoids the real issue. If Indigenous educators are to take control of the education of other Indigenous people, a clear direction is needed or we may end up with as many interpretations of the concept of “asking” and “concentric circles” as there are purchasers of the book explaining these concepts. The introduction of peoplehood to the question of Indigenous thinking will clarify and ground some of the unsettled questions regarding what it means to “think Indigenously”. Peoplehood
was first applied to the conflict between the Hopi and Navajo over land with an emphasis on why both tribes were thinking Indigenously about why they did not want to cede territory to the other tribe, (Holm 1989). Consider that sacred history, place territory, specific language, and ceremony cycles all radiate outward toward an individual. The four aspects of peoplehood speak to the individual in an attempt to teach that individual in a manner consistent with Indigenousness. The individual must ask that their dreams, intuitions, and desires are properly situated so that the question can be radiated towards these aspects. At the same time, the dreams, intuitions, and desires of the individual must be properly situated to receive knowledge as it is radiated to the individual. In general, we must understand that the questions will not be asked of one aspect. In turn, answers will not be projected from one source. When Indigenous educators keep these ideas in mind, the impact on an educational approach is clear.