

Generational Perspectives on Community Knowledge Transfer in Nipissing First Nation

Lisa Blenkinsop, MSc., University of Guelph, Guelph, ON

The findings of this research address the second core FishWIKS questions: **Can varied IKSs be used to improve the effectiveness of fisheries governance at national, regional, and local scales in Canada and internationally?**

A brief introduction on the specific issue being addressed

The overarching research goal of the Fish-WIKS project is to understand Indigenous Knowledge Systems within the context of fisheries in Canada and how this knowledge has been, and can be, used to enhance fisheries governance and improve fisheries sustainability, with the understanding that current fisheries decisions are made through a Western lens. My research project with Nipissing First Nation (NFN) explored: **(1) the historical and contemporary intergenerational transfer of community knowledge; (2) historical and contemporary barriers to the intergenerational transfer of Indigenous Knowledge; and (3) opportunities for the intergenerational transfer of community and fisheries knowledge.** Elders and youth from the community were invited to participate in a community-led workshop aimed at connecting generations and creating a space for knowledge-sharing and dialogue around the community fisheries.

Why it was important to address this issue

Nipissing First Nation is actively working to restore their community knowledge, traditions and ceremonies, with intergenerational knowledge transfer essential to the continuance of the Nipissing First Nation's Anishinaabe culture. Indigenous Knowledge and language revitalization is of critical importance to First Nation communities throughout Canada.

What are the key findings from the research

a) Community Knowledge

Table 1 provides a summary of the main generational differences of lifestyle and learning between community youth and Elders. In comparing the two generations, the youth lack contemporary mechanisms to learn from their Elders as the day-to-day interaction of the traditional ways in which knowledge has historically been transferred between Elders and youth in the Nipissing First Nation community have been lost. For Nipissing

First Nation, this disconnection is directly tied to the imposition of the Western/settler worldview and knowledge systems by settler governments on the Nipissing community.

| Elders | Youth |
|---|---|
| Anishinaabemowin (Ojibway language)spoken at home | English spoken at home |
| Multigenerational home; close relationship with community | Nuclear or single family home; families separated into different communities on reserve |
| Grandparent significant part of learning/knowledge transfer | Grandparents typically not part of daily life/learning |
| Knowledge learned through informal, daily, experiential, observation, story telling | Knowledge learned through formal structured activities in education curriculum, community ceremonies, cultural/language classes organized by Cultural dept. |
| Stages of knowledge learning based on age and ability | |
| Significant time spent on land and water | Minimal time spent on land and water |
| Fish and game significant part of diet | Fish and game nominal part of diet |

Table 1. Summary of generational differences

b) Worldviews Perspective

Indigenous worldviews are typically examined and compared to the Western/settler worldview using Western methods as a framework. By using the Anishinaabe medicine wheel as a conceptual framework, the community and settler worldviews can be examined from the perspective of the community participants and their experience with the Western worldview, using an Indigenous/community lens.

Figure 1 below details the community worldview as voiced by the Elder participants using an Anishinaabe medicine wheel. In the case of the Elder worldview, the medicine wheel quadrants are representative of the

spiritual, values, relationship and Anishinaabe identity components of the Nipissing community worldview.

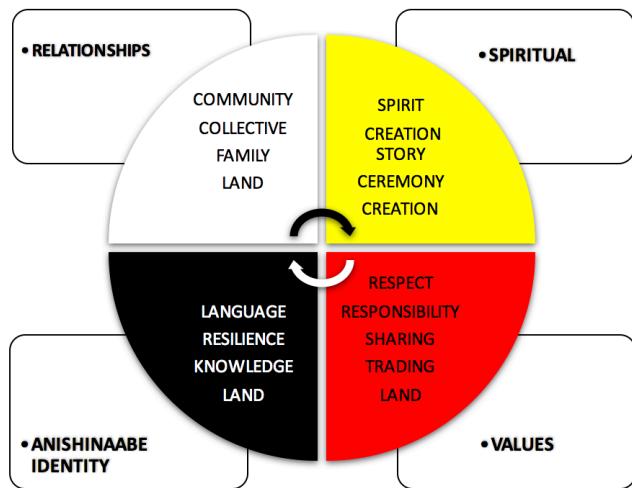


Figure 1: Nipissing First Nation Worldview conceptualized as Medicine Wheel

Figure 2 represents the Western/settler worldview. The four quadrants of this medicine wheel symbolize the economic system, values, relationships and technology characteristics of the settler worldview as experienced by the community, and expressed by the Elders and youth in the workshop. As with the community worldview, the medicine wheel enables us to see that quadrants are closely interrelated.

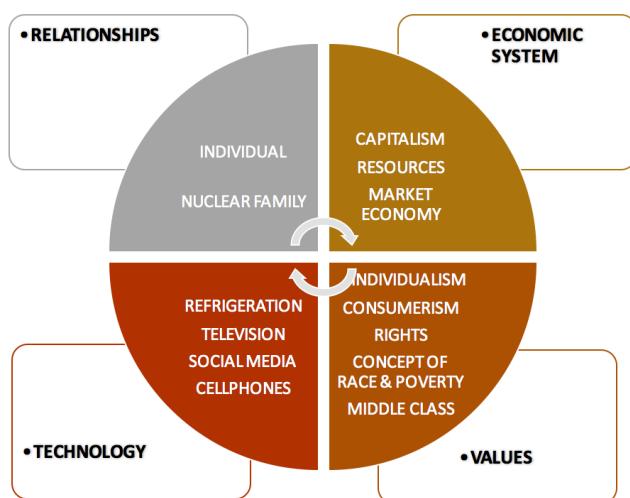


Figure 2: Western Worldview conceptualized as Medicine Wheel

What are some of the main policy Implications arising from the findings (e.g. for the government, for indigenous nations (as a whole, or individually), for other relevant stakeholders, etc.)

There has been a long history Indigenous Knowledge appropriation in resource management which creates tensions incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in resource management policy. NFN community participants distrust the Western methods of fisheries data collection as well as the decision-making process in fisheries management. This tension between knowledges demonstrates the complications involved in negotiating knowledge systems in the context where one knowledge system has held control and power for hundreds of years.¹

This research project illustrates that worldviews of Nipissing First Nation, and that of surrounding settler communities and governments, are distinctly different and can be seemingly incompatible. At the root of the fisheries conflict are the differing values and beliefs with which Nipissing First Nation and settlers approach the fisheries and fisheries knowledge. These cultural differences need to be acknowledged and addressed by both the Nipissing First Nation and settler communities/governments. Similarities or “common ground” between these knowledge systems should also be acknowledged and explored, to create understanding between knowledge systems and support fisheries management.²

Perhaps of most importance, inclusion of Indigenous worldviews and knowledges into fisheries policy is not an attainable goal unless Indigenous Knowledge is recognized as an equal partner to Western Knowledge and power differentials, and historical context, are acknowledged and addressed.

Support for this research was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Grant #895-2011-1007.

¹ Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A. (2005). Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Alaskan Native Ways of Knowing. *Anthropology and Education, 2005* (36), 8-23.

² Nadasdy, P. (1999). The Politics of TEK: Power and the “integration” of Knowledge. *Arctic Anthropology, 36*(1), 1-18.