

Personal Perspective Paper:

Knowledge + Perspective + Experiences + Connections = Future

Uvbi Osatohangbon

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INDG 128: Intro to Indigenous Knowledges

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Date: April 1st, 2022

“Positionality is the social and political context that creates a person's identity this includes multiple areas such as race, class gender, and many more” (Dictionary.com., 2021, para 1). I fall into the category of a black woman, living in what most people would consider a middle-class household, and even though I may have my own struggles I am physically able to do most things and therefore considered a physically abled person. This information describes what would be considered my identity and makes up only a small sum of my positionality. Often in our daily lives these little pieces of information tend to be overlooked and underappreciated but in indigenous communities, a person's identity and role in society are particularly important and are not underestimated. As a result of this when working with an Indigenous Community it is important for me to know about my own positionality as well as learn to appreciate the value the indigenous community places in a person's individual positionality. As was explored earlier in the course, positionality is more than someone's identity. It includes the communities you may be a part of whether it is a church, family, or neighborhood community. It can include special places like your home or things that made up an experience. All these things aren't always as clearly or nicely laid out as we'd like to believe, and it can result in a bit of a struggle for people. An example is that of Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaw scholar, she states:

“Home. Was it the land that was rich with the stories of my father and mother who travelled from one place to another, pointing to one landmark after another telling me about how it came to be a memory and a story to be told and retold until it landed fully in my memory? Home has come to have many connotations for me and to consist of many stories from many places where I have lived” (Battiste M., 2016, p. vi).

We can see the struggle she initially experiences identifying her home, and how it impacted her positionality. In an indigenous community, positionality is seen as a valuable tool that can help others and can give the knowledge to help a person face differences and biases experienced

daily. Learning to understand positionality from an indigenous point of view and the struggles that may have been faced in the process, it is important to keep in mind when working and interacting with an indigenous community. Another key vital piece in an indigenous community is accountability. Accountability refers to who or what one has responsibility over, how well or not a person is accountable will result in consequences. A person can be accountable for their job, family, or choices. Accountability can look different between people depending on their community or worldview. This means that accountability or what a person is responsible for could look different in an indigenous community. As a result, if not careful these different views could build biases that could negatively impact relationships. Acknowledging personal positionality allows for a good foundation to prepare to work and build relationships with the indigenous community by allowing a person to recognize their own biases before it causes a negative impact. Accountability allows us to further build relationships and make connections with the indigenous community. Positionality gives the knowledge needed to be accountable, and both accountability and positionality are vital to be able to build a good relationship with indigenous people.

“Interconnectedness is the principle that everything in the world is connected and that changes in one part of a system can affect other parts of the system.” (Studocu, 2023, para. 2). Indigenous worldview includes the belief that everything has a connection, every animal, person, or plant are connected to each other. Understanding the interconnectedness of relationships is vital to my future work as it allows me to learn the reasons and perspectives behind the decision-making process for many Indigenous community. For instance:

“When listening to a news item about a remote Indigenous community that is struggling... you might have asked yourself “why don’t they just leave?” They don’t leave because... the connection to community and land ties them to their culture, their ancestors, their

history as well as all the animals, and plants that live on that land” (Indigenous Corporate training, 2017, para. 2).

In the western world, interconnectedness is not always paid attention to, or it's neglected. Keeping in mind the principle that everything in the world is connected and therefore can affect another system will not just allow me to understand the reason behind Indigenous people's choices but will also improve my way of thinking and decision-process-making, resulting in an improved relationship with Indigenous people around me. This is important because being able to build relationships with people is a skill I will need in my future career and learning to understand Indigenous people better will make it easier for me to work with them and rebuild the trust that may have been taken away from past experiences.

Indigenous people in Canada experience struggles daily leading them to constantly fight for their right to gain access to basic Healthcare (Heather Yourex-Wes, 2022). Even with the increased attention to the health outcomes of Indigenous peoples, not much has changed. (Ray, L. et al, 2022). As a result, challenges remain when attempting to ensure adequate access to appropriate health care for indigenous people (Lavoie, J. et al, 2021), and Canadians, including medical professionals, feel empowered to engage in racist systems, despite not being aware of or understanding the racialized damages (Hantke, S. et al, 2022). With this knowledge and understanding that I have gained from the indigenous courses I have taken, in both my personal and professional life I can make the changes necessary in myself and environment to work in destroying the social stigma that has been created towards Indigenous people and build relationships and connections. One way I can start doing this is honoring treaties and acting according to what they stand for as well as learning how to work alongside indigenous people while showing respect, recognizing traditional territory, being appropriate, educating myself on the background of indigenous culture, maintaining patience, being open to listening and learning,

approaching them with a good mind and heart, being truthful about the things I don't know while always keeping in mind nobody is above the other and we are all working together using the things and skills we know.

There are many things I have learned throughout both indigenous courses some of the things I mentioned earlier in this paper like racism or treaties, but there are other things I learned that I did not mention. Starting from smudging and the medicine wheel, I learned the medicine wheel overall focuses on balance and well-being while smudging as well as being a way to communicate to the creator and acts as a reminder or prayer to do good. Just learning about these things will allow me to reflect on how I keep my own life balance and what areas I need to work on. Even though I do not identify as an indigenous person and therefore I do not practice things like smudging, I can still learn and apply the teachings that follow to my life for instance the importance of balance in life (Sarah Beady, Fleming College, personal communication, 2023). Another topic I learned more about was Indigenous ethics. Ethics is based on well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans should and should not do. I learned these standards can be different from person to person, and this will allow me to better understand the individuals around me. Knowing this will make showing empathy easier as well as allow me to learn from others and their standards. Black and Mcbean explained:

“That Western knowledge is derived through hypotheses, acquired through experimentation, and transmitted through written records, whereas traditional knowledge is derived from examples and anecdotes, acquired through daily interactions with people and the planet, and transmitted through oral narratives.” (Black K., McBean E., 2016, p.

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In terms of indigenous knowledge, I know that it may look different than what knowledge is usually visioned as, and because of this when interacting with Indigenous people in the future I will keep in mind that being different is not the same as being wrong and with this knowledge build relationships and connections. These are just two examples of things I learned and the impact they will have on my life. Some honorable mentions that I will include of things that I learned are Indigenous language and art, how it looks like to work with an indigenous community, the seven grandfather teachings, the meaning of dance, Indigenous protocol, Cultural appreciation, and cultural appropriation (Sarah Beardy, Fleming College, personal communication, 2023). All these are topics I learned from and will be able to use in my future career to build better relationships with everyone especially Indigenous people that I may encounter.

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