Converging Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems: Implications for Tertiary Education – a study by Jerome A. Hammersmith

1. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The researcher spent more than three decades working in various sectors of Indigenous development in several Canadian provinces and territories, as well as in Africa and New Zealand. These experiences left him seeking innovative options to the 'either – or' Eurocentrism masquerading as universalism approaches that he had witnessed nationally and internationally (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson 2000: 86).

Having witnessed the very real and documented psychological conflicts that have been created for Indigenous tertiary students by occupation and internal colonialism (Wright 1992: 3-14; 61), the researcher sought evidence-based options that could be forged (Ermine 2004: 1-5).

He believed that education could be a logical launching-pad for change (Freire 1993: 43-60). Further, he believed that options could and would be found by researching the potential convergence of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) Systems with Western Knowledge Systems (Dei 2000: 70-85).

The researcher presented a proposal for this study to the University of South Africa in late 2002. The proposal was accepted, a promoter and co-promoter assigned and the study began in early 2003. Following intensive and extensive research of the literature and intensive field work, the study was completed in late 2007.

This article describes the dynamics, the components, findings, conclusions and recommendations of that five – year study.

Initially, a few primary questions provided focus to the study:

1) Can locating the discourse between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in Saskatchewan in an abstract, voluntary 'ethical space' between them contribute to identification of their complementary diversities (Ermine 2004: 1-5)?

2) Can the convergence of these knowledge systems in creative interconnections in research, development and teaching enable each system to preserve its own integrity (Barnhardt 2005: 1-18)?

3) Can a collaborative, multi-venue (*portable*) institutional model for Indigenous tertiary education be developed (Wangoola 2000: 265-277)? This model will be

capable of being locally-customized. It will be intended for local development by Indigenous communities who wish to add a community-based delivery mode interconnected with others to the delivery of tertiary education for their citizens (Barnhardt and Kawagley 1999b: 1-21).

2. <u>LITERATURE REVIEW</u>

Literature reviews of Global Indigenous Knowledge literature and North American Indigenous Knowledge literature pertaining to tertiary education is converged with field research data from an Indigenous Saskatchewan Cree community in responding to the primary questions.

Global Indigenous knowledge literature (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 1-199, Dei, Hall and Goldin Rosenberg 2000: vii-277, Ermine 1995: 101-112 and 2004: 1-5, Odora Hoppers 2002: vii-285, Battiste and Youngblood Henderson 2000: 1-312, Esteva and Suri Prakash 1998: xi-144, Friere 1993: 9-183, Wangoola 2000: 265-277 and others) leads the study into an exploration of the relationships of these global findings with literature related to North American Indigenous tertiary education.

This latter review narrows the focus from a global perspective to North American, Canadian and Saskatchewan Indigenous tertiary perspectives (Grenier 1998: vii-115, Kirkness and Barnhardt 2001: 1-18 , Deloria and Wildcat 2001: v-164, Thaman 2003: 1-17, Battiste and Barman 1995: vii-340, Alfred 2005: 19-296, Poole 1972: 1-174, Ermine 2004: 1-5, Foulcault 1988: 37, Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 4, Trask 1999: 1-252 and others). This review also identifies examples that assist the theoretical and methodological framing of the study's perspectives, illustrating the potential for 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' approaches to converging Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. Critical differences in perspectives identified is the difference between the Indigenous perspective of students '*going*' to tertiary institutions and the institutional perspective viewing Indigenous students as '*coming*' to the institution (Kirkness and Barnhardt 2001: 2-7). The dilemma created for Indigenous tertiary students by these conflicting perspectives are explored. North American Indigenous tertiary literature reviews the impact of contrasting temporal and spatial worldviews as well as the place of Indigenous

knowledges' context, teaching and learning processes and Indigenous spirituality in Indigenous tertiary education (Deloria and Wildcat: 2001: 1-28). This literature provides evidence-based support for community-based Indigenous tertiary institutions as a complementary option to conventional mainstream tertiary institutions for the provision of Indigenous tertiary education (Barnhardt and Kawagley 1999b: 2-20).

3. <u>EMPIRICAL STUDY</u>

This leads the study into field work that contemplates questions relating to whether global and North American findings can be converged with the tertiary education goals of a Saskatchewan Indigenous community.

Field research uses a qualitative, ethnographic, sociolinguistic and phenomenological research design (Marshall and Rossman 1999: 1-141). Fifteen formal intensive interviews with Indigenous community Elders ('Elite' interviewees as defined by Marshall and Rossman 1999: 113), leadership, advisory staff, secondary teachers and other professionals yield data for analysis. Community-based interviews are supplemented and balanced by formal intensive interviews with respected Indigenous Elders from outside the community and with tertiary faculty experienced in teaching both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in conventional, mainstream tertiary institutions.

Field research results lead the study into asking whether these results can be converged with the results of Global and North American literature reviews in an overall data analysis.

Data analysis reviews and analyses how a convergence of global Indigenous knowledge data, North American Indigenous tertiary data and Field Research data provides positive, functional responses to the primary questions posed by the study. Data analyses providing positive responses to the primary questions and the sub-questions lead the study logically and directly into Summaries, Conclusions and Recommendations.

4. STUDY FINDINGS: Convergence of findings into five categories enables focusing on critical implications for a Canadian Indigenous Multiversity, the study's recommended model community-based tertiary institution:

❖ **Operational Characteristics:**

- The views of several researchers globally are compatible with this study's call to begin, in one selected Indigenous community, the creation of a Multiversity/Consortium of interconnected and interdependent community-based and community-controlled Indigenous knowledge centres.

- The study's data illustrate that such institutions can identify the potential place of Indigenous knowledges' context, teaching and learning processes as well as Indigenous spirituality in Indigenous tertiary education.

- Data identify the need for an Indigenous tertiary education system that *respects* Indigenous students for who they are, that is *relevant* to their view of the world, that offers *reciprocity* in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise *responsibility* over their own lives (Kirkness and Barnhardt 2001: 7-12).

- Data conclude that colonisation dispossessed Canadian Indigenous Nations of their knowledge and their voice (Seepe 2001: 1-10). It attributed to so-called 'traditional' thought and practices the qualities of superstition and irrationality. This study argues that prejudicial accounts in Canada must be deconstructed as part of the process of using Indigenous Knowledge as a *counter-hegemonic tool*.

- Indigenous Knowledge Systems is about opening crucial files that were closed in the chaos and violence of colonialism in which the cultural, scientific and economic life of the colonised was subjugated and crushed (Seepe 2001: 1-10). This study proposes to redress this, through Indigenous community-based tertiary institutions, by retrieving rich human perspectives developed over generations.

- Beginning in the 'ethical space' and recognizing that *Indigenous context* and *Indigenous teaching/learning* processes are more important than *Indigenous content* alone (Deloria and Wildcat 2001: 79-99), Indigenization is not antithetical to Western knowledge, but in fact, seeks to broaden the understanding of human knowledge.

❖ **Instructional Practices:**

- The long term intent should not create a false dichotomy of 'conventional/colonial/external' knowledge as bad and 'Indigenous/ marginalised/non-Western' knowledge as good (Dei et al 2000: v-17).

- One objective of this study is to rupture the present relationship between what conventional mainstream institutions call 'valid' knowledge and 'not valid' knowledge, arguing that 'Indigenous knowledges' are valid, legitimate ways of knowing that are both dynamic and continuous (Dei et al 2000: vii-xvi).

- The goals of tertiary education for cooperation and sustainable human development need to be clarified; new social contracts that can bind together democratic citizenship, social justice and capitalism need to be developed or strengthened and an Indigenous Multiversity's community-based tertiary campuses can provide optimal locations for the development and implementation of such social contracts (Odora Hoppers 2002: vii-21).

- Deculturation of dominated societies is shown by the fact that, increasingly, they voice their predicaments and aspirations solely in terms of the categories sanctioned by the invading culture (Seepe 2001: 1-10).

- This has entailed, at the limit, the asphyxiation of the recipient culture, and the loss of vitality and coherence of Indigenous cultural forms. Indigenous societies and communities have, under these conditions, been made to feel that there is little or nothing they have ever given to others (Seepe 2001: 1-10).

❖ **Curricula:**

- The study shows that a key curricular objective must be to bring Indigenous knowledges into the present as a contemporary means of constructing 'valid' knowledge about them. Indigenous knowledges are used by marginalised peoples to make sense of and live in today's world (Barnhardt 2005: 1-18).

- Patriarchal Eurocentrism continues to masquerade as universalism. In many academic circles, projects that seek to break the silence around the knowledge held by minoritised and subordinate groups are fiercely discredited (Odora Hoppers 2002: vii-22).

- Every day in many parts of the world, colonised cultures are being reconstructed and oral traditions are being recovered. Approaches to development can reclaim diverse local peoples' world views and must do so if we are to identify, generate and articulate new visions of social transformation (Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005: 1-20).

- Indigenous tertiary studies must focus on the impact of colonialism on Indigenous people's minds. This needs to be part of a larger critical effort to reflect on the nature, scope, and processes of colonialism both in Saskatchewan and globally (Thaman 2003: Abstract).

- IK is shared and communicated orally in Indigenous languages, by specific example and through culture. Indigenous forms of communication and organization are vital to local-level decision-making processes and to the preservation, development and spread of IK (Grenier 1998: 1-8).

- ❖ **Community Involvement:**
    - Reclaiming voice and reclaiming vision through community models are necessary processes for Indigenous Peoples to re-establish a sense of true identity and to be able to assert the Indigenous mind and discourse in ways that bring honour to the community (Wangoola 2000: 265-277).

    - Indigenous communities need to assure that tertiary education-decision making is made from a position of shared strength and wealth, not from a position of relinquishing language and culture in order to participate in the conventional mainstream (ANKN 1998: 3).

    - The Indigenous concept of community and its epistemological underpinnings represent spaces from which it is possible to re-theorise and legitimise universal models for ethical social relationships that are inclusive.

- The 'ethical space' can be a sacred space for human advancement, a refuge for the human potential, and a space of procreation for future possibility (Ermine 2004: 2-3). The principle imperative of a new Multiversity enterprise, spurred on by affirming the existence of the 'ethical space' is the realignment and shifting of the perspective, particularly from the Western knowledge perspective that dominates the current research order, to a new centre defined by symmetrical relations in cross-cultural engagement (Ermine 2004: 1-5).

- Condescension and the absence of flexibility toward other forms of knowledge in the conventional, mainstream academic institutions, claiming responsibility for generating, validating and disseminating knowledge even as the notions of human rights, of democracy, and of equality get writ large in constitutions, is both hypocritical and unacceptable (Odora Hoppers 2002: 19-21).

❖ **Tertiary Institutional Jurisdiction:**

- The need to disrupt conventional/mainstream/standard academic knowledge as seen by leading researchers is supportive of this study's call for Indigenous community-based complementary institutions, rather than the exclusivity of the existent conventional mainstream academy, to lead the convergence between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems (Dei et al 2000: vii-17, Deloria and Wildcat 2001: 1-99, Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 107-122, Barnhardt and Kawagley 1999b: 1-21, Esteva and Suri Prakash 1998: 35-128, Freire 1993: 43-124, Battiste and Youngblood Henderson 2000: 291-292 and others).

- The denial of access to Indigenous peoples in the formulation of educational policy constrains the use and development of Indigenous knowledge and heritage, confining education to a narrow positivistic Western scientific view of the world and the dominance of this world view threatens the global future (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson 2000: 171-250) .

- Not only is it important that Indigenous knowledge and heritage be preserved and enhanced; it is also important that that they are recognized as the domain of Indigenous peoples and not be subverted to the dominant culture in its conventional, mainstream academies (Battiste and Henderson 2000: 59-96).

- Data describe the widespread and continued exploitation of Indigenous knowledge and heritage by conventional/mainstream Eurocentric institutions and scholars as the final stage of colonialism, following the exhaustion of Indigenous peoples' tangible assets (Dei et al 2000: vii-17).

- The study argues that adoption of the 'ethical space' perspective within a consortium of an Indigenous Multiversity's collaborative, interdependent community-based campuses can provide credible forums for beginning to resolve these kinds of issues.

Representative Conclusions of the Study:

➢ The long history of failure of external efforts to manage the lives and needs of Indigenous peoples makes it clear that outside interventions by themselves are not solutions to the problems. Indigenous people, at the community level, have to shoulder a major share of the responsibility for carving out their educational future.

➢ While the Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan have continuing fiscal responsibility for Indigenous education, including the support of initiatives at forging a new future, governments need to recognize Indigenous jurisdiction, relinquishing control and providing support for Indigenous Nations to address problems in their own way.

➢ There also is a need to go beyond critique to reclamation, creating complementary bridges, managed by Indigenous communities, between the wider Indigenous community and conventional, mainstream academia. Such bridges can provide genuine alternatives to existing discourses on development, development-education, and other sectors of adult learning.

- Locating the discourse between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in a voluntary abstract 'ethical space' between them can contribute to identification of their complementary diversities, converging them in creative interconnections in research, development and teaching relationships that also enable each system to preserve its own integrity.

- The perspectives of this study, although pluralist, advocate an approach to Indigenous tertiary education rooted in Indigenous thought and knowledge.

- Indigenous cultures, values and languages must be the basis for reaching out and interfacing with other peoples and their knowledges.

- This can effectively be done within a research-based model based conceptually on adaptations of characteristics of all of : 1) Mpambo, the Afrikan Multiversity (Wangoola 2000: 265-277); 2) the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI) Barnhardt and Kawagley 1999: 1-12); 3) the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC 2000: 1-4)); and 4) the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC 2005: 1-6).

- The model is intended to provide means by which Indigenous communities can focus, individually and collectively, on tertiary education reforms that increase the level of complementarity and interconnectivity between their own Indigenous and imported Western knowledge systems.

- A new tertiary institution, a Canadian Indigenous Multiversity made up of a consortium of collaborative, interdependent Indigenous community-based campuses, guided by a philosophy for rekindling the Indigenous spirit and driven by a worldview at the centre of which is a closely intertwined trinity of values – Spirituality, Development and Politics, can forge a viable complementary option in Canadian Indigenous tertiary education (Wangoola 2000: 265-277).

- With these considerations in mind, individual Indigenous communities can develop their own collaborative, interdependent models as campuses within a Multiversity Consortium. Such multi-venue models can serve as catalysts to foster reforms focusing on increasing the level of interconnectivity and complementarity between local Indigenous knowledge systems and imported Western knowledge systems.

> ➢ A Multiversity can effectively confront the differing perspectives between Indigenous students 'going' to tertiary institutions and those institutions which view them as 'coming' to the institution. These conflicting perspectives can be eliminated by a Canadian Indigenous Multiversity, converging collaborative, interdependent community-based campuses which lead partnerships with conventional, mainstream tertiary institutions.

Establishment of a Multiversity's Language of Articulation:

Establishment of a Canadian Indigenous Multiversity resulting from and consistent with this study's data analyses would mean that expertise on Indigenous Knowledge Systems could be put directly to task in support of various initiatives in policy formulation. In other words, such an Indigenous Knowledge Systems project could enable development of theoretical and conceptual frameworks (a language of articulation in this field), but at the same time help in developing operational strategies for inputting into policy development. This would demonstrate that research could directly strengthen capacity-building for policy work (Wangoola 2000: 265-277, Odora Hoppers 2002: 11-22).

The recommended initiative, under Indigenous leadership, could aim at fostering understanding of the interfaces among language, culture, values, science, technology, and sustainable human development. It could also aim at fostering understanding of the comprehensive development of human, renewable, material and scientific resources. It could identify these in a manner that gives cognizance to the wisdom and authenticity of traditional Indigenous practices, institutions, and knowledges. Moreover, it could provide a new basis for the continuing generation of Indigenous knowledge and new consciousness in protecting Indigenous intellectual property and other rights that have been taken for granted for so long.

The study recommends that such an institution be located within a critical humanistic and post-positivistic frame of reference, keeping the human being firmly at the centre of the activity, fully aware that the technocratic approach to evaluations contributes to the domestication of learning, and that what usually passes for value-neutrality in reality can conceal powerful but hidden conservatism (Odora Hoppers 2002: 11-22).

The notion of comparison in this study therefore seeks to bring perspectives and

experiences from different contexts into a critical reflective dialogue on the tenets of thinking and practice. This study's data argue that this can be done with a view to reconstructing or deepening the functioning of those tenets at the ontological, epistemological, and sociological levels (Odora Hoppers 2002: 19-21).

The study reviews some of the distinguishing characteristics of Indigenous education strategies that have been successfully implemented in Fourth World settings globally (Barnhardt 1991: 1-36). Through interviews with Elders as well as Social/ Cultural/ Political leaders from Big Island Lake Cree Nation and others, the study records community views with respect to tertiary education goals and standards. Findings from global and North American Indigenous tertiary education initiatives are integrated with stated Big Island Lake Cree Nation goals, yielding Big Island Lake Cree Nation's proposed cultural adaptations for tertiary education. This enables the study in its conclusion to recommend its earlier analyses and descriptions of a Canadian Indigenous Multiversity Consortium model. The model is recommended as potential guidance for Indigenous communities seeking to construct educational enhancements to the dominant, conventional, mainstream, Western-style institutional model.

The study, with the permission of Hon. Paulo Wangoola, *Nabyama* of Mpambo - the Afrikan Multiversity in Kampala, Uganda, uses Mpambo as a model when it recommends a Canadian Indigenous Multiversity. *Nabyama* means 'the one who is entrusted with the communities' strategic secrets, for use for the progress and advancement of the community – one who can never divulge the secrets of the community to strangers or enemies.' Wangoola's permission can be taken as a measure of the confidence in as well as expectation held for this study and its potential linking impacts (http://www.blackherbals.com/Mpambo_the_African_Multiversity.htm).

Recommendations: The study recommends that:
  ➢ Guided by the study's data analyses, and findings, Big Island Lake Cree Nation establishes the initial campus of a Canadian Indigenous Multiversity at Big Island Lake Cree Territory, Saskatchewan, Canada.

- Beginning two years following establishment of its own campus, Big Island Lake Cree Nation take a proactive lead role in identifying and assisting Indigenous communities desiring to develop campuses of the Canadian Indigenous Multiversity by establishing their own interdependent distinct community-based tertiary institutions.

- Saskatchewan, Canadian and other Indigenous communities use Big Island Lake Cree Nation as a model and a consultant in developing their own campuses of Canadian Indigenous Multiversity.

- Two years following Big Island Lake Cree Nation's start-up, communities' interests be focused through attendance at an initial Canadian Indigenous Multiversity Conference, to be the first of on-going annual conferences hosted by the Big Island Lake Cree Nation campus during the third-year following its start-up; with the locations of subsequent conferences to be selected annually at the conference being held.

- At this first conference, those Indigenous communities, institutions, Indigenous, Territorial, Provincial and Federal government agencies, corporations and organizations that have agreed to become *Fellows, Associates, Partners* or *Patrons* of the Canadian Indigenous Multiversity attend as full delegates, participating in decision-making, while others are welcomed as observers.

- The Multiversity's vision with respect to the development of individual interdependent campuses, have each of them become part of a consortium of Indigenous community-based tertiary institutions, secure in their individual identities, where lifelong ways of learning and knowing are respected, honoured and practiced.

- In the process of development of the consortium of interdependent campuses, one consideration, though not the only, of the Multiversity be a mission such as: '*The Canadian Indigenous Multiversity Consortium will nurture, foster and protect Indigenous peoples' right to their own particular identity through the collective, cooperative and mutually beneficial efforts of collaborative campuses, while sharing and promoting Indigenous-based initiatives to maintain and perpetuate our ways of knowing.*'

- In respect to values adopted by the Canadian Indigenous Multiversity Consortium in developing individual campuses, institutional values should respect the autonomy of member venues and communities. The Multiversity must be clearly committed to the decolonisation of Indigenous communities, minds and souls.

- In the development of individual campuses, the Multiversity adopt goals that reflect:
  - Promotion of Indigenous control of Indigenous standards of excellence in education through support of Indigenous accreditation processes and mechanisms.
  - Having effective strategic leadership to guide the organizational development and maintenance of the Canadian Indigenous Multiversity and its individual campuses to meet their identified needs.
  - Building and maintaining partnerships in the development and monitoring of appropriate legislation, policies, and regulations for Indigenous adult and tertiary educational programs and institutions.
  - Developing and maintaining a strong secretariat for effective communication and organizational management.
  - Developing and providing a range of programs and services that respond to the ongoing and changing needs of the Canadian Indigenous Multiversity Consortium members.
  - Developing and pursuing economic resources that will lead to long-term financial self-reliance of the Canadian Indigenous Multiversity Consortium and its members.

- In applying Global Experiences, the Canadian Indigenous Multiversity:
  - Assure that it is characterized as a new, innovative Canadian Indigenous tertiary educational reform initiative that can evolve with the support and assistance of Indigenous educators currently working in the existing conventional mainstream tertiary education system, coupled with the Indigenous Elders who are the culture-bearers for the Indigenous knowledge system.

- Assure that its efforts are supported by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Saskatchewan Ministry of Learning, Saskatchewan universities, technical schools colleges and corporations. Collectively, these agents of change can constitute a considerable set of 'attractors' that can serve to reconstitute the way people think about and do Indigenous tertiary education in Saskatchewan and throughout Canada.
- Assure that it utilize The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium and the Mpambo - Afrikan Multiversity as models that can guide the 'attractors' through an on-going consortium of locally-generated, self-organizing activities that produce the 'organizational learning' needed to move toward a new form of emergent and convergent system of tertiary education.
- Assure that the overall configuration of this emergent system is characterized as two interdependent though previously separate systems being nudged together through a series of initiatives maintained by a larger system of which they are constituent parts.

Concluding Remarks

- ➢ Conventional/mainstream institutions often argue that once they have included Indigenous program *content* managed by Indigenous people, a few reforms will be enough to turn them into instruments that will serve Indigenous peoples and communities effectively. Such arguments ignore *Indigenous contexts* and *Indigenous teaching/ learning processes* while embracing the Western modernization development paradigm. The study calls for a Saskatchewan-based Indigenous Multiversity that while pluralist and open to all knowledges, is rooted in Indigenous thought and knowledge. It can be the basis for reaching out to and interfacing with other peoples and their knowledges.
- ➢ The study sees the 'ethical space' in an Indigenous Multiversity as an optimal location for confronting and reaching out to all knowledges while resolving *content/context/teaching-learning process* issues. The Multiversity would be a

multi-venue consortium of collaborative Indigenous community-based tertiary campuses partnered with conventional/mainstream professional and technical institutions and colleges.

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