

## Chapter

# A Weaving of Knowledges to Stand on Their Own: Assessing the Braiding of Indigenous Knowledge in Western Academia in Twenty-First Century Reconciliation Canada

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## Abstract

Academia is undoubtedly a colonial space. Understanding the foundations of how academia operates and thrives as a colonizing entity that suppresses or alters Indigenous epistemologies is crucial before institutions can fully grasp decolonization and work with and for indigenous peoples and their lands. Current Canadian trends in reconciliation aim to support the voices and knowledges of indigenous peoples through the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, thus guiding the Indigenization strategies of many universities, including the U15 Canadian Research institutions. This chapter embraces indigenous orality practices and integrates roundtable discussions to examine the concept and practice of “braiding knowledge.” We stress questions relating to what collaboration with and for indigenous peoples looks and feels like. Braiding knowledge cannot become another buzzword driving the momentum of indigenous research in colonial institutions; we reflect critically on whether this work is possible or if it merely repeats harmful appropriation by cherry-picking Indigenous knowledge.

**Keywords:** indigenous ways of knowing, braiding knowledges, true collaboration, reconciliation, Canada, indigenization, decolonization

***We are constellations***

*There's a battle ahead,  
but we've had instructions for how to survive  
buried within us marrow deep.  
We are here – tip of the spear,  
armed with sacred knowledge.  
For our ancestors laid out instructions  
among the stars for how to love fiercely.*

*We are constellations,  
embodied representations  
of what it takes to heal this world.  
The powers that be have always tried to break us  
by threatening our existence,  
taking our children,  
sterilizing our women,  
removing us from our homelands,  
creating an epidemic  
where our people go missing and murdered.*

*They have always tried to steal  
what we were born to protect:  
our lifeways, languages,  
prayers, culture, relatives,  
and songs. The very land  
each human being walks on.*

*We stand here together  
with moccasins on the ground.  
Braiding ourselves together like sweetgrass,  
three strands: freedom, justice, and healing.  
These are our demands.  
No one is free until we're all free.*

*The actions we take now  
are making medicine bundles  
for future generations to find.  
We are tip of the spear –  
aligned, shooting precise,  
and straight into a future  
where our Mother Earth and all her inhabitants  
are treated as the sacred.*

*– Tanaya Winder*

## **1. Introduction**

Robin Wall Kimmerer is a Potawatomi botanist best known for developing the idea of braiding knowledge and how each braid strand is strengthened by many strands being woven together [1, p. x]. Therefore, Braiding Knowledges is

a relational framework that weaves together Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, which is a purposeful action since each braided strand (knowledge system) is strengthened by being brought together. Using two knowledge systems is not a new framework. For instance, Etuaptmumk, or the Two-Eyed Seeing approach developed by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall of the Eskasoni First Nation, brings together Indigenous and Western worldviews for decision-making. Elder Marshall stated that Two-Eyed Seeing is the ability "to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" [2, p. 335]. Another example that utilizes two different knowledge systems is the concept of the Kaswenta, or Two-Row Wampum treaty, where the two systems operate in parallel with each other in a peaceful coexistence. The Kaswenta teachings encourage researchers and communities to work through their diversities and to establish mutual respect, trust, and finding common ground [3, pp. 1–2]. Braiding is significant in our time and place as it leads many university initiatives. We begin this chapter by situating ourselves in relation to one another and to the communities, lands, waterways, and responsibilities that shape our collective work.

Máykʰ, Tân'si. Our collective authorship as community and academic authors reflects our commitment to relational accountability and honoring Indigenous Knowledges and voices. Affirming Indigenous protocols, we acknowledge the ancestral and traditional territories of the Indigenous Nations where we live, work, gather, and carry out our scholarship. This chapter was written collectively on the territories of Nêhiyaw (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Métis, Nakoda (Stoney), Dene, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), and Anishinaabe (Ojibway/Saulteaux) – lands that are now known as parts of Treaties 6, 7, and 8, as well as the homeland of the Métis, the traditional homelands of the Cui Ui Ticutta (Pyramid Lake Paiute), and on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded lands of the K'wík'wəłəm (Kwkwetlem), Səlil'wətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), Sk̓w̓xwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), X'wəłk'wəyəm (Musqueam), scəwəθən (Tsawwassen), and Coast Salish Peoples. As we write in a virtual space, it is critical that we take intentional actions to advance reconciliation and indigenize our online environment by acknowledging the relationships with Indigenous peoples and the communities where our connections and responsibilities lie.

By acknowledging relationships, we can understand how indigenous knowledge can be shared throughout generations and with other communities. Wâhkômiwêw, *how he/she relates to others through the ties of kinship*, emphasizes what it means to be connected to place, individuals, and communities. This is particularly important to understand how Indigenous and nonindigenous peoples can come together to collaborate in academic spaces, but also how wâhkôhtowin, *being related to each other*, through miyo-wîcihiwêwin, *good relations*, can build knowledge outside of our own peripheries. We introduce ourselves in the direction of the sun (clockwise), but you will notice how relations extend through a commonality of one individual.

Dr Natahnee Winder is a citizen of the Duckwater Shoshone Nation. On her mother's side, she is Pyramid Lake Paiute and Shoshone, and on her father's side, she is Navajo and Southern Ute. She grew up on the Southern Ute reservation. Dr Winder is an Assistant Professor at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia and completed her PhD at The University of Western Ontario (UWO). Samantha Dancey grew up along the border of Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 and is a settler with Ukrainian and Northwestern European ancestry. She has a background in molecular

biology and is currently completing an MA in Sociology at the University of Alberta (U of A) under the supervision of Dr. Paulina Johnson. Darian McCullough comes from Coast Salish territory on the west coast of British Columbia. Her mother is Métis, and her father is Irish and French Canadian. She is the Blue Sky Research Lab's (BSRL) Research Coordinator. Dr. Patsy Steinhauer is from Saddle Lake Cree Nation and is a faculty member in the Faculty of Education at the U of A. Senyuan Chen comes from Quan Zhou, a southeastern city in China's Fujian province. He is Han Chinese and is also completing an MA in Sociology under the supervision of Dr. Paulina Johnson. Dr. Noella Steinhauer is the elder sister of Dr. Patsy Steinhauer, a retired faculty member from the Faculty of Education at the U of A, and a member of Saddle Lake Cree Nation. Dr. Paulina Johnson is from Samson Cree Nation in Maskwacis, Alberta. Samson Cree Nation is a sister-nation to Saddle Lake Cree Nation. She is an Assistant Professor in Sociology at the U of A and Co-Research Director of Braiding Knowledges Canada (BKC). Dr. Johnson directs the BSRL at the U of A and completed her PhD at UWO. Tanaya Winder is Dr. Natahnee Winder's sister, a citizen of the Duckwater Shoshone Nation, and is Pyramid Lake Paiute, Navajo, and Southern Ute. Marieliv Flores Villalobos is from Trujillo, Peru – a city in northern Peru. Marieliv is mestiza (of Indigenous and Spanish ancestry) and is currently a PhD student in Public Health at the U of A, working with Dr. Johnson and Dr. Denise Spitzer. Paul Johnson is from Samson Cree Nation and is Dr. Paulina Johnson's father. Dr. Diana Moreiras Reynaga is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the U of A. Originally from Mexico, she is mestiza and trained in anthropology and archeology. She met Dr. Johnson in graduate school at UWO. Kimberly Bruno is a research assistant at the U of A, a cousin and best friend of Dr. Johnson, and a citizen of Samson Cree Nation. She was raised in the Mountain Cree Camp near Hinton, Alberta. As is evident in our introduction above, our connections extend through relationships with Dr. Paulina Johnson from her time at UWO up to the present day through research relationships at the U of A. Relationships are fundamental to reconciliation in academia, and we emphasize these connections here to show the importance of community.

Currently, in Canada, specific mandates through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) release of the 94 Calls to Action highlight an openness among universities to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into their structures and foundations for reconciliatory initiatives. Though great in theory, in practice, this reality often falls short. As scholars working within Indigenous methods and research, we came together to address the role of reconciliation through the current concept of "braiding knowledges". Rather than write an article addressing the tensions and benefits, we believe that an open and honest dialogue would be beneficial for all parties involved. And so, our conversations led us to ask: *Can Indigenous Knowledges be truly braided within Western academic institutions without being diminished, appropriated, or extracted?* This chapter details our examination of the academy as a colonial space and how Indigenous Knowledges can be ethically and authentically braided within Western academic frameworks, or whether such efforts risk reproducing the colonial hierarchies they seek to unsettle and transform. We were engaged with this topic through a roundtable discussion and focused on six main questions between community and academic scholars, along with opening and concluding poetry for reflection.

## 2. The meaning of braiding knowledges

Braiding Knowledges cannot shift away from or dilute the impacts of ongoing settler colonialism and assimilation efforts imposed on indigenous peoples. Therefore, researchers must be careful when framing Braiding Knowledges as “integrating” knowledge systems, and the word “integration” should be avoided [4, p. 245]. When Indigenous and Western knowledges are “integrated,” it erases the ongoing settler colonialism, racism, and assimilation that Indigenous Peoples experience. It must be firmly understood that Indigenous Peoples received unique instructions from their Creator to steward the land and water ways in their respective territories, which leads us to our first question: ***What does Braiding Knowledges mean to you?***

**Paulina:** I am one of the Co-Research Directors of Braiding BKC, which works to bring together Indigenous Knowledge within the Natural and Applied Sciences. It allows Indigenous Knowledges and Ways of Knowing to expand biology, botany, engineering, and similar fields in the sciences, enabling the exploration of different foundational worldviews, and that is what it is supposed to be. Braiding Knowledges means not forcing these two different theoretical and philosophical dichotomies together; it is about allowing Indigenous Knowledge to come to the forefront of academia. For the longest time, Indigenous Knowledges have been sidelined, marginalized, and kept as alternatives. Braiding Knowledges means that you are working together to support Indigenous Knowledge in being seen as critical. It is informative and allows the voices of Indigenous People to be seen, heard, and valued. One of the biggest misconceptions is that we can properly bridge Indigenous Knowledges into a colonial system that’s not designed for us. Braiding Knowledges must examine all the intersections of racism, sexism, discrimination, and socioeconomic conditions that are related to colonization. This is fundamental in this work before we can integrate Indigenous worldviews into a system that upholds whiteness, oppression, and dominance. Braiding Knowledges is about allowing community members, who may not have Bachelor’s degrees or PhDs, to stand as authorities, ***because without community knowledge, we do not have research.***

**Natahnee:** Indigenous Knowledge Keepers’ perspectives and teachings are at the forefront. It’s about recognizing that our Knowledge Keepers have PhDs. It may not be in a Western sense, like ivory tower education, but they already have PhDs. For individuals who are in academia, we do not have their knowledge. Universities really need to recognize and privilege Indigenous epistemologies. I think universities that truly want to understand Indigenous Knowledges need to create positions or communities of practice for Elders/Knowledge Keepers to come in and teach; they don’t need to have a university degree because they are already teachers within our own communities.

**Samantha:** I find that there’s a lot of inconsistency with how it’s used. Braiding is often used interchangeably with weaving. Two-Eyed Seeing includes both Indigenous and Western perspectives, but Braiding introduces a third strand. BKC has a model that uses ethical space as the third strand to acknowledge the colonial history and positions of power in the context in which both systems exist. As someone who comes from a Western science background in biology, I never learned about Indigenous ways of knowing. The idea of Braiding provides a way for people with an education like mine to grasp why incorporating Indigenous Knowledges is important.

**Tanaya:** When I think of Braiding Knowledges, as a community-based artist and musician, I try to weave my Indigenous practices and culture into how I teach poetry and make music. I think of that word "braiding." Those of us with long hair who know how to braid understand that you need three strands that are about the same thickness and width. If you're braiding in a rush and one strand is thick while the other two are not, then you are not going to have a nice-looking braid. I think that whatever Knowledges we are braiding, we must make sure to give all those subjects, people, or groups equity and equal space, equal opportunity, and equal value – making sure it is equitable so it's a strong braid. ***Braiding with intention.*** If you have ever tried to braid your hair really fast or sometimes too loosely, that braid can come apart. Braiding Knowledges means having that intention and awareness about what you're braiding and why. Because all that energy and medicine go into things. Whether you are braiding sweetgrass or your hair, everything has a purpose. Everything can be a ceremony. Sometimes Western academia or the Western world forgets to have intention and slow down. In the same way, when we are together, and do our introductions and share – that is part of laying that strong foundation. Knowledge has been a weaponized word before, where only certain people hold "worthy" knowledge. Braiding Knowledges means starting from that place of grounding and clarity, holding ceremony, holding prayer, to intentionally weave together different things with purpose, where we are building together.

**Marieliv:** When I first came here from Peru, I started hearing about Braiding Knowledge and learning more about Indigenous Knowledges. I thought at first that it was a set of different knowledges that you could put together. As I got more involved in the culture and in ceremony, thanks to Dr. Johnson and her family, I reflected more on the intention of Braiding Knowledge per se, and how I am situated within it. Braiding Knowledge means taking the moment to really understand what I am doing, how I am doing it, and why I am doing it. I can get moments of being uncomfortable, or realize it is better to be quiet and learn more. I've come to understand that we cannot just bring two different systems – Western and Indigenous – together and claim we are doing something together from that, because we are literally speaking two different languages, right? It means taking the moment to think about the intention and recognizing the limits of what I can understand for now.

**Patsy:** Braiding Knowledges in Nêhiyaw thinking speaks about the process and the ethics driven by the reality of interconnection and holism that are present in our ontological descriptions. It is a three-part process that is in our language and is a responsibility to understand the word. We framed it within the idea of tamowin, in that three-part concept of nisitohtamowin, *which means to understand or to come to that understanding.* To come to that understanding, your mind, body, and spirit must be present and synchronously engaged. Braiding Knowledges is about what a good friend of mine, Manulani Meyer, talks about holographic epistemology. The concept of mind, body, and spirit is present in all ancient cultures, shaping our ongoing understanding. She explains that the intellectual aspect – the knowledge – is usually where we focus. Knowledge relates to intellect, or the mind, as it involves knowing and understanding. When we examine this from an intellectual perspective, it is about the mind grasping knowledge. However, as we engage with this knowledge, we begin to experience and internalize it.

Lakota Elder scholar uncle Lionel Kanua said our body will run through our DNA, and it takes time for it to be in our blood memory. This is ancestral knowing, and then it links with that spirit or the notion of understanding. I'll draw upon my uncle Reuben

Quinn in his book to emphasize our Cree law structure, where he talks about the first four laws. Loving is the first law, and it is intentional to love each other – not the notion or law of love like *sâkihitowin*. It's more like *sâkihiwêw*, *to be loving to each other*, and then there is *sâkihitowak*, *to love **one** another*. *Wîcihtâtok*, *to help each other*, is the second law, followed by being joyful and then being strong. Those first four laws demonstrate the processing that is required for us to live it in that human body.

This means that the DNA within us changes as we learn within those laws, but it is also carried within us unknowingly. This means that, for us to understand, we must learn in an experiential way, connecting our mind, body, and spirit, which then builds upon the knowledge our DNA carries through blood memory for our spirit and selves to fully understand.

Our elders often speak about this notion of working through the three-part process rigorously. It's guiding us on how we are to think about things or reflect deeply, to arrive at an understanding or a process. Braiding Knowledges delves deeply into a philosophical Indigenous thought reality, honoring its holism. It's about respecting simultaneous, synchronous reality and honoring our whole selves as we engage in thought – mind, body, and spirit –to attain knowledge, knowing, and understanding.

**Senyuan:** I think about Braiding Knowledges as something that is crucial on paper but very delicate in practice. I think academia is still a colonial institution; it is still able to choose and define what is knowledge, as well as how that knowledge is used. I think of buzzwords or cherry-picking as examples of this. I worry about what these outcomes mean for research – specifically, whether or not ideas will be reproduced. It swings both ways, right? Research can both reproduce narratives but, at the same time, redefine and/or challenge them. Braiding Knowledges is critical, but it is always important to reflect back on positionality and the consequences, both positive and negative, on the research that is done and why it was conducted.

**Noella:** Nisitohtamowin, as Patsy said, the key to the root word is three, and much like the scientific method, it has three parts. If someone asks you, “do you understand?” They will say it constructively, especially when you are a child or if you are learning how to do something. It always involves observing something – that is the one part—then practicing it repeatedly until you know. Almost like that hypothesis at the end of the scientific method, our way of understanding and our knowledge system is understanding the equity that is embedded in those braids and all those knowledges. We must be mindful of the fact – and I am not going to say a whole lot more—that they are all equal in their power, and they can stand individually because each of them has its own epistemological kind of framing. We say things are equitable, but are they really?

I think that is one of the key things that people have to remember: Our knowledge has sustained us on this land, and we thrived. To say our knowledge is not as good or equal is not a good thing. And the Academy has been very good at saying one knowledge is better than the other. Over the years, we have had to start challenging the institution and the Academy itself, which is such a big thing. I remember Patsy said, “I’m tired.” Well, she is tired, and I am tired. We have been at this whole idea of talking about Indigenous Knowledge since we were graduate students in the late 1997–98 period. In those times, when we were talking about things like this, people laughed at us – even some of our own people – but we were always trying to legitimize the importance of recognizing how valuable our knowledge systems are. I like the idea of braiding because it denotes, as someone or a few of you have said,

that equity is embedded in the framing of it or in the thinking of it. And if you braid too fast, as Tanaya said, well, you are not going to have a pretty good-looking braid. **Our goal always is to make sure all of them are equal.**

**Paul:** I understand that it is integral to have our knowledge interwoven into other perspectives. At the same time, dealing with being in Western Canada, and ultimately Alberta, is volatile, and we are in a volatile time. We are sharing our knowledge, but who is it really serving? Is it serving us Indigenous people in Canada, or is it ultimately going to go to some institution that does not really care about what they have? That is why we must be cautious about it. It is great that we are filling the gaps of knowledge that are not there and are lacking in Western knowledge. Our Indigenous culture has not been seriously taken into account, even though we have lived on this continent for millennia. Why hasn't everybody, even Western scientists, acknowledged that North America was not a barren land that nobody inhabited, when everybody else in the world was inhabiting parts of their continents? That is a naive way of thinking. We have been here, and we must always prove that we existed before anybody else. There was no barren land mass that we crossed in Alaska. We are always having to prove who we are, how we are valuable to the land, and how we lived off the land within the hostilities and the beauty. And historically, if it was not for the Indigenous peoples in Canada, settlers would not have survived their first winter.

We need to be cautious about how much information we give out on Indigenous aspects because sometimes it could be used against us. We have seen this many times, especially right now with treaties not being understood as historic and binding. We will not rewrite the treaties for the sake of those who are ignorant or to serve the separatist's ideas in Alberta. Can Canadian Western academia evolve? I do not know, but are we dream scaping? Like Senyuan says, they pick and choose what is true knowledge, and like Noella said, they laughed at her. Laughter is the first reaction of fear, and *they fear us*. That is the part where I think they begin to learn about who we truly are in respect to our knowledge that has existed just as long, if not longer, than theirs. It creates fear because everything they thought they knew could be wrong.

**Kim:** Braiding Knowledges is a great way of moving forward with understanding our land and climate change, and focusing on issues that impact our day-to-day living and our future. It involves bringing Indigenous Knowledges and Western science together to understand Mother Earth and how to heal it. Having respect and understanding for each other's Knowledges, intertwining them, and building a bond.

Cultivating a space for mutual understanding of Indigenous and Western Knowledges has been an ongoing conversation since the late 1990s. Many Indigenous scholars and Community Knowledge Keepers have pushed upstream to have their voices heard and for Indigenous Knowledges to be mutually respected, demonstrating that it is as rigorous as Western knowledge. Scholars like Noella and Patsy have pushed open the door for the next generation of scholars to pick up the next journey of paddling the currents in the academy to weave Indigenous and Western Knowledges together. Weaving these Knowledges to combat climate change and gain a deeper holistic understanding to advance reconciliation efforts is both needed and necessary. It is important to proceed with caution, as stated by Elder Paul Johnson, and to be vigilant about what is shared and what is the intention. This leads us into the next discussion question: *“What does true collaboration with and for indigenous peoples look and feel like?”*

### 3. Collaboration with and for indigenous peoples

To begin our conversation, we turn to the community authors with the intention to honor and privilege their voices:

**Noella:** We have always had to fight for our space. I think true collaboration is an understanding of how people view collaboration. When you collaborate with the First Nations people, the engagement is thoughtful and meaningful. People think collaboration with us is the land acknowledgment, an elder to say a prayer, and some dancers; then the indigenous peoples have to go. Was that a collaboration? That is unfortunately what some people think collaboration is: let's invite some people over to do this, or let's feed them.

Understanding what collaboration means, giving people the time and the space – the actual, real space – to engage. When I was in Ontario, I asked a person, “How many people did you collaborate with?” She said, “Oh, over 50”. I said, “Did you have a meeting?” She said, “No, I just phoned them, and I told them what I was doing.” I said, “Oh, what kind of feedback did you get?” to which she replied, “No, I just told them what I was doing.” For her, that was collaboration. There must be common ground for us and some understanding, because we are not going to push our way. If people really do have a desire to engage in meaningful collaboration, we have to define for both sides what is meant by collaboration. It does not mean doing a land acknowledgment. People think it is such a big deal. My aunt said, “Someone told me, we'd like to invite you to come do this and do the land acknowledgment.” She said, “I'll do the first part of the first thing you asked me to do, but I'm not going to do the land acknowledgment.” They could not understand why, and she did not explain to them. I thought, “good for you!” If they get that a few times, maybe they will figure it out, because they probably have already heard how irrelevant land acknowledgments are. It needs to be meaningful, and people need to understand what both sides actually mean.

**Paul:** I concur with Noella. We always have to be cautious of what someone is really asking; we have to ask, what is the end game? You must always be cognizant of what information is shared and how it is going to be used – used against us or for us? That is the question I always ask. They shower you with gifts and money and whatnot, or the biggest one is they give you tobacco. They do not really understand what they are offering or asking. Usually, when giving a person some tobacco, you are asking for a prayer and knowledge transfer. But if the elder has already spoken, already done the prayer, what are you really asking of me with that tobacco offering? So, everything comes with a question. I come from an economic development background, and a lot of companies – oil companies specifically in Alberta – the first thing they bring is tobacco and gifts, but there is always a hidden agenda in what they are really asking for. They are not really asking to work with us; they are working for compliance, and that is the part we need to work on. We are not compliant. We will work with you, not for you, and they must also respect us, and that is the braiding part.

**Tanaya:** Thank you, Paul and Noella. I love being a part of panels where I am learning too. I feel like a lot of people ask me to collaborate on different things, and I was not even thinking: what is the end goal? I just jump in because that is how we are raised. You go do those dishes – I will help. Go take out the trash – I will help. So, I am loving that I am learning on this panel that it is okay to slow down, take a breath, and ask those questions. It is okay to ask those who want to be in partnership with us: what

does a healthy relationship look like to you? Healthy collaboration means leaning into consent. It is pausing and asking: what does collaboration mean to you? What is the end goal? Because I might have something different in mind than my collaborators. It is important to make sure values align with the people that you are collaborating with. If not, that is where a lot of disagreements happen. It is important to establish what those values mean and live with them in practice. It is also good to think about inevitable conflicts that will happen – we are humans, there's going to be misunderstandings, there's going to be arguments. Let's talk through what we are going to do if a rupture happens. How are we going to repair it? Who do we want to call in and have those conversations with? It is really planning for all of those things and making sure everybody does feel valued; everybody does have that voice. The people we are collaborating with need to know: you are not just collaborating with me, you are collaborating with my family and with my nation.

**Natahnee:** When I work with a group of people, I go in with the best intentions – a good heart, mind, body, and spirit – while simply asking, “What can you commit to this project?” And, understanding how am I going to compensate people for their time and effort in contributing? I think a lot of people continue to ask indigenous peoples to contribute, but they do not really try to create that relationship at the beginning, nor do they try to maintain that relationship going forward. It is about making sure that the community and whoever you are working with are always involved in every single step of the project. You do not ever want to misinterpret or do something in a bad way, and I think that is what a collaboration is – an ongoing relationship process to ensure you did it well and that it was a true collaboration. If they do not want to work with you again in the future, then you know you did not do it the right way and that you were not forthcoming about what you wanted or those outputs. Also, for true collaboration, I think when you finish a project, if the community asks you not to use a transcript or asks to just keep it for the community, you respect that. It is understanding that sometimes things might just have to stop or go into hibernation for a while, and then you can pick it up later.

**Paulina:** Sometimes academia is so fixated on having a result or something tangible, but what happens when the community says, “We don't want to share this,” or “This is no longer on the table.” Then, in academia, if you do not have anything to share, it is seen as though you have not done that work. True collaboration is having indigenous peoples in academia but also seeing them in the community and understanding what work is entailed. We have been really trying to advocate for this with ceremony, or even the preparation of going into the community – that is work, that is labor. Also, when you are working with a community, what happens when an Elder or a community member passes away? There is an emotional toll on you. We are told that if we rest, as academics, we are not doing anything productive. If we are going to have a true collaboration with indigenous peoples, it is also about understanding the foundations and the worldview of those peoples and not expecting those worldviews to fit into this box that academia kind of puts us in.

The realistic aspect when you are doing work is to have a community with you. Often, the best people who are going to have your back are your relatives or individuals who know what you are doing. They see it from both sides – they see the hardships that you are up against in academia, but then they also see the hardships you are facing personally, spiritually, and emotionally. If academia could gain an understanding of that, it would be so much easier. If they are going to bring

indigenous peoples into these institutions, they should have the proper support in place.

True collaboration means not only the academics you bring in, but also the community who is there and that you are honoring them in the way that they are founded, rooted, and grounded. If we are going to Braid Knowledges with Indigenous communities, we must examine the impacts of colonization, racism, and the power imbalances. We are here to work as a collective—that is what we do best. We are working for reconciliation. You cannot have reconciliation without truth. So, the truth of the matter is the violence, the dehumanization, and the injustice that occur, and if you cannot acknowledge that, you have basically tokenized us from the beginning.

Universities must not only have an Indigenization Plan but also demonstrate the actual movement forward in what they are aiming for. If a researcher oversteps or does not do things right within the community, I think that they should be gone immediately. I know that is cutthroat, but for so many times with indigenous peoples, if we overstep or mess up, we are blamed, and then we are basically gotten rid of. Yet, if a nonIndigenous person does the same, they're like, "Oh, well, they didn't know any better." They knew better. They just did not care. So, it is that double standard and the differing expectations placed on indigenous peoples versus nonindigenous individuals that need to be addressed in academia.

**Mariveliv:** It also requires a personal decision. It was about understanding that academia has this idea that we have to own the truth, that they have to own knowledge. Working through collaboration means that ownership is not real, right? That is not necessarily something that needs to happen. Understanding my position as an outsider, but also as a person who benefits from the colonial project, means that sometimes I need to be silent and let others talk. In Spanish, I would say: *trabajar la tierra para otros*; work the land so others come and plant the seeds, and you can see the flowers and all the colors on it. Understanding my limit as a person who is working in academia, I am not from the Indigenous community, but I am here, and I do my best to contribute to this work.

**Patsy:** I think true collaboration is moving from this notion of uninformed, superficial engagement to the sacred, because it is there where that ethical reality is respected. We can call it Ceremony, but for the purposes here, I am just going to say sacred. I think in that superficial context, there are these rules about how the notion of Western collaboration is applied to, for, and with indigenous peoples. It really approaches it with a compliant attitude or consciousness. We are looking for that approach of bringing it back to the dominant compliant context. The sacred kind of reality is about preparation and sometimes involves protocol. These notions become very superficial because they are not really understood in terms of the sacredness of what we are responsible for and serving.

The province was giving \$150,000 grants to schools to collaborate with the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. It was quite open and broad. I was at a Nation. A city school showed up with one of the collaboration grants and had the whole process set out. This is how the collaboration was going to go: they were going to come in; they were going to get 10 songs from the community. Of those 10 songs, they were going to share them with the children back in their district so that the children would know those traditions, and they were doing their part in keeping the knowledge alive. There was a big disconnect; a big overstep of protocol was overlooked, and all the preparation was done one-sided. We need to have standards

that are very explicit for people to know that true collaboration is about knowing what you are saying and listening to what it is. Those ethical, spiritual, and sacred principles must be followed. In that meeting, when they were told by the community, “You’ll need to do protocol, you’ll need to actually commit the summer to some ceremony,” they refused. They came back a second time and said, “No, we absolutely refuse. Our contracts do not pay us over the summer, so therefore we are technically not working.” All these technicalities help in that superficial commitment to collaboration. At the end of that meeting, the school district representatives were getting very frustrated. The elder said to them, “You asked the question, and if you don’t like the answer, then don’t ask the question.” This notion of collaboration can become very important to know where the situatedness is angled. It really does require that web of relational knowing to be embodied in the process because it is sacred. Collaboration is sacred, especially for Indigenous Peoples, because it does not involve just human engagement as it might in a Western scholarly way. It does not only involve mental capacities or the intentional human short-term goals or objectives. It involves so much more: collaborative accountability to a much more multidimensional reality, multidimensional entities in that Indigenous thought structure. It is important that whoever is speaking and whoever is listening both have the criteria of knowing what is required for that to be respectfully spoken and heard – and heard and spoken.

For true collaboration with and for indigenous peoples to occur, all relations involved must come to a consensus to understand how collaboration is defined, the process, and how dissemination of output will be carried out. It is also grounded in *wiyinikêwina*, *Creators Laws*, versus *wiyasiwêwina*, *the laws of the country*, as Creator's Laws are the sacred laws of indigenous peoples and value the importance of Indigenous ceremonies from start to finish on a project but, importantly, for the spirit of all our connections that we work and advocate for.

#### **4. Braiding knowledges and reconciliation**

After we have discussed the challenges in collaboration and working with nonindigenous peoples, the group started to converse on how reconciliation fits into Braiding Knowledges, its place in academia, and what is needed for true collaboration to proceed. We asked two sets of questions: *does the concept of Braiding Knowledges fit into the actions of reconciliation? And can Indigenous Knowledge truly be braided within Western academia and Canada?*

**Samantha:** It is uncommon to be engaging in work that actively contributes to reconciliation daily. I think of what Dr. Johnson was talking about earlier, about how we cannot do Braiding without recognizing racism and colonialism. We cannot do reconciliation without addressing those. We cannot truly braid Indigenous knowledge with Western knowledge or science without recognizing the harm that science has done in the past. Science has been used against people, used as a justification for racism, used as a justification for ableism, etc. Science has been used as a weapon by those who are in power. Throughout my education, we only talked about a little bit of the not-so-great history of Western science. Unless we start talking about the hard history of Western science from the get-go, there can be no change.

**Paulina:** Indigenous peoples are rooted in observation and understanding of the land. We have been doing science from the very start; our ways of knowing and understanding the world have always been there. For Western science, I have said it before: they need to catch up with indigenous science. They also need to check themselves, because being self-aware is a key in indigenous research. Like thinking, “Oh, did I overstep?” or “Did something happen?” I feel like a lot of Western scientists are not mindful of their actions and their intentions. It is two very different philosophical groundings; one always clashes with the other, and it is the western science that clashes with the indigenous science. It is always trying to prove that it is superior, right, and informative, and that “We don’t need Indigenous Knowledge.” A lot of pharmaceutical knowledge comes from indigenous knowledge of medicines and plants. Are indigenous peoples getting the intellectual property or even royalties on that? Absolutely not.

**Marieliv:** In the Andean culture in Peru, braids are important, like getting your hair braided. Women have long hair, and sometimes they put colored ribbons in it to make it look pretty. Both of my grandmas, when they were young, used to have long hair. They are proud of their braids in the few pictures they have. This reminds me of something that Tanaya was saying for the first question. When we do our braids, we use three sections of our hair, but when it is done, you can only see two of them. You do not see the third one. Years ago, I had a professor who used that analogy to talk about intersectionality – how racism and classism are embedded in society, but you do not see it, right? It looks pretty once the braids are done, but we must remember the third section that we are not seeing. That could be the spirit world, the history, the painful history. That could be all our self-accountability and the reactions we take as scholars, as humans, as friends. It is so important to reflect on the one that we are not seeing.

The takeaway from our conversation about Braiding Knowledges and reconciliation constantly returned to the third strand, *the one that we do not always see*. This third strand represents settler colonialism, racism, and the walls of the ivory tower that do not align with indigenous ways of knowing and protocols. These unseen truths and lived realities are interwoven into the fabric of our society. We also acknowledge that there is a systemic pattern of privileging one knowledge system over another. We shifted our final question to: *what does the future of Braiding Knowledges look like?*

## 5. The future of braiding knowledges

If we are really talking about equity, then each braid must stand on its own. The first strand to be braided is indigenous knowledge and everything that encompasses indigenous perspectives, worldviews, and protocols. Taking the next strand is what collaboration means with Western science. The final strand is to understand the role of racism and colonialism in the entire braid. We need to talk about these realities (**Figure 1: Braiding Knowledges**) to understand what the future looks like. There need to be concrete intentions, as opposed to the aspirational or the use of buzzwords that achieve no institutional, academic, or societal change, before Braiding Knowledges can be accomplished. Without that, we do not have an equal platform to even begin the process, so it does not become empty words or rhetoric.



**Figure 1.**

*What do the three strands mean when coming together? Indigenous knowledge, Western knowledge, and the unseen realities of settler colonialism.*

**Samantha:** I think the future of Braiding Knowledges involves having a lot of hard conversations and confronting a lot of things. There are so many people who have good intentions, and they want the best for other people, but they need to understand that they/we – scientists and settlers – cannot be in sole control.

**Patsy:** It can easily fall into this, as Tahnee Galford says, a recolonization process, depending on who is leading the reconciliation. It is that perspective which is critical. Diversity is a construct that comes from the equity theory, and sometimes that can get misapplied. For indigenous peoples, we know about the universal way in which we can commune with each other and understand that, worldwide, there is a familiarity. But on that other plane, we respect the specific specificity, as my mentor Manu Meyer says. I wanted to end with this quote that an undergrad shared in my class yesterday, and she was quoting Marie Battiste's text, *Decolonizing Education*: "**Nothing about us, without us.**"

**Senyuan:** The future of Braiding Knowledges involves a deconstruction of ignorance. To elaborate, Noella mentioned that a lot of researchers are very superficial or disingenuous with what they say and mean. I think about when Paul mentioned ulterior motives and how academics usually have their own research to focus on, sometimes putting relationality on the back burner. I think it all ties back to this defense of ignorance, whether it be a scheme or genuine. When Dr. Johnson said, "It might have been cutthroat to say that," but I think it is not. While we often hold the claim-maker accountable, I think it is equally valid to hold settler researchers to the same expectations for accountability. It is a double standard currently, but it is still the moral responsibility of academics to understand and consider the culture, to understand that there is a history of colonization. The institution is still colonized, and we need to truly collaborate for the future of Braiding Knowledges. I think it is important for academics to understand that you are not coming in here just to get something out of it. You are not here to just research a community. **You are here to**

***collaborate, and there needs to be more responsibility on academics to resolve that ignorance and better understand their accountabilities.***

**Noella:** I am thinking about what Patsy is saying, “the significance of that perspective, of recognizing where you come from and how you contribute to the work of Braiding Knowledges.” One important thing that needs to happen is we must explore and understand where we are coming from. When I had undergrads, I often asked them to explore their culture, their own stereotypes, and their own cultural framing and positionality. They always said, “oh, I’m not racist. I accept everyone as the same,” and on and on. These were the same people saying, “but we still have to help our poor Indians, our poor First Nation people.” There is so much in that statement. I think sometimes people, especially those working with Indigenous people, fall into the benevolence trap. They think, “I have to save these people”. For Braiding Knowledges, it is important that people understand their perspective. Recognizing that we have some stereotypes we may be harboring, or that we have perspectives that may impact our work by preventing us from seeing things – especially in the sciences – is crucial. Science is notorious for thinking, well, the scientific way is number one. But what about our science? I think it has good responsibility moving forward, but in terms of a collective, I think it is important that people, together, understand where they are coming from, their positionality, and the epistemic privilege they may or may not have.

**Paulina:** Colonial languages do not have proper definitions of what respect, honor, and care mean in an Indigenous context. For the future of Braiding Knowledges to occur, if we share these concepts and use the colonial language, we have already failed, as we have to interpret them into languages that do not adequately understand the spiritual and interconnectedness of those terms themselves. I personally think that if we share these concepts from an Indigenous perspective, but Western academia and those working for indigenous peoples do not actually fulfill or acknowledge them, you are not braiding knowledges. You are tokenizing us once again for your own benefit. I also must state that making indigenous peoples translate our concepts into easy ways of thinking so that they can understand also highlights the problems of braiding. It is not fair for us to simplify complex realities without any effort from those on the other side who are not willing to put in the work themselves. Using us to teach every way of thinking or mindset of where we are coming from should not be our only role. I want the labor that is always put on indigenous peoples to be removed from us, so that we can do what we are always supposed to do at the forefront of research and knowledge, rather than on the sides or being silenced.

**Tanaya:** I have always been hopeful, positive, and overly optimistic. The future I radically imagine for Braiding Knowledges is one where we do not have to keep advocating, where people’s first instinct is to check in, define respect, find care, and all those things. If they are the ones elevating and uplifting us, then we do not have to advocate for ourselves as much. We just come in with that respect. We come in having our indigenous knowledges elevated the way they always should have been. Indigenous peoples carry within our DNA and our bones the roadmap to survival and to how to thrive and do these things we always have. In Braiding Knowledge’s future, we are upheld and uplifted with both hands.

**Marieliv:** I think my answer is more emotional than rational, but I would like to start by saying that I find it so important that we are having this conversation right now, in this context, when so many people out there are being targeted for who they are. In the entire world, we are seeing wars resulting in people not being able to

communicate with their families. We are seeing how immigrants are being targeted, being killed, and it keeps happening, and it is not new. We have seen this before, and we have seen these techniques used against indigenous peoples around the world as well. I want to shake up this environment. I really want to have hope that academia can transform itself to be more open, with good intentions of understanding and learning from Indigenous Knowledges and ways of living.

**Paul:** I would say, probably, that the future can go strong and forward if the indigenous perspective is respected and, more importantly, entrusted upon them. Don't be afraid to say your piece, and rather than sit there and be consensual in any rational way, like funding and all that stuff, push the envelope. We need to be more forthright and tell our perspective to a certain degree while keeping certain knowledge that they do not need to know.

**Darian:** It is important to take a step back and move away from doing things primarily through Western institutions and thinking. This will take time and patience to try to break out of the cycle of how we do things. But I do not know if it is truly Braiding Knowledges if we are entering braiding within the Western world. Going back to what Tanaya said about making sure the braid strands are of equal weight, we need to ensure that each part of braiding is held in the same regard and given the same treatment to move forward in an equitable way.

**Kim:** It is about ensuring that our indigenous and western points of view are acknowledged equally, and that working together will be beneficial. Focusing on bigger issues such as, climate change, working together to set a place for the future of the next generations to come. True collaboration is about creating a trustworthy bond, knowing that who you collaborate with understands and respects you, our community, and our traditional ways, and that they have the best intentions when forming that bond.

**Diana:** I am still learning what Braiding Knowledges means. I would like the future of Braiding Knowledges to look bright, involving true collaboration, as discussed already, with open communication and transparency from all sides. With selfawareness and selfaccountability, researchers should approach the work with a good heart and intentions, as well as strive for better integration of the spiritual and the sacred into Braiding Knowledges.

## 6. Concluding thoughts

Braiding Knowledges has different approaches, definitions, and processes. There is no consensus. This is similar to what Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) found regarding how universities invest in indigenization within the academy. We are still waiting for transformative change, and everyone has a role in this process [5, p. 226]. Instead of providing academic closure to this chapter, the goal is to challenge the academy by honoring and uplifting Indigenous voices, perspectives, and ways of knowing and doing. We end our chapter with a poem by Tanaya Winder to stimulate ongoing reflections and story talk about Braiding Knowledges. Miyo-ayâwin. Kanagami'wat(ü).

### *We Braid This Wisdom*

*Before we were born,  
our ancestors wrapped us  
in a blanket of stars*

*as they gathered around  
a ceremonial fire.  
Medicines were burned,  
and songs were sung  
to carry their prayers  
into life, being and breath.  
Our Ancestors showed us  
every constellation as they  
spoke to us in the language of the sky.  
They took turns holding us in their arms,  
whispering stories of  
where we come from  
and where we belong.*

*We braid this wisdom  
with systems that have threatened our being –  
Western knowledge and settler colonialism.  
Each separate strand  
offers lessons meant to weave  
into the path forward.  
We carry these teachings  
in our bones – Mother Earth  
does not belong to us.  
We belong to her.*

*We belong to the water of life,  
that connects us to all living things.  
The water that replenishes, washes away, and cleans.  
Remember: everything in this universe  
has a voice and something to teach.*

*We braid these ways of knowing  
to help us survive and sustain.  
A reminder for us to ignite  
our sacred flame; to use the medicine  
of its blaze to clear our path.*

*– Tanaya Winder*

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## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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