

My Failure With An Ojibwe Artist: Reflections On Initial Intercultural Relationships

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In this article, I examine a first meeting with Ojibwe artist, Terry Kemper, during which I failed to initiate our meeting with the gift of tobacco. I explore failure in a relational event with Kemper and discuss the intentions of my ethnographic research, my researcher-identity, and my mistake of initially neglecting Ojibwe protocol during my first meeting with the artist, in addition to the role of tobacco in Ojibwe communities. Through aesthetic inquiry I reframe failure in an installation entitled, "Toward Reconciliation" that has potential pedagogical implications, with hope that it avoids a static and impotent result. I intend the article and installation as a public engagement of my continued apology and hope for continued conversation with Kemper to reflect and revisit ongoing ethically and culturally appropriate relationships.

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They took more pollen, / more beads, and
more prayer sticks, / and they went to see
old Buzzard. / They arrived at his place in
the east. / “Who’s out there? / Nobody ever
came here before.” / “It’s us, Hummingbird
and Fly.” / “Oh. What do you want?” / “We
need you to purify our town.” / “Well, look
here. Your offering isn’t / complete.
Where’s the tobacco?” / (You see, it wasn’t
easy.) / Fly and Hummingbird / had to fly
back to town again. (Silko, 1977, p. 113)

Similar to the epigraph of Silko’s (1977) excerpt from her novel *Ceremony*, I return to reexamine a first meeting with Ojibwe artist, Terry Kemper, at the Shooting Star Casino located on the White Earth reservation, during which I failed to initiate, but concluded our meeting with the gift of tobacco. I discuss the intentions of my ethnographic research, my researcher-identity, and my mistake of initially neglecting Ojibwe protocol during my first meeting with the artist, in addition to the role of tobacco in Ojibwe communities. I also aesthetically explore pedagogical implications of decolonization resulting from failure. I reframe failure in an installation entitled, “Toward Reconciliation” that has potential pedagogical implications with hope that it avoids a static and impotent result. These experiences have continually impacted my reflexivity and self-decolonization that inform my ongoing relationships with Ojibwe artists who have, over time, become good friends. My intentions align with Eldridge’s (2008) hope for Indigenous methodology, that “Native and non-Native scholars and Native American communities could possibly rebuild lost trust and increase the benefit Native people enjoy from research that involves them” (p. 41). Eldridge emphasizes Native contributions to research endeavors, while inviting outsiders

to possibly partake. I discuss research methods and ethics as an outsider to the Ojibwe country to publicly reflect, apologize, and hope for continued conversation with Kemper so that ethical and culturally appropriate relationships endure.

Contextualizing the Study: Becoming an Ally

Art educators advocate learning with and from Indigenous artists to expand and de-center Eurocentric art curricula (Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Ballengee-Morris, 2008; Ballengee-Morris, 2011; Ballengee-Morris, Sanders, Smith-Shank, & Staikidis, 2011; Ballengee-Morris & Taylor, 2008; Bequette, 2007; Blandy & Congdon, 1991; Chalmers, 1996; Delacruz, 2003; Eldridge, 2008; Scott, Krug, & Stuhr, 1995; Staikidis, 2006; Stuhr, 1994). In like mind, my teaching experiences are grounded in public school art education to high school students in a Washington, D.C. suburb for three years, where over 90% of the student population identified as Black, leading me to de-center Eurocentric art curricula and pedagogical practices. At that time, I designed instruction to foster students’ personal connections to a wide array of cultural art content and continued to improve my allied position with the students. After seven years teaching in public schools, while pursuing my doctoral education, I conducted poststructural archival research at the Carlisle Indian School concerning American Indian children’s art education and cultural dislocation during the late 1800s (Slivka, 2011). These formative experiences culminated in a three-month ethnography in Bemidji, Minnesota with Ojibwe artists. Tom Robertson of Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) reports, “a study last year [2009] found that three-quarters of Indians, and 90 percent of those living on nearby

reservations, think the Bemidji community is not welcoming to people of all races” (2010, para. 4). Perhaps the Bemidji community feels as Ojibwe novelist Treuer (2012) writes,

it [Bemidji] is surrounded by Indians, literally – White Earth, Red Lake, and Leech Lake reservations form the points of a triangle in which Bemidji sits at the center, and the combined reservation population outnumber the population of Bemidji two to one. Bemidji still has a ‘circle the wagons’ kind of feel to it. (p. 138)

Due to these historically strained relationships I explored the following question: In what ways do the Ojibwe artists’ practices and/or products inform local contexts, identities, and cultural positions?

I attempted to respectfully work as an ally interested in participants’ artwork, art processes, and relationships. As an outsider I felt anxiety about initial meetings with potential participants, as I wanted to establish trusting relationships and did not know how they would receive me. During the twenty-one hour drive from Pennsylvania to Minnesota, I questioned my research proposal. However, I recalled my allied intentions were with a “good heart” (Eldridge, 2008, p. 44). One of Eldridge’s six guidelines for an Indigenous methodology is conducting research with a “good heart [which] means that the researcher has good motives and intends to benefit everyone...good intentions followed by good actions” (pp. 44-45). For example, Grassy Narrows Anishinaabe activist Da Silva (2010) explains the possibilities of her work with non-Native people:

We worked together, and we stood together, and created awareness...Anishinaabe and non-Native people could ... stand strong together and work together and operate together. That was the biggest learning experience that I received, that we can actually work with people like that, and not be so afraid of them. (p. 72)

Da Silva’s reflective sentiment of fighting clear-cut logging north of Kenora, Ontario indicates the possibility of a relationship with an outsider. Therefore as an outside researcher, I wanted to reciprocate generosity, listen and follow Ojibwe artists’ intentions, and respect their time and willingness to work with me so that I might learn from them and about their cultural practices. This required me to de-center my position, amplifying my anxiety, since I had to acknowledge and attempt to disengage with my ideological social privileges as a White, middle class researcher with ties to the Pennsylvania State University. I invited Ojibwe artists to partake either by email or through telephone and emphasized that there would be no intended alteration of their daily lives. This research model required reciprocity, time, and devotion to a “dynamic relationship” where “trust will not only be reciprocated but constantly negotiated” (Smith, 2012, p. 137). Furthermore, I realized this negotiation is never complete and the relational dynamic will be forever ongoing.

Prior to this study, I participated in a three-week, 2010 course where I was immersed in Ojibwe culture within numerous Minnesota reservations and participated in a drum ceremony, a sweat lodge and naming ceremony, in addition to

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numerous community circles.¹ Four of the five participants of the 2012 study lived on or near Leech Lake reservation. Additionally, I traveled and visited with several other artists from White Earth, Red Lake, and Mille Lacs reservations. Over the course of three months talking with Ojibwe artists about their artwork and processes and writing field notes, I felt as if I had begun to foster an allied position. I believe this relationship was fostered in part by their invitation to a hand-drum workshop held at the Leech Lake Tribal College by art instructor Dewey Goodwin and his wife, Bambi. I brought food and drink for a small feast afterwards and aided in cutting elk hide into thin strips for lacing the hand drum to the ash armature. The Goodwins invited me to a stone-carving workshop held at their home for a week, after which I was invited to house-sit, feed their horses, and care for their dogs while they traveled to Medora, North Dakota. Eventually, the Goodwins invited me to stay with them while I continued my research for two months. Jim Jones Jr., Cultural Resource Director of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, also invited me, to harvest and prepare cedar planks, birch bark, and spruce roots intended for a birch bark canoe. We traveled across lakes, wooded areas, and paved roads through forests locating particular qualities of each natural material necessary for the canoe. Additionally, quill and bead artist Melvin Losh invited me to cut birch bark, which led to cleaning, cutting, and preparing bark for lidded quill boxes. Losh also invited me to apprentice with him in order to learn

¹ The Pennsylvania State University offers the course entitled Exploring Indigenous Ways Of Knowing in the Great Lakes Region. Information concerning the course can be accessed from: <http://icik.psu.edu/psul/icik/CED497.html>

how to create a quill box and informed me that he refused to kill porcupines and only harvested those unfortunately hit by cars. Occasionally, I found a porcupine on the side of the road and brought it to Losh or called him about its location. Lastly, I attended a birch bark workshop at the Mille Lacs Indian Museum led by Pat and Gage Kruse. I aided Kruse with car-trouble, and was invited to apprentice his birch bark basket processes. The artists offered food and drink during every meeting, and I reciprocated frequently by purchasing groceries and fuel for vehicles. My support for Ojibwe artists reflects my desire for reciprocity, my respect for them, and my efforts to give back material resources, labor, and company as they gave to me.

Devoting physical labor, harvesting materials, contributing financial support, and giving food demonstrated my willingness to learn as a student and contribute while learning about their cultural practices. My relationships in the community developed during slow, sometimes quiet visitations, watching television, sitting around campfires, or riding as passenger on “go along” car trips (see Kusenbach, 2003). Being an ally also meant that I did not ask prodding questions; rather our conversations took on a circuitous route concerning topics that were initiated and led by Ojibwe artists. This isn’t to say that I didn’t ask questions; rather I learned to ground my questions in their topics. For example, when I did ask a very direct question, such as “How do you know what subject will be carved from the stone?” Goodwin laughed and shifted topics. This response was perhaps intended to teach me what was a comfortable and appropriate topic and what was not. Additionally, becoming an ally and attuned to their wishes included accepting personal invitations to community events and art workshops. During my meeting with Kemper, I became more aware of my ideological social

privilege and I needed to explain my intentions more clearly and transparently, which contributed to my greater sense of the importance of research ethics. I realized that ethical interactions were predicated upon observing and respecting Ojibwe cultural traditions by giving tobacco during first meetings. My failure to give Kemper tobacco during our initial greeting positioned me as a problematic outsider whom he questioned as a potential threat to his culture based upon the troubled history of non-Natives' relations and anthropologists' objectifications of Native peoples' cultures. While observing and enacting traditional Ojibwe customs, my acceptance was in a constant state of negotiation and slippage, so I worked toward humility, diligence and constant de-centering of myself.

Historical Research Considerations and Methodology

Widespread historical maltreatment of American Indians by White anthropologists and other researchers has created contemporary distrust of them, for many important reasons. V. Deloria (1969/1988) explains:

The fundamental thesis of the anthropologist is that people are objects for observation... objects for experimentation, for manipulation, and for eventual extinction. The anthropologist thus furnishes the justification for treating Indian people like... chessmen available for anyone to play with. (p. 81)

Historically, a number of researchers have set an abysmal precedent for scholarly work, including Frank Cushing who "moved from anthropology to Indian play while doing field work at Zuni" and participated in rituals to access tribal secrets while

establishing participant observation protocol (P. Deloria, 1998, p. 119). Still others conducted unethical medical research (see Hodge, 2012), or sterilized American Indian women and girls (see Chicago Committee to End Sterilization Abuse, 1977). Given these egregious approaches to research, I continuously redefined my own research cautiously to present what I believed was a sensitive approach through an ethic of care while respecting the cultural differences between us (see Slivka, in press; Noddings, 1988). Jones (2008), a White cultural researcher, elaborates upon the various ways that outsiders position themselves while conducting research with Indigenous peoples:

in a research setting, the politics of the indigene-colonizer hyphen becomes a struggle... A marker of the relationship between two generalized groups, the hyphen has been erased, softened, denied, consumed, expanded, homogenized, and romanticized. (p. 473)

Although I never assumed success by softening or erasing the hyphen, I attempted to listen, learn, and maintain respect for cultural difference rather than consume it and "play" as Cushing did. Rather, I have outlined allied ways, which draw upon my Byzantine Catholic upbringing.

I addressed ethical considerations in the data collection processes by first meeting with potential participants and asking oral permission to research when they felt comfortable with the newly formed relationship. I also provided the permission form for them to peruse at their leisure, which sometimes took days or weeks. This allowed time and respected their position whether or not to participate, while reflecting upon an early oral agreement. Only with permission, I wrote research notes

during each event or immediately afterwards. Later, I shared notes with corresponding participants to verify their perspectives and to check my interpretations. During our meeting in 2012, I asked Kemper if I could write notes while we talked and he approved. Kemper also talked with me and reviewed this article and provided invaluable feedback over two phone calls, a text message, and an email on February 24th and March 6th, 2015 during which he also gave permission for the manuscript and use of his name.

My cultural arts research is a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995, 2011) informed by participants' decisions to collaborate with me and with embedded local narratives and perspectives that constitute the local contexts. Marcus (2011), a White anthropologist clarifies:

Multi-sitedness represents three things – the objective relations of a system which can be studied independently of ethnography (e.g. a network); the relations set into play as an artifact of a research design (...this is the reflexivity of the fieldwork); and the para-ethnographic perspective...the 'native point of view', which is always spatio-temporal... (p. 28)

Marcus outlines the three areas that constitute multi-sitedness and I took them up by investigating the interrelationships of prominent sculptures embedded with White-ownership-narratives and statues of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox that occupy Bemidji's city center. Additionally, I investigated the historical relationships of treaties and land ownership, blood quantum and authenticity discourses, and historical and contemporary intercultural material exchanges including bandolier bags, pawn shops, and logging practices. Marcus also

suggests that the "native point of view" is indigenous to the context. This is where my research differs from his as he is not referring to American Indian peoples and I emphasize the importance of Ojibwe stories and their contexts in addition to material culture and ecological interspecies influences. Particularly, I examine my relations with Kemper as the reflexivity of this research.

In preparation for my first conversation with Kemper, I packed a large journal that included my own ink and graphite sketches and a plastic bag of loose-leaf tobacco to offer when we met. I agreed to meet him at his chosen location and time at the White Earth Reservation Shooting Star Casino during the fifth day of my ethnographic research. Following this meeting, I expanded my field notes and reflected on my position and actions. I also contacted Kemper throughout three months in northern Minnesota since he invited me to maintain contact to check-in on my progress. After completing this ethnography I continue to reflect upon my interactions through oral presentations with art educators at conferences, written analyses of my dissertation (Slivka, 2013), and arts inquiry for public exhibition in a university gallery (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. "Toward Reconciliation" (2014) comprised of fire-cured tobacco, four sheets of paper, three pieces of petrified wood, and a primed canvas. Courtesy Kevin Slivka.

Insider/Outsider Dialogic Relationships

My work to formulate relationships with Ojibwe artists was often fraught with apprehension as I was uncertain whether our meetings would generate ongoing communication. I arrived at the Shooting Star Casino after a ninety-minute drive from Bemidji and pondered how to offer tobacco since I was juggling a notebook, pen, and backpack. Ultimately I delayed offering tobacco since I didn't want to fumble with materials. Kemper approached me, we greeted each other, shook hands, and he suggested we talk in the casino restaurant. After some initial discussion our conversation focused upon research and the Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationship:

"You have nothing to offer that I want," Kemper stated matter-of-factly as he looked over his cup of coffee.

I stared down into my own cup of coffee, looked up, and tried to explain, "Well, I want to be an agent of decolonization, for change..."

He interrupted, "An agent! Agents took our children away from us, agents..." Concern gave way to laughter.

I course-corrected, "Well, agent is perhaps not the right word...an advocate." I paused. "Yeah, it [agent] isn't a positive word..." We continued to laugh together.

He expressed with concern, "Well you're going to do your dissertation, take what you want and leave."

I paused, then explained, "Well, there *is* a possibility for others to learn about Ojibwe [cultural life-ways and arts processes] by doing this." We continued to talk for two hours over our steak, potato, and broccoli meal while sipping coffee. We discussed the Sandusky scandal, which seemed to be an indictment of my position causing me to explain the particularity of the issue and how it wasn't indicative of the institution and educational programs. He shared images on his phone and scrolled

through some of his artwork: paintings, dancing sticks, and headpieces among other items with fabric paint applied in Ojibwe cultural patterns. He asked if I had done artwork and had examples to show him. I had left photographs of my artworks in the Bemidji State University dormitory (where I was living at the time) and he teased, "Oh so you brought images to others you met, but not to me!"

I explained that I did have a sketchbook with some graphite drawings, which we perused. He noticed a theme of identity throughout my work. We also discussed the limits of the English language since I conveyed my archival research at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School and he leveraged how Ojibwe language cannot be separated from culture and meaning making, while addressing the effects of assimilation.

He said, "I looked at those photographs during the Boarding School Era and all I see is dead in the eyes."

Eventually, the waitress took our plates. I dipped my hand into a plastic bag and said, "I'd like to offer you some tobacco."

Laughing heavily, he exclaimed, "So, you *did* learn something. You should've given this earlier, it means: 'He's okay, he can walk here, we know him.'" He chuckled and said, "Forget about that confusing earlier stuff."

"I meant to, but just didn't..." My words trailed off and ended as I failed to convey my intention. I could not describe my hesitation and felt regret as he collected the loose-leaf tobacco that fell between our hands.

The preceding dialogue demonstrates the nuances of cultural difference as "a process of signification through which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity" (Bhabha, 1994,

p. 50, emphasis in original). Kemper's challenges to my statements refute any assumed authority I conveyed in my position and situate the conversation on his terms. I continue to explore my engagement with power/knowledge relationships and the purposeful centrality of observing and respecting Ojibwe cultural practices as Bhabha's (1994) cultural difference, which refutes "cultural diversity" discourse as relativism seeking to preserve or promote "mythic memory of a unique collective identity" (p. 50; see also Dissanayake, 1995; Davies, 2012).²

Offering tobacco acknowledged Kemper as a human being on his terms, respecting and meeting him through his culturally specific language, his sovereignty, and self-determination. Kemper reoriented me as learner and guest to a lesson on cultural specificity and respectful practice that challenges any notion of a unifying or assumed collective human identity, since his actions and discourse reaffirmed an Ojibwe epistemology. In 2010 I learned how to initiate intercultural relations with Anishinaabeg, but my anxiety and Western-based manners superseded my understandings of exchange when requesting Kemper's time and aid.³ Paralleling Silko's

² Dissanayake's (1995) position doesn't focus on artistic intent and content, which is culturally and contextually specific, while attempting to universalize art making as biological through a Darwinian argument. Ultimately, Dissanayake softens, erases, and replaces Indigenous epistemology with *making special*.

³ Warren, of Ojibwe and Pilgrim heritage, explains that *Anishinaabeg* (the plural form), also spelled, "An-ish-in-aub-ag... is derived from An-ish-aw, meaning without cause, or 'spontaneous,' and in-aub-a-we-se, meaning the 'human body.' The word An-ish-in-aub-

excerpt at the beginning of this article describing an incomplete request, I felt regret as I gave him the tobacco. The offering of tobacco in this context is a culture-specific language, de-centering and decolonizing Whitecentrism and linguoracism (see Orelus, 2013).

Taking A Step Back

Respect and reciprocity are intimately related in Ojibwe culture, and are dependent upon upon the gift of tobacco when requesting advice, help, or guidance (see Figure 2). Tobacco may be offered in prayer or prior to an excursion in the environment to harvest manoomin (i.e. wild rice), birch bark, spruce roots, medicinal plants, or any of nature's gifts. Ojibwe author, Basil Johnston (1982/1990) elaborates upon the centrality of tobacco:

From his father's custom of burning tobacco at the onset of storms, of offering tobacco during journeys, in those places deemed dangerous or sacred, and of implanting tobacco in the earth while gathering medicine, Mishi-Waub-Kaikaik learned that his people were always conscious of the presence of *Kitche Manitou*. (p. 33)



Figure 2. Dried-whole-leaf tobacco given to me by Dr. Bruce Martin to give to Ojibwe artists. Courtesy Kevin Slivka.

ag, therefore, literally translated, signifies 'spontaneous man'" (1885, p. 56).

Johnston continues with an origin story concerning the offering of tobacco that occurred after a nine-day journey to the top of a mountain by two young community members. They neared the top and were met with thunder, lightning, and a veil of fog and mist through which the chant called forth, “Waegonaen maenaepowunt?” / “Waegonaen wauh pagidinigaessik?” / “Who dares without tobacco?” / “Who dares without offering?” (p. 34). Johnston describes that one of the men lost his balance and plummeted to the foothills of the mountain due to his boldness in approaching the Thunderbirds. The Thunderbirds left and never returned since their abode was desecrated. Later on, the other young man who lived was paddling a canoe when a gust of wind pushed him to the point, formed by the confluence of the lake with the aforementioned mountain. Here too, was an ever-present mist. As the young man worked to balance his canoe he heard chanting with the blowing wind, “Apaegish abeedabung.” / “Apaegish abeedabung.” / “Oh! For the light of day.” / “Oh! For the light of day.” / “Apaegish ginopowauhingobun.” / “Apaegish zugussowauhingobun.” / “Oh! For the taste of tobacco.” / “Oh! for the smell of tobacco” (p. 35). A small canoe with diminutive people with empty pipes appeared as those who were chanting. The young man then offered his tobacco into the water. Johnston continues:

As the tobacco floated away, he chanted: “Saemauh n’weekaunaehn.” / “Saemauh k’weekaunaehnaun.” / “Saemauh k’weekaunissimikonaun.” / “Tobacco is my friend.” / “Tobacco is our friend.” / “Tobacco makes us friends.” (pp. 35-36)

Here then, the gift of tobacco signifies humility, reverence, and

interconnectivity, which perhaps acknowledges imbalances incurred through personal action. Inherent to this understanding is sensitivity to the sustainability of the immediate ecology and the tightly woven interconnectedness that some Ojibwe practice is an anti-hierarchical relationship among people and the natural environment (see Wilson & Restoule, 2010). Johnston (1982/1990) states:

And even though the little people were never seen again, the Anishnabeg never forgot to offer tobacco to them in the places where they were thought to abide. Thus began the custom of offering tobacco to the deities in their domains.⁴ (p. 36)

I was concerned that the gift of tobacco from an outsider, particularly from a White researcher can be a complicated matter. As an outsider, I thought it could be difficult to discern who continued to practice the exchange of tobacco, especially when the offering of tobacco differs from region to region in addition to the many Ojibwe who have adopted Christian practices. Specifically, First Nations Anishinaabeg have slightly different exchange practices of tobacco. For example, The Traditional Peoples Advisory Committee (TPAC) from the University of Manitoba explained the sacredness of tobacco and the relationships that are inferred through exchange:

When giving tobacco, place it in front of the Elder and state your

⁴ The spelling and referencing of Ojibwe, Anishinaabe, or Anishnabeg signifies examples of the multiplicities and variance of self-identification between northern Minnesota Ojibwe and First Nations Ojibwe.

request. The Elder indicates acceptance of your request by picking up the tobacco. If you hand it directly to the Elder you do not give him/her the opportunity to accept or pass on your request it takes away their choice. Always speak to the tobacco BEFORE handing the tobacco to the Elder. (as cited in Wilson & Restoule, 2010, p. 41, emphasis in original)

I was not aware of these protocols, as they were never expressed or corrected during either of my excursions to Minnesota Ojibwe reservations in 2010 or 2012. Tobacco was always offered directly from the giver to the receiver, with whom the giver wished to respect and engage. Although I offered tobacco to Kemper, my delay caused unintended tensions and provoked interrogations from him. The two-hour conversation magnified my anxieties, his challenges to my presence, and exposed slippages of my competence in Ojibwe country as an outsider. Although contradiction lay between the statements issued by TPAC and my personal experiences with Ojibwe informants and participants, there are multiple ways in which tobacco may be given. There is not one singular, *authentic* mode of operation, which resonates with Bhabha's (1994) notion of "cultural difference" being sovereign and autonomous (p. 50). Further, Mi'kmaq scholar Battiste (2008) concludes, "Indigenous knowledge, then, is a dynamic knowledge constantly in use as well as in flux or change...There is no singular author of Indigenous knowledge and no singular method for understanding its totality" (p. 500). Respecting the fluidity and interrelationships as an Indigenous interconnected way of being also means that my knowing is intended to be partial. Kemper's cultural sovereignty reinforces

Jones' (2008) re-conceptualized hyphenated Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationship, one that is "not only a relationship between collaborating people but also their respective relationship to *difference*" (p. 475, emphasis in original).

Conclusions

My first meeting with Kemper greatly impacted my research studies and pedagogy as an educator. Since this event, we shared multiple phone conversations about our daily experiences and he extended opportunities to join a sweat lodge and other community ceremonies. However, weather or other meetings impeded these events. Following this early field experience, I consistently initiated meetings with Ojibwe artists by offering whole leaf or loose-leaf tobacco. I intended this offering as a communication of respect and with a good heart. Battiste (2008) states, "To acquire Indigenous knowledge, one cannot merely read printed material...or do field visits to local sites. Rather, one comes to know through extended conversations and experiences with elders, peoples, and places" (p. 502). I address Battiste's concern by communicating with Kemper, Losh, Jones, Kruse, and the Goodwins through letters, phone calls, photographs, gifts, and personal visits. My continuing communication is not solely concerned with acquisition; rather these relationships have become meaningful to me beyond the research.

I examined failure as a relational ethic that predicates allied relationships and as aesthetic inquiry to reflexively reframe it (see Figure 3). The importance of this artistic act is a personal gesture to reconcile my missteps while learning, observing, and respecting cultural difference and sovereignty as a relational ethic of care. The resulting installation is comprised of reflective memory work as a Byzantine

Catholic, as a public school teacher, and as a student of philosophy. Furthering the reflexivity of this article, I failed to contact Kemper prior to the installation; it was only while I wrote this article that I asked for his permission, which is an additional misstep and delay similar to giving tobacco, but one that could have magnified ramifications. Battiste (2008) explains, “As outsiders, non-Indigenous researchers may be useful in helping Indigenous peoples articulate their concerns, but to speak for them is to deny them the self-determination so essential to human justice and progress” (p. 504).

as a part of my dissertation, and again as an aesthetic inquiry-based installation. All are pedagogical events defined by reflexivity to serve decolonization through shared discussions that encircle what was absent and expected: my observation, engagement, and practice of Ojibwe ontology concerning respect. However insignificant the event may be within the political, social, and cultural agendas of decolonization, my examination of the event in multiple and diverse contexts is a call for outsiders to embrace humility, cultural difference, and respect for Indigenous peoples’ self-determination and sovereignty.

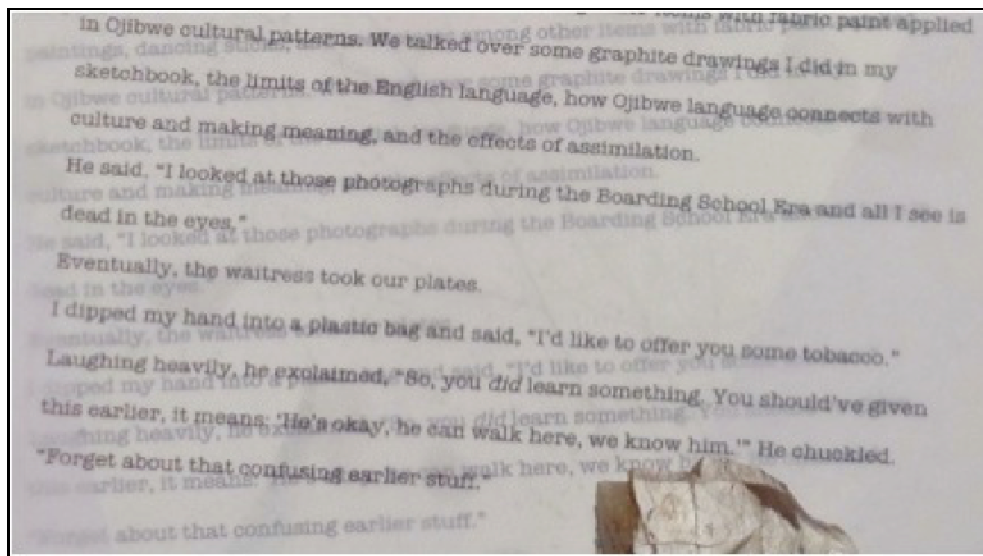


Figure 3. Detail of "Toward Reconciliation" depicting doubled text and petrified wood. Courtesy Kevin Slivka.

Artists, teachers, researchers and school-age students can investigate failure through creative processes as a means to foster metacognition, reflexivity, and pedagogy. I encourage fellow educators to take up Tuhiwai Smith’s (2012) call for research with Indigenous peoples that might result in “processes which can be incorporated into practices and methodologies” targeting overarching endeavors of decolonization, healing, transformation and mobilization (p. 120). My investigation of failure has been taken up as an oral presentation, critically written

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