

## Revisiting Action-Oriented, Multi-Reality Research

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Alaska Native people have often thought of the white man as having capabilities that go far beyond our own abilities as creators and inventors, forgetting to consider some of the long-term side-effects of our infatuation with the Euro-centric ways. That feeling of awe and wonder is fast changing as we see our world deteriorate, driving us to action for a change in consciousness and returning to our own eco-centric worldview.

For the last several centuries, native/tribal people have been inundated with the products of a materialistic and techno-mechanistic society. We have marveled at the power of the rational mind and ingenuity at producing many and varied gadgets that are getting more complex and thus more difficult to understand and operate. The Euro-Americans have used the scientific method, objectivity and reductionism to produce these wonders. They have made gadgets galore and produced boundless knowledge of the physical universe. But we should pay heed to the words of Gregory Peck in the movie, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, when he said, “Just because the airplane goes faster than the horse does not mean that we are better off now than we were then.” We now suffer from overpopulation, erosion of natural resources, violence and a loss of faith and trust in our clergymen, politicians and other institutional leaders.

The Euro-American scientists are coming to the North in droves to do research in places that they know little or nothing about, and often fumble around in the dark, almost blindly. Yet the indigenous people who have lived on this land for millennia are left out of the research projects in many instances. These original people who know the history and how to keep their place sustainable are ignored and seen as being primitive, having only anecdotal and place-specific knowledge. Native people are led to believe that they

will find the problem and fix it with some form of new technology. However, there are seldom technological solutions to biological, mental or spiritual problems.

Western science seeks to identify symptoms of problems and then develop treatments, whether it involves physical, intellectual, emotional or spiritual phenomena. This is well and good to a limited extent, but it has a obvious weakness. These generalized inclinations have thrust insights drawn from the physical world into a world of abstractions<sup>1</sup>. The phenomena studied becomes absorbed by the generalized approach to solving problems. This outmoded notion of reductionism and objectivity gets in the way of compassion and cooperation and denies emotional and spiritual connection between the human, other creatures, plants and elements of Mother Earth. However, indigenous people can only be understood as part of their environment, part of their place.

Early in our heritage as we experienced change, our Elders recognized that this technical world produced much to purportedly make life easier, but they also warned that there is a danger in this trend. Too much of the resources are being used and wasted and the refining and manufacturing processes involved require excessive use of energy. In extracting minerals and timber, much land is laid to waste and it takes a long time for it to recover. These processes do not take into consideration the needs of the seventh generation. Will our descendants be able to enjoy the resources in a similar state of abundance and savor the beauty of Mother Earth as our ancestors did?

Psychologist Carl Jung has written of the “collective consciousness” and other scientists have used a holographic metaphor to convey the complexity of our relationship to our past and to each other. I can readily appreciate this as it lends itself to explaining our ancestral memory and ways of knowing. During gestation in the mother’s womb, a chord is struck which resonates in the universal holographic mind. Early in life, certain notes in this chord vibrate stronger than others, such as for suckling, crying when hungry or hurting, smiling to show love and joy and so forth. As the child gets older these early notes become weaker as others become stronger, from which emerges an outgoing personality, a spiritual attitude, a love of music, a mathematical or scientific interest and so forth. These will continue to grow while others begin to shrink as we mature.

There is a story of a hunter about to cross a newly frozen body of water. He remembers his Elders telling him that he should test the strength of the newly formed ice by dropping his ice pick. If it penetrates and does not stop, don’t try crossing because the ice will be too weak. If the pick stops where the wooden handle and bone point intersect, the hunter can try to cross. To do so, he has to gather energy by looking at the sky, the sun, currents,

wind, moon and stars from which he gains a feeling of lightness in his mind. He starts across the ice establishing a rhythmic gait, and he makes it to the other side. The energy chord produced from his observations has struck a resonant chord in the holographic mind bringing his body in rhythm with the surrounding environment.

It behooves us, as Native researchers, to redesign research methodologies that go beyond those we have learned in the Euro-American universities. We must first try to find balance in our own lives before we attempt to establish a meaningful and dynamic relationship with those we are seeking to understand. In some instances we may have to rely on spiritual methods altogether. This will allow us to truly interpret data that we have gathered by asking questions, observing and directly participating in an experience. We, as Native people, thrive on first-hand experience as the primary source of knowledge.

We have heard stories about tuberculosis being healed by drinking juice of the spruce needle, or the remission of cancer by drinking stinkweed juice. These treatments require belief and faith from one's own worldview, using the whole mind and body to try to explain and understand. If no rational explanation is found, then one has to accept this on belief and faith of something greater than you and I. In using this method of knowing it presents a new frontier of research methods using the whole self. The self is consciousness without knowing. It has been said that mysticism is a dialectic of feeling, while science is a dialectic of reason. We must work toward the integration of the intellectual with the mystical for the healing process to be complete. Albert Einstein noted that spirituality is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research and as such is a philosophical/psychological prerequisite for research.

Most research methodologies in vogue today require that we only use a part of our self. However, the modern scientific method combined with Native ways has the potential to produce a new breed of scientists and engineers who are able to exercise all their capabilities with compassion and a sense of greater purpose as they strive to build a technology kinder to the human, the environment and the spirit that resides within all of us. These scientists will work for restoring balance, healing and living a life that feels just right. This is action-oriented, multi-reality research which will put Alaska Native people on a pathway to greater control of our past, present and future.