

Indigenous Knowledge Protection Act

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When I think about how outsiders have been able to interfere with the recovery, re-vitalization, and resurgence of Indigenous knowledge (IK) I realize it is partly because many people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are selfishly benefiting. Another reason for these acts of interference is that no one has taken the time to identify and name the inappropriate actions. Nor for that matter is anyone offering a framework that helps community people perceive the interference for what it is. The recovery, re-vitalization, and resurgence of Indigenous knowledge is at stake, thus I offer this framework:

1. Indeed, culture is a social process and is both shared with, and borrowed from, others. This exchange is a good and natural process. Regardless, a moral code must mediate all cultural exchange. This is particularly the case in situations where oppressive societal structures have stifled and prevented a good life for particular peoples.
2. People who borrow another's culture for selfish needs, be it for spiritual, economic, or employment reasons, without considering the ramifications and critically thinking about how they may be making matters worse for an already oppressed people, are interfering. Further, they are engaging in cultural appropriation.
3. We all have IK. This includes European people. Many people have taken the time and effort to define IK. Broadly speaking IK,
 - ✓ predates human arrival;
 - ✓ exists outside of the human capacity to perceive, understand, and interpret it;
 - ✓ is also the observed, interpreted, and constructed knowledge that predates patriarchy, the western scientific model, industrialization, materialism, and the present economic paradigm;
 - ✓ has ritualistic, oral, and written elements;
 - ✓ is wholistic: mind (thought), body (practice), and spirit (emotion);
 - ✓ is the land based knowledge that emerges in relationship with the greater cosmos of the universe;
 - ✓ sits closer to natural law; and,
 - ✓ is inclusive of an inherent moral code.
4. An IK paradigm shift will not occur if people continue to interfere, take, and rely on other people's IK. Many people have worked hard to re-learn and re-gain their IK. Follow this path and do your part at learning and gaining your IK. Further, live with IK integrity and be a role model for other people to follow: embrace and celebrate your own IK.
5. Teachers genuinely interested in acknowledging the value of IK, and who are genuinely interested in a paradigm shift, must begin with their own IK and must also ask students to begin with their own IK. To do otherwise is unethical, stifles the much needed critical mass, and thus perpetuates colonization.
6. Avoid "elder essentialism," which is the thought and practice that only elders hold IK. Elder essentialism is a form of idolatry, is dangerous, and interferes.
7. Do not label an Indigenous person who is not a member of your community "elder," nor for that matter should you rely on government or an institution to do this. This is a form of elder essentialism and interferes. The process of identifying and naming elders must remain in-situ, or

alternatively community based, and free from the structural limitations and politics of both institutions and outsiders. In short, community members hold this right. Discover and identify your elders, applying your community criteria in the process.

8. Incorrectly labeling a person “chief,” “elder,” or “doctor” for your own purposes is interference and is inappropriate manipulative aggrandizement. This is an act of interference.
9. In your need for other people’s IK, avoid disingenuous inappropriate patronizing relationships as they serve to place community members in a vulnerable location in their genuine need for IK as they will be expected to be equally or, worse, more patronizing. This sets up a situation where disingenuous relationships are not only expected but are the norm. In short, disingenuous patronizing relationships are an act of interference.
10. When interested in integrating particular or local IK, that is not your own, into an event, conference, journal, or book, do so in a true process of collaboration. Adding a sprinkling of other people’s IK after all the important structural decisions have been made is another act of interference and cultural appropriation.
11. When interested in a sacred site that is not your own and that you have not been socialized into understanding, and are thus void of the necessary interpretive competency, ask for a teaching on the site rather than engage in a ceremony. To engage in a ceremony where you are a curious cultural interloper is interference as it serves to devalue the sacredness of both the place and the ceremony for community members.
12. Expect to concretely give back to the Indigenous nation that you have borrowed IK from as they, rather than your friend/s, define what the giving back process entails; meaningful reciprocity is fundamental.
13. To people who argue a dream/vision told them they are from a particular Indigenous nation, and people who argue they saw a photograph where their ancestor looks like so-and-so as a rationale for interfering; this does not constitute concrete community membership. Rather, there are three criteria:
 - ✓ Self-identification;
 - ✓ An ancestral connection; and,
 - ✓ Community recognition and membership.

In the event that you are unable to fulfill these three criteria understand that you are not Indigenous to the particular nation or community that you are precariously claiming.

14. Being adopted by a man or woman does not constitute greater community belonging and is not a license to interfere.
15. Develop the moral courage to challenge and question IK interference, cultural appropriation, and the patronizing relationships that allow cultural interlopers to benefit to the detriment of the Indigenous community. Accept the reality that many people will react negatively to your effort and set out to undermine your effort and you.
16. Lastly, stop interfering with other people’s IK and the crucial community work that members need to do to live a good life. Go back, retrieve, and develop your own IK. This is the best and only way to recover, re-vitalize, and protect IK.