On Tribal Consciousness

THE TREES THAT HOLD HANDS

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Bringing Together Western and Aboriginal Science Knowledges
Unama’ki – Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada
Knowledge has spirit

lives in specific places

- stories
- oral traditions
- prayers
- daily dialogue

Artist Basma Kavanagh
Traditional Knowledge

• known through watching and listening
• dynamic (i.e. not static as many schools demand)
• experienced through song, ceremony, hunting, fishing, gathering medicines
• interacts with daily life
• present in dreams, visions, ceremonies
Traditional Knowledge

lots of interest in this concept from outside traditional culture

What is TK?

Artist Basma Kavanagh
Elders from several communities provided understandings towards the concept of Traditional Knowledge
Two-Eyed Seeing

CAPE BRETON UNIVERSITY

Cheryl Bartlett
Professor of Biology

SCIENCE + TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE
What is TK?

*image by: Rod Restoule from: Into the Daylight; C. Morrisseau, 1998*
If you look beneath the forest floor you will see that the trees of different species are all holding hands.  

Charlie Labrador, Elder

Why can’t we humans do the same?
Western Science  Traditional Knowledge

physical characteristics  physical characteristics +
cultural significance

For example, long ago moss could be used to keep infants dry and comfortable (as a diaper). This is part of **tribal consciousness** and also reflects scientific understanding.
Elders try to pass on tribal consciousness to ensure the living preservation of our world view.

Loss of language among the young makes it difficult “to live” the knowledge because the understandings are embedded in the language.
What is Traditional Knowledge?

The words of our Elders have always reinforced our belief that at one time all creation was one.

All living things have DNA.

TK is a reflection of your own tribal consciousness.
One’s possession of traditional or tribal knowledge becomes a mirror image of our spirituality.

Artist Basma Kavanagh
Merging spiritual guidance with knowledge: parenting

Parenting is considered preparation of character
Spiritual Guidance and Knowledge

Elders from the community monitor behaviour of a pregnant mother.

Mother must make sure baby’s spirit is safe, thus she must not exhibit bad habits or lack of control.

Our responsibilities to each other, i.e. our interconnectiveness, is thereby reinforced as a new being prepares to come into the community.
There are many beliefs which are enacted during pregnancy that serve to remind us of our spiritual ties to one another.

When the baby is born, these beliefs continue to remind us of the fact and mystery of interconnectedness.
Language Has Spirit

Language allows us to teach respect.

Artist Basma Kavanagh
Government Agencies said:

1) children should only be raised by the parents, and
2) the community was not to interfere.

This distorted the rights and responsibilities of parenting and caused cultural disarray.
We need to recover from cultural starvation ... i.e. relearn and use our Mi’kmaw language and spirituality.

We need to recapture our stolen spirits, broken methods, and beaten down skills ... all towards our collective journey of recreating healthy communities.
Traditional Knowledge

Consciousness of Knowing

our interdependence on each other and on Mother Earth

All people must learn

“two-eyed seeing”

so that knowledge of the physical is not separated from wisdom of the spiritual.

*image by:* Rod Restoule  
*from:* Into the Daylight; C. Morrisseau, 1998
Wela’lioq
Thank You

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