Reconciling difference and building trust:

International Collaboration in Indigenous Language Revitalization
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This presentation sets out to:

• Share our experience working collaboratively within the Aboriginal and academic communities, exploring issues that confront the diverse participant constituencies.

• Share strategies used to address the issues of difference that frequently interface with language revitalization initiatives.

• Discuss measures of successful collaboration along with residual challenges.
The InField Institute

• In the summer of 2008, the University of California, Santa Barbara, with the support of various funding bodies, hosted a six-week InField Institute:
  – Two weeks of concentrated, instructional workshops
  – Four weeks of applying these skills in intensive field linguistics methods and community-grounded ethical protocols.

• Participants in the latter section were assigned to work with speakers representing one of three endangered languages: \(k^\text{\textsuperscript{w}ak^\text{\textsuperscript{w}}ala},\) Ekegusi, and Mende.
InField: $k^wak^wala$

- In 2005, 161 fluent speakers were identified, out of the total $k^wak^wəkə’wak^w$ population (approx. 7500). The number of speakers has since diminished dramatically.
- The $k^wak^wala$ collaboration was sponsored by a SSHRC Strategic Aboriginal Research project.
The kʷakʷala Field Linguistics Class
InField: $kwak'wala$

- Participating in the $kwak'wala$ course were:
  - 2 Elders
  - 1 Linguist
  - 4 $kwak'wak'wak$ Community Members representing a wide range of educational backgrounds
  - 1 Cheyenne Elder/Fluent Speaker
  - 1 Anthropologist/Language Activist
  - 3 PhD Students: Austria, Canada, USA
  - 2 MA Student: Canada, USA
  - 3 short-term visiting scholars: Canada, Japan, USA

- In the course of our work, three phases emerged:
  - **Negotiating Difference**
  - **Building Trust, Reconciling Difference**
  - **Collaboration**
1. Negotiating Difference

- We were bound by a shared commitment to the revitalization of *kʷakʷala*, yet challenged by the dimensions of difference among us.

**Aboriginal vs Academic**

- We consider this a false dichotomy, as it implies incompatibility, conflict, or over-simplification. We view our differences as dynamic and complex, as multi-layered and multi-faceted as our individual identities.
Differences...

academic background
ethno-cultural background
talents and expertise
institutional expectations
intra-/inter-community relationships
experience with or ignorance of historical/appropriation issues
responsibilities
short- and long-term goals
intellectual property rights
motivations
priorities
resources/backing (legitimacy)
entitlement
protocols
2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference

a) Segregate the endeavour.

b) Maintain open, respectful, and constructive communication.

c) Determine a communal purpose.

d) Create a knowledge collective.
2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference

a) Segregate the endeavour: New-tral spaces, neutral faces

• Establishing physical and emotional distance from the context of intra-/inter-community conflict/alliances/rivalries can have a defusing effect, making for more inclusive, non-partisan surroundings, which boosts participation.

• Sharing in the discovery of a new place, developing ‘survival’ strategies.

• Negotiating new relationships and re-negotiating old relationships within our new community.

• A sequestered environment reduces the degree of distraction: eat, sleep, breathe $k^wak^wala$, if only for awhile.
2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference

b) Maintain open, respectful, and constructive communication.

- Identify a code of conduct founded upon respect.
  - Presence of Elders summons specific protocols and codes of conduct. Out of deference to the Elders in our group, we maintained an atmosphere of harmony and dedication.

- Share concerns and grievances, discussing towards a resolution rather than over-emphasizing a problem.

- Address barriers as they arise so as not to let them govern the engagement or impede the workflow.
2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference

c) Determine a communal purpose.

• Sharing individual purposes, and finding the common thread that binds them.
  – We were brought together by a shared dedication to the revitalization of *kʷakʷala*.

• Focusing on educating towards achievement of the purpose rather than blaming: “I have something to learn here.”

• Provides a foundation upon which new relationships are built and old relationships are rebuilt rather than perpetuating pre-existing differences.

• Once a purpose has been established, trust lies in allowing others to make choices about their learning. There are no guarantees…
2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference

d) Build a knowledge collective

- Start at square one then accelerate quickly in learning linguistic content and cultural content. Every participant contributes their strongest features creating a resilient body of knowing.

- Support the knowledge-building momentum: Continue to bring forth that which is questioned, unknown, or not understood.

- Relinquish control: Allow the group to grow as a collective, developing processes and outcomes in its own right, creating an atmosphere founded upon the strengths and qualities inherent. Facilitators guide this progression without overriding it.
3. Collaboration

- Decolonizing effect
  - Building of trust
  - Building of relationships
  - Rebuilding of the *kʷakʷala* speech community
Challenges

• Preparatory pragmatics: birth certificates, passports, visas, housing, transportation, childcare, taxes…
• Balancing the needs of the group with the needs of the individual
• Ethics and protocols
• Future Work: Analysis, Archiving, Access
Where do we go from here?

- Thesis projects
- Co-authorship
- Facebook, email contact
- Future collaboration
- Reunion?