Breakout 1C: Building from a Cultural Foundation

Tuesday November 14, 2017 1:15PM – 2:45PM

Kluane Adamek (Chair), Ed Schultz, Peter Hutchins, Les Doiron

Ed Schultz

Ed Schultz explained that language is inextricably tied to land, identity and place. He discussed that although land claims are a great platform, they don't facilitate change and therefore nations must be proactive.

Like most other groups, his people have experienced a severe decline in cultural identity as a result of the colonial policies of the state, churches, public institutions and the education system. Languages, belief systems and ways of life are getting down to extinction; less than a half-dozen people that are fluent in his language. He explained that his language is who his people are as it was born from the lands that they have occupied for over 10,000 years.

Twenty years after signing their final agreement, community members are still wrestling with regaining their identities and the social problems that our people are dealing with are still prevailing even with co-management, money, and assets, etc. By 1997 they realized that the land claims didn't solve anything and they needed to make a concerted effort to decolonize themselves.

Selkirk First Nation and other communities have been discussing how to get young people involved in their culture. There have been talks facilitated between the Elders of these communities and they were able to take some of the transfer money to fund this effort. Now spending about $300/400K per year. Elders were willing to share and let us record what they were saying. The books are now available and authenticated by their elders and made available to students at public schools.

There is also a need to educate those not in school – especially young people. They are now developing codes of ethics for leaders, youth, elders, women, and men. They have budgeted to cultivate apps for this material and legends and stories so that it's accessible and to help guide people. They have also developed an Uncles Retreat to reacquaint men with their traditional role– to protect and provide for the community. They also have an Aunties Retreat for women and their traditional roles to ensure harmony and balance. Genealogy charts and maps of areas you came from can distill pride and dignity. These are some ways they are being proactive about their culture and identity. They are working on collapsing departments of education and culture into one. They want to make sure that kids prepared for the academic challenges of the western world but that they are also grounded in their language and culture.

Land claims and self-government are great vehicles to deal with problems but they don't address your problems directly. Use that platform and take it to places they never thought you could take it to.

Little Salmon Carmacks website for more information.

Peter Hutchins

He helped negotiate the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) which was born out of a conflict over a hydro project. This conference on modern treaties is going to speak about historic treaties. He has been interested in the commonality between the ancient treaties, historic treaties and modern treaties. In framing the modern LAC we've lost sight to an extent of the important things like Aboriginal perspectives and the golden thread of continuity that the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) has spoken about.

Most menacing admonition of modern treaties is the whole agreement clause. He is hostile to this idea because it reflects a positivism which is not a part of Indigenous points of view. The clause doesn't leave anything beyond it for innovation, creativity or elders. He also expressed how the written word favours non-Indigenous cultures over Indigenous oral traditions, in his view.

Mr. Hutchins was surprised about the unwritten provisions of treaties as they could be applied to culture, identity, and the land. To say that they aren't there is to drain the lifeblood of these texts. The role of Indigenous law is vital part of the link between culture and legal instruments/treaties. When one looks at those treaties, it's not always clear what's happening. The SCC can interpret it outside of the spirit in which it was written – and can come to the wrong conclusion. He gave an example from the JBNQA about missed federal responsibility due to a complete misreading of the text of the JBNQA.

Indigenous people don't talk about "my treaty" they talk about "our treaty" and they are using legal action to get Canada and the provinces back to the table. The language of extinguishment will never deprive Indigenous people of their roots and their attachment to the land. This must be acknowledged to get to the golden thread of continuity.

Les Doiron

He said that only way to lead is by learning your language, finding out where you're from and learning who you are.

Many members of his community are urban because social housing and jobs are a struggle in our communities. Their challenges of being a small, rural, remote community can be overcome with funding. However, funding is currently based on small grants/proposals, with no long-term funding from the current relationships. Therefore, the current programs are short lived an unsustainable, and there is a rush because there are only seven fluent speakers remaining.

Own source revenues have been invested into programs. They developed a warriors program for young men, and a girls program will be coming soon. These are a way to introduce youth to transitional foods, medicines and ways of life. They are found to help young people and older people too because it gives them a chance to share knowledge. They are also working with elders towards language preservation to develop programs and record their language.

Everything and everyone is interconnected… "Let's all speak our language."

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Q: What are some of the traditional roles for the women in your community?

Ed Schultz: For our people, identity comes from our women and grandmothers. They didn't live in villages, they had seasonal camps. The men were the hunters and women were the educators and storytellers who would take a lead role in making sure the camp was functioning with medicines, childcare, etc. As he sees it, they were the glue that held our identity together. When the Indian act happened, they were compelled (sometimes by force) to move, and children were taken away. When the women got displaced, everything else became displaced. A lot of what they're doing today is to educate what the traditional roles were. Some people are conflicted in how the western world is and how they see their roles.

Kluane: Conversations are also starting to take place for those that are two-spirited and transgender. This is a huge conversation when decolonizing to make sure those people feel comfortable and that everyone has a role.

Q: The concept of Indigenous law: how is that linking into policies, programs, governance processes? How have the ways we used to govern shifted in the new governments?

Ed Schultz: They have a clan system which is now outlined in the constitution. Once elected, clan members represent all the people, not just that clan. Since the time of ratification, the work they're doing now is looking at gender roles, roles of leaders/youth/elders/etc. Once these codes of conduct are adopted he fully expects to support amendments to constitution/policies to accommodate that reacquired knowledge.

Les Doiron: The treaties that they've signed are exciting and create a lot of opportunities, but they are not without challenges. They can't lose sight of the cultural component. There is a seat in government for the Chief and they have the elders to help guide them in the modern context.

Ed: Aside from constitutional things, in the modern context, 1008 square miles of land is communal, not individual. Even those in designated housing, it is still held collectively. Surface interests, subsurface and financial interests are all held collectively too. That has carried over from the way we used to be.

They have one annual assembly for all their citizens and three general meetings. At these meetings, they come up with constitutional questions and strive to come to consensus. When

there is disagreement, they must respect their opinion and try to understand it and find ways to move forward. Before contact they lived in small family units and they had to collaborate and work hard – without being told. Anyone who went off to do their own thing put their family in jeopardy. Consensus is brought forward because of that.