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Decolonizing Research Practice: Indigenous Methodologies, Aboriginal Methods, and Knowledge/Knowing

Mike Evans, Adrian Miller, Peter Hutchinson, and Carlene Dingwall

Abstract

Indigenous approaches to research are fundamentally rooted in the traditions and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples themselves, although Indigenous methodologies and methods have become both systems for generating knowledge and ways of responding to the processes of colonization. Very specific Indigenous methods emerge from language, culture, and worldview. This chapter describes two such Indigenous research approaches drawn from the work of two Indigenous scholars with their communities in Australia and Canada. Although creative and new, these approaches draw deeply from their communities and thus express and enact traditional knowledge systems in contemporary terms. This approach may result in more pertinent research, better take-up and dissemination of research results, and a general improvement in the situations of Indigenous communities and peoples.

Key Words: Indigenous methodologies, decolonization, participatory action research

Indigenous approaches to research are as complex and multiple as Indigenous peoples themselves, but the context for understanding Indigenous methodologies or the closely related topic of decolonizing methodologies necessarily includes the overarching (and in some ways unifying) colonial structures in which peoples find themselves embedded. One of the small ironies of Indigenous methodologies is that the struggle to be defined and understood as Indigenous through specifically Indigenous knowledge production is sometimes most clearly heard by other (i.e., non-Indigenous) scholars as an oppositional rather than self-constituting process. Nonetheless, Indigenous scholars and the communities from which they come understand the expression and practice of distinct Indigenous research methodologies to reflect, enact, and revitalize those Indigenous knowledge systems themselves.

The term itself—“Indigenous”—speaks to what it is not (i.e., colonial/European) as well as to what it contains—the perspectives, histories, and

approaches to research as broadly different and varied as those of Maori, Cree, or Sámi peoples. This is comprehensible, given the spread of capitalism and Western European power over the globe in the sixteenth through twenty-first centuries (see Hardt & Negri, 2000; Wolf, 1982; Worsley, 1984), but can obscure what an Indigenous (or “Indigenist,” see Rigney, 1997) perspective entails, which may have as its source something quite specific, something best considered authentically formed by Indigenous peoples themselves (i.e., autochthonously), rather than derivative of colonialism. This is equally true of the closely related term “Aboriginal,” which also derives some of its content from the colonial experience and Western frames of thought to which it is most often opposed.¹ To understand Indigenous methodologies simply in these terms, however, no matter how well intentioned, is a potentially recolonizing act.

Fundamentally, the ground contested through Indigenous methodology is knowledge itself, and,

for Indigenous people, it is often self-knowledge that is at stake (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). For many centuries, European knowledge production systems have attended to building images of Indigenous people; Indigenous methodologies are proactive processes through which Indigenous people create their own images and stories. A short story might help show how fundamental the critique of Western knowledge systems can be.

A number of years ago I (ME) went to a large pow-wow at the Toronto Skydome with some friends. About halfway through the event, I went outside the stadium with a young Anishinabe woman to smoke. We were talking and smoking, and, at some point in the conversation, I mentioned that I was studying anthropology (I was doing my PhD at the time). This was a surprise to her, as we only knew each other socially and through circles where anthropologists in particular were greeted with some suspicion. On learning this, she paused for a moment, and then said thoughtfully, “You are the people who think we walked across the Bering Strait.” She was referring to the Bering Strait or Beringia hypothesis, which claims that the Americas were peopled between about 10,000 to 30,000 years ago via a land bridge across the Bering Strait. This is quite a contentious theory among Aboriginal communities (see Ward Churchill’s chapter entitled “Let’s Turn Those Footsteps Around” in the book, *Since Predator Came*, 2005 [1995]). The opposition to the theory is founded partly in alternative belief systems and partly in a deep concern for the amount of intellectual energy that seems to go in to understanding when Aboriginal people arrived in the Americas. The suspicion is that, at root, the core interest in proposing, arguing, and promoting the theory is in recontextualizing all human communities in the New World as immigrants. After another few seconds, she peered at me through the smoke and offered a one-word critique of the Beringia hypothesis—“Whatever” she said, and then we finished up our smokes and went back inside.

That one word—“whatever”—sums up the epistemological positioning of Indigenous methodologies vis-à-vis colonialism. That is, as a system of thought and knowledge production, Indigenous methodologies do not dispute European ones directly, but rather ignore them, and, in practice, create knowledge directly rather than as a result of disputation or opposition. In this way, Indigenous methodologies avoid being entrapped in the power relations inherent in colonial knowledge systems.

Certainly, in colonial systems, knowledge and power are intertwined. Attwood and Arnold (1992) provide one analysis of these systems in their work on

Aboriginalism, work that draws on the much earlier Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, which Flyvbjerg (2001) describes as prudence or practical wisdom/knowledge, or “true state, reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man” (p. 2). *Phronesis* goes beyond the notion that knowledge is about simple facts to consider the role of values and power in judgments and decisions made by a social or political actor. Flyvbjerg argues that phronetic social science focuses on four value-rational questions: (1) where are we going? (2) who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?, (3) is this development desirable?, and (4) what should we do about it?

Thus, Attwood and Arnold look to Aboriginalism as an intellectual development of constructions of authoritative truths about “Aborigines/Aboriginals,” one characterized by the relationship between power and knowledge. Aboriginalism exists on three levels: the first as Aboriginal Studies through the teaching and scholarly pursuit of knowledge about Aborigines/Aboriginals by non-Indigenous intellectuals who claim Aborigines/Aboriginals cannot represent themselves and therefore must be represented by experts who know more about them than they know about themselves. The second level is based on a style of thought that places emphasis on the imagined distinction between Aborigines/Aboriginals and Europeans in order to construct them as the “Other” and to form a “Them” and “Us” relationship. The third level refers to corporate and government institutions exercising authority over Aborigines/Aboriginals, claiming rights, laws, and information about them. Unfortunately, it is at this point Attwood falls silent and leaves off the Indigenist project of Indigenous people developing, controlling, and determining their own epistemological trajectory. Research can play a key role in empowering Indigenous people to fulfill this role.

There is, then, a sort of knowledge-based empowerment that sits at the very heart of the development of Indigenous methodologies. This is a proactive stance, building on the work of Indigenous critics of Western knowledge systems (most notably Deloria, 1969; 1973; subsequently, see Alfred, 1999; Battiste, 1986; Churchill, 1997; Ermine, 1995), but the germinal work in this regard is Tuhiwira L. Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999). It is important here to note that Smith’s work is framed in terms of decolonization, in opposition to colonial processes, including those of knowledge producers be they colonial officials, historians, or social scientists. The work also references

a number of proactive responses, and, indeed, in her concluding chapter, Smith provides some very general signposts for how a careful scholar might seek out particular and appropriate Indigenous methods. At one level, Smith's is a moral guide, directing scholars to decolonize their own practices; at a deeper level, it is a primer on where and how such scholars could find suitable Indigenous actors to speak with about whether and how an appropriate research undertaking is possible.

What Smith does not do is frame research methods beyond methodologies. The distinction here between method and methodology is important, but making it runs the risk of descending into the trite. Without claiming too much, we would like to suggest that, for heuristic purposes, method here be understood as a technique for generating data and methodology be conceptualized as a higher order system that affects the selection of methods in any one instance via a set of principles regarding the nature of knowledge and information and the suitable sources from which such information might be derived. There is an epistemological underpinning to methodology that subsequently patterns action in the research space and, thus, knowledge.

Indigenous methodologies and participatory ones are, in this regard, quite similar (see Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009) and share a history of struggle. Arising from scholars and communities working in opposition to colonial oppression (Fals Borda, 1987; Friere, 1970) and now adopted by any number of people(s) working from marginalized positions, *participatory action research* (PAR) is used to seek insight from, not simply information about, people and communities in the context of research. For Indigenous communities in particular, such insights may well be derived from deep epistemological roots expressed and reproduced in language and culture. Certainly, within the work of contemporary Indigenous scholars, the concern about Indigenous language and culture is very much tied up with the unique perspectives or worldviews derived from these sources.

Indigenous methods derive from Indigenous perspectives, language, and culture and are thus exactly that—Indigenous; not simply postcolonial or decolonizing, they are epistemologically revitalizing as well. Having now made that claim (i.e., that Indigenous methodologies are, at least potentially, distinct from Western systems of knowledge production), we can move on to a couple of examples that speak to the fundamental goal of Indigenous methodologies—facilitating Indigenous people to develop knowledge

and speak for and of themselves about any and all elements of the worlds they inhabit.

Cyclone: An Australian Aboriginal Approach to Knowledge Production and Dissemination

Tropical cyclones are a seasonal weather condition that Indigenous peoples in Northern Australia have experienced for thousands of years. These meteorological events are firmly embedded in the daily lives of Aboriginal people, and this is reflected in language and cultural practices. The Jirrbal people are the keepers of the cyclone story, and sites of significance are maintained and cared for by descendants. Arising from the epistemology of my Jirrbal language and the long experience of my community (AM) in north Queensland, the cyclone model resonates with people and thus provides a culturally cogent mechanism for both generating and disseminating research.²

Historically, research has not been a positive experience for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; researchers have a responsibility to cause no harm, but traditional forms of research have been a source of distress for Indigenous peoples due to inappropriate methods and practices (Cochran et al., 2008; Miller & Speare, 2012). More recently, PAR has offered a way forward, to make research meaningful for the community and to enable an action research cycle that assists in improving processes for addressing important issues from the communities' perspectives. It has potential to reduce the negative effects that conventional research has had on Indigenous people (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006).

Importantly, when communities seek control of the research agenda and seek to be active in the research, they are establishing themselves as more powerful agents (Baum et al., 2006). With the increasing use of PAR approaches to address public health and educational issues, there is potential for bridging the gap between research and practice in addressing social issues and creating conditions that facilitate people's control over the determinants of their health (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Miller & Speare, 2012). Cargo and Mercer (2008, p. 327) suggest that a "key strength of PAR is the integration of researchers theoretical and methodological expertise with nonacademic participants' real world knowledge and experiences into a mutually reinforcing partnership." Partnerships formed with marginalized and vulnerable populations need to ensure that concepts of cultural humility and cultural safety are integrated so that academic and

nonacademic partners are able to establish and maintain mutual respect and trust.

Participatory action research can be a collaborative, participatory, and equal partnership among Indigenous community members, organizations, research assistants, and researchers to examine an issue, gather information about it, analyze the data that come from the process, and then take some action to address that issue. It is driven and owned by the community and the researchers and involves a two-way, respectful conversation that feeds into both the process and the outcomes of this research.

Rigney (1997) promotes the concept of an Indigenist (read Indigenous) methodology that focuses on developing an “anti-colonial cultural critique of Australian history in an attempt to arrive at appropriate strategies to de-colonise epistemologies” (p. 110). Indigenist research is informed by three fundamental and interrelated principles: (1) resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research, (2) political integrity in Indigenous research, and (3) privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research (p. 118).

I have applied these principles by constructing my research worldview on the following quote in my Jirrbal language:

ηααη ηαηβαηηρηηηυ (I think)
ηαη ηηηδα ηαηβαηηρηηηυ (You and I are thinking)

I endeavor to pursue research through the understanding that I am a thinking person (*ηααη*

ηαηβαηηρηηηυ), a sentiment denied to my recent past relatives and ancestors sanctioned on the basis of contrived social theories like polygenesis and social Darwinism (McConnochie, Hollinsworth, & Pettman, 1988). Such theories were used to label Indigenous peoples as being unable to use their minds and intellect; unable to invent, build, cultivate land, produce items of value, and participate in the arts of civilization (Smith, 1999). Indigenist methodologies counteract this premise by privileging Indigenous voices and intelligence.

In applying Indigenous research principles, it is important to critically look at the past to find answers for the future from Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices. Therefore, I also believe that resolving problems collaboratively (*ηαη ηηηδα ηαηβαηηρηηηυ*) is a pathway to understand and address many of the socioeconomic and health problems experienced by Indigenous people.

My research worldview combines both Indigenous research principles and PAR and formalizes it in my own cosmological and cultural framework; a tropical cyclone analogy. Tropical cyclones are significant to Indigenous communities in Northern Australia for not only their destructive power but also for their regenerative and cleansing effects. They are cosmologically and spiritually significant to many Indigenous communities in northern Australia.

The main features of a tropical cyclone are destructive winds and a calm inner eye. I have labeled these features in my language, Jirrbal, in Figure 10.1.

Tropical cyclone analogy

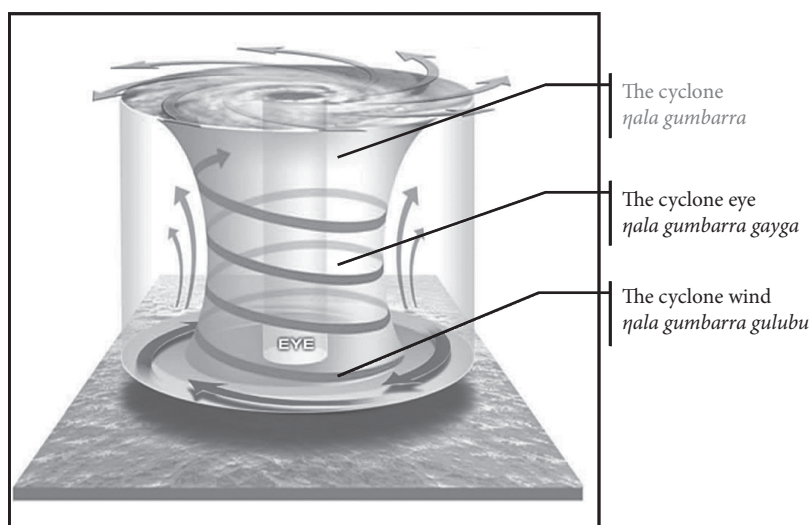


Figure 10.1 The tropical cyclone features destructive winds and a calm inner eye. Accessed from <http://www.ga.gov.au/hazards/cyclone/cyclone-basics/causes.html>

World-view

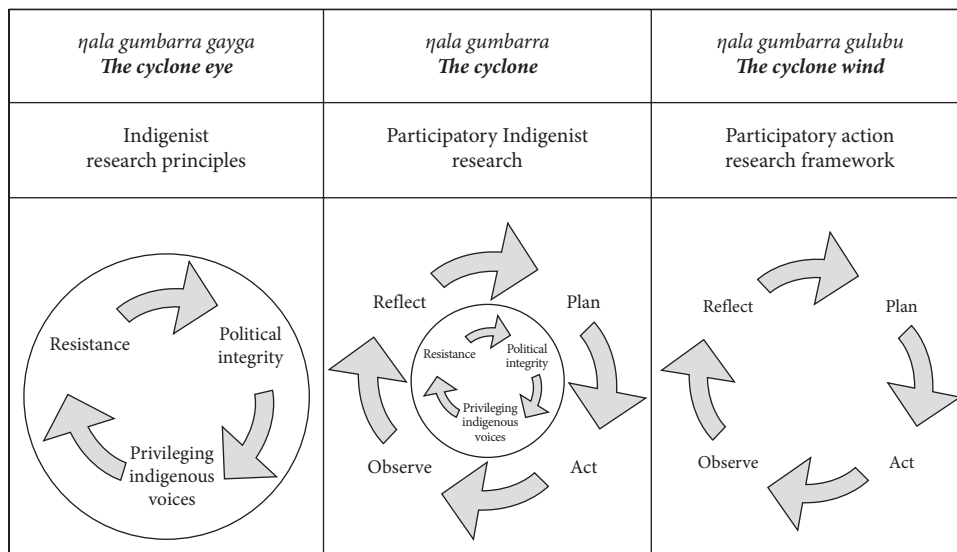


Figure 10.2 The combination of principles from Indigenist research and participatory action research are conceptualized by the eye and the wind of the cyclone.

In combining Indigenist research principles and PAR, I have conceptualized both within the eye (*nala gumbarra gayga*) and wind (*nala gumbarra gulubu*) of the cyclone (*nala gumbarra*).

Indigenous research principles are the eye or center of the research analogy, with the cycles of the PAR framework forming its outer momentum. By using this approach, researchers can take into account the complex dynamics faced by Indigenous communities by planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to bring about change and action as experienced by Indigenous communities (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Rigney, 1997).

In some recent research regarding the impact and context of communicable disease in the Torres Straits, we (Massey et al., 2011) have employed just such a model, combining PAR and the Indigenous research principles embedded in the cyclone. In two linked studies, one on influenza and the other looking at *Strongyloides stercoralis* (threadworm), these principles are applied as a checkpoint at every stage of the research. This is undertaken through application and the ongoing reflection on three questions: (1) Are we undertaking research that is a priority or of importance to Indigenous people in this context? (2) Are we recognizing and acknowledging the political integrity of this research with Indigenous people? (3) Are we ensuring that we actively promote Indigenous voices in this research (Rigney, 1997, p. 118)? The purpose for asking such questions is in guiding the effective and meaningful

participation of communities and organizations involved (Figure 10.3).

Plan

The communities and organizations involved in these studies are based on cultural connections, historical associations, and political assertiveness. Employment and capacity development have been core activities in forming relationships and collaborations. The ideal qualitative sample is one that is small enough to yield rich information to inform the research questions and that contains “critical cases,” “typical cases,” and also occasionally “deviant” cases (Schutt, 2006). The study of more than one case or setting strengthens the generalizability of the findings, hence the inclusion of quite diverse regions.

Acting Stage: Data Collection

During this stage, interview questions have been developed and piloted before interviews are undertaken. Notes should be taken during the interview and validated with the interviewee(s) at the end. Additional observational notes are taken about any other events that have arisen during the interview. The types of data collected could include:

- In-depth interviews, focus groups, observations
- Obstacles and aids to data collection
- Reflections on data quality (valid, reliable, and “thick”)

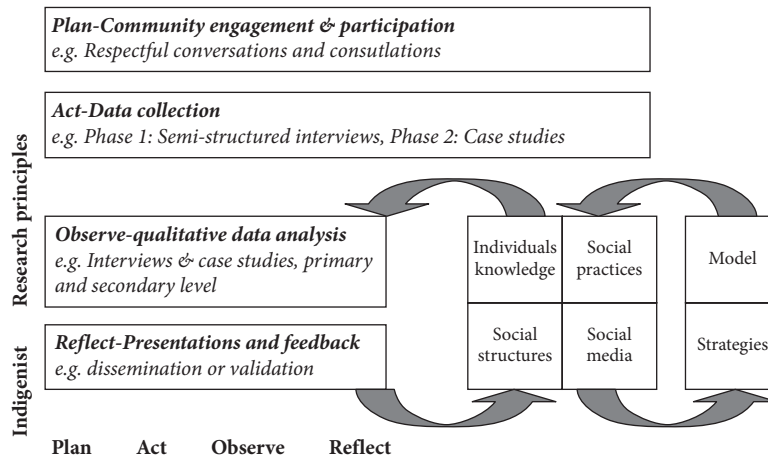


Figure 10.3 Indigenist research principles in practice.

A semistructured interview guide should be used, and participants who consent for interview will be asked a series of questions. Recruitment will continue until saturation is reached; that is, up to the point at which new interviews yield little additional information. The sample will include “critical,” “typical,” and “deviant” cases, as well as include more than one setting.

Observation Stage: Qualitative Data Analysis

This study design requires interviews to be thematically analyzed to develop a model that can be locally contextualized and implemented. Indigenous cultural protocols need to be adhered to in relation to the interviewer’s self-identity, gender, age, language, and confidentiality. Body language, prompts, judgmental language and gestures, dress standards, and the location and timing of the interviews are taken into consideration, and no individuals are identified in the data.

An example of primary level data analysis (Schutt, 2006) includes:

- Documentation
- Conceptualisation and coding
- Examining relationships and displaying data
- Authenticating conclusions
- Reflexivity

A secondary level data analysis example (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) seeks further analysis of the data to sort according to Individual’s Knowledge, Social Practices, Social Structures, and Social Media and to re-categorise the findings in a PAR matrix.

Reflect: Presentations, Feedback, Dissemination, or Validation

Presenting and disseminating preliminary findings to communities and organizations involved in a study is an essential step in this example. This allows for communities and organizations to provide early feedback and validation of the findings and to ensure active participation in the study. Perhaps more urgently, though, this is the point at which the cycle begins anew—reflection is an essential part of the next planning process. The image of the cyclone, that of a continuous swirl of people and ideas coming together to create change and renewal, is an essential element in communicating the purpose, process, and results of the research itself.

It is often stated that Aboriginal communities do not feel connected to research and cannot or do not understand or access research results (Estey, Kmetc, & Reading 2008; Hoare, Levy, & Robinson, 1993; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). The cyclone process is one way to change that, by keeping people abreast of the intention, form, and content of research in an ongoing process that is integral to the research itself. Here, knowledge production and knowledge translation/dissemination are seamlessly (cyclonically) connected.

Between Two Methods: A Parenthetical Comment

Quite recently, Gobo (2011) observed that many Indigenous methodology studies seem to use pretty standard methods, and the studies discussed here do, indeed, use methods drawn and expressed in ways entirely consistent with and embedded in Western medical knowledge systems. But—and

this matters—the methodology, the overarching set of principles that contextualizes that knowledge is located in place, in the cyclone as a metaphor, in the cyclone as a means of communicating with the Aboriginal communities involved, and in the cyclone as the process through which Aboriginal peoples and interests remain at the “eye.”

One might argue (and we do) that it is vital to see and utilize the strengths of differing knowledge systems and contexts thoughtfully and creatively in academic and community settings (Wiber & Kearney, 2006; in Estey et al., 2008). This “two-eyed-seeing” (Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett 2009) also refers to the ability to turn a critical eye toward Western knowledge as “situated,” cultural knowledge, and it allows a simultaneous deconstruction of the dominant paradigm while resurrecting and generating Indigenous knowledge.³ The nature of this process, particularly as it exposes power and privilege, often suggests that Western and Indigenous worldviews are conflicting and in opposition to one another; yet, although the worlds are very different, they are not necessarily incompatible (Smylie et al., 2004). Western research is dominated by “epistemological and ontological disputes that tend to dichotomize quantitative and qualitative research approaches” (Botha, 2011). This dichotomy is both epistemologically and practically antithetical to Indigenous methodologies. Rather than knowledge as being paradigmatically oppositional, Indigenous knowledge is a “collective” knowledge generated by three different knowledge sources: traditional knowledge, empirical knowledge, and revealed knowledge (Castellano, 2000). According to Botha, Indigenous research methodologies can and should go beyond the current hermeneutic borders of conventional qualitative research to embrace more appropriate epistemological and axiological assumptions and suggests a mixed-methods approach as a vehicle for moving beyond these paradigms.

Indigenous ontology is frequently characterized as being “process oriented”; that is, an action and “eventing” approach to life versus a world of subject–object relationships. “Individuals live and enact their knowledge and, in the process, engage further in the process of coming to be—of forming a way of engaging others and the world” (Duran & Duran, 2000). Positivist research paradigms not only produce “colonizing research,” they are contrary to the understanding that knowledge is founded on subjectivity (Cajete, 2000; Marsden, 2003). Subjectivity, as an enactment of an Indigenous research ethic

that derives knowledge from ways of knowing, being, and doing (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003), is also informed by internally informed sources such as dreams, visions, stories, interspecies communications, and internal efforts to maintain spiritual balance (Cajete, 2000; Deloria, 2006; Getty, 2010; Kawagley, 2001). These ways of knowing are, among other things, deeply metaphorical and symbolic and must be understood within a particular cultural, geographical, and linguistic context, and it is this knowledge that has been most impacted by cultural oppression.

One cannot separate these two because the research itself is embedded in activism (Swadner & Mutua, 2008). Indigenous scholars advocate for clear, culturally informed ethics to guide both research and the ongoing dialogue between intersecting worldviews (Ermine, 2005; Tait, 2008). This involves approaching the research with commitment and following the “right path” in the quest for meaning and understanding and how knowledge is handled legally, economically, and spiritually (Cajete, 2000).

Both PAR and Indigenous methodologies focus on process, relationships, justice, and community and are therefore theoretically oriented to evolving research designs and plans. Indigenous methodologies, however, are frequently grounded in the tribal affiliation of the researcher as a statement of identity and respect (Kovach, 2009) and as a process that enables the illumination of particular cultural values and beliefs (Wilson, 2008). As we’ll discuss shortly, culturally derived relational metaphors are often used to both frame the research paradigm and explicate the findings and are reflective of a relational epistemology focusing our attention on our interrelatedness and interdependence with each other and our greater surroundings. These relations are part of complex and multilayered, multiembedded systems that are dynamic and evolving (Getty, 2010; Henderson, 2000; Little Bear, 2000). From particle to universal, each system contributes to the functioning of a larger encompassing system. “All relationships are tied to other relationships. There is a vertical process and a horizontal process, and these processes are constantly intertwining with each other to create reality” (Cajete, 2000, p. 41). In other words, iterative and positioned processes typify Indigenous knowledge systems.

Building a Red River Cart

The Métis are a distinct and constitutionally recognized Aboriginal community in Canada. Born of

the interaction of First Nations and Europeans in the fur trade, the Métis developed as a distinct and politically self-conscious nation in the nineteenth century, co-occupying a vast area in central and northern North America (see the collections edited by Peterson & Brown, 1985; St-Onge, Podruchny, & MacDougall, 2012) until colonization by the Canadian and American States abruptly marginalized them. In Canada today, although legislative and legal distinctions are between Métis and First Nations (see Teillet, 2009), unfortunately, one of the things shared between Métis and First Nations is that their interactions with the same colonial government has resulted in similar, although not the same, social issues. For example, both Métis and First Nations share a similar inequity in health status when compared with the general population of Canada (Adelson, 2005; Gracey & King, 2009).

To address this inequity in health status with the general population, Métis communities, along with other colonized Indigenous peoples, have called for programs developed by their own community. This is an alternative to receiving programs and policies that are derived from outside of the community, one that hopes, in part, to provide a service that is culturally imbued or familiar with the expectation that such familiarity increases participation in and the effect of the program.

The *community readiness model* (CRM), originally developed by Plested, Edwards, and Jumper-Thurman (2006), is one that seeks to understand, assess, and increase community readiness for program interventions in an integrated fashion. The model is particularly useful for health-related program development because it considers readiness in terms of a specific issue and in ways that can be measured across multiple dimensions, with due concern for variation across dimensions and between and within communities. Readiness can be

increased during the process of assessment by bringing key actors together to consider an issue. Indeed, the development of a community consensus and assessment is, in fact, an essential element of developing the strategies and interventions required. By using participatory methods in investigating the readiness of a community, the technique promotes community recognition and ownership of the issue and its solution. Effective inclusion of community promotes cultural continuity and sustainability by promoting the use of community experts and resources while developing a program that is manageable by the community (i.e., consistent with its readiness and capacity). The community must identify befitting strategies that are congruent with their level of readiness. In 2008, as part of a broadly conceived research program with the Métis community in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, Hutchinson facilitated research on the readiness of the community to take greater control of their community health agenda and to identify one or more key issues.

To do this, he and his collaborators started by assessing previous efforts made by the community around the issue of health, the general knowledge of those efforts within the community, and how current community leaders were addressing health. Additional concerns were the general community's understanding of the issue, its priority, and what resources were available to address the development of a community health agenda. The seven-step model is reproduced in Figure 10.4.

The method utilized to assess readiness within the CRM is primarily interviews and surveys. Plested, Edwards, and Jumper-Thurman (2006) also suggest utilizing reviews of policies and programs and academic literature to finalize an assessment of a community's readiness. The interviews and surveys rely on scaled responses from participants to provide

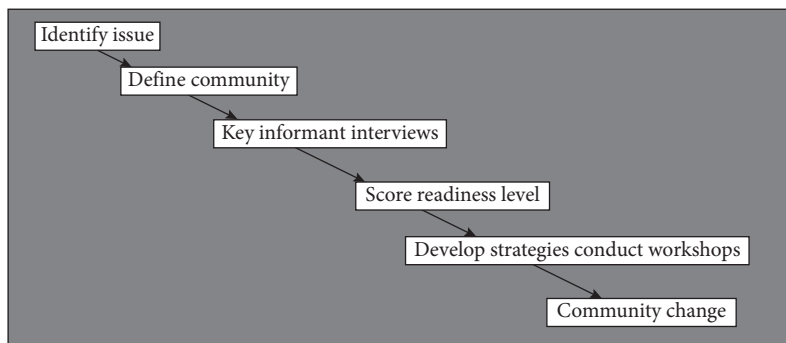


Figure 10.4 Seven steps in the community readiness model (Plested et al., 2006).

the basis for analysis and determination of a community's level of readiness. A community may be at several different levels of readiness, including:

- No Awareness
- Denial/Resistance
- Vague Awareness
- Preplanning
- Preparation
- Initiation
- Stabilization
- Confirmation/Expansion

After assessing the community's readiness, researchers and the community itself are in a better position to address the issue being investigated.

After using the CRM, a very Métis-specific critique emerged, with people indicating that the model itself (that is to say, the methodology) was not sufficiently reflective of their own experiences. The community members, service providers, and leaders wondered if readiness was really quantifiable, and, perhaps more importantly, if complex issues are usefully reduced to a single issue and whether the research focus—rather than a program delivery focus—was warranted. As an Aboriginal community that is (and indeed was) fundamentally dispersed, people noted that the CRM assumed a high level of cohesion within the community (overall and within specific issues) and, indeed, almost presupposed that the community was geographically bounded (note that this has been identified as an issue for Métis health-related research more generally; see Evans et al., 2012). People also noted that there was a danger in framing the work as research based on

a one-time assessment because community needs are continuous and evolving.

As a result, a large gathering was held to consider approaches to community change around health issues and to derive the community's own model. Expressed in terms derived from the original CRM, to which they had been introduced, the major insight that people felt needed to be incorporated was that the process be reiterative and reflective upon itself at every new stage (see Figure 10.5). In a community as complex as that of the Métis, the appropriate interlocutors (i.e., the community) change as an issue is identified; in defining the community, the issue will change to reflect the community's areas of interest; by effective action, community change occurs throughout the process; key informants affect the framing of the issue; and, in workshops and strategies, community and the issue are redefined. At the meeting, one participant noted that it was like a wheel spinning, in that the same point would come around again and again with new information and in a slightly different context.

The new model had to allow for a borderless community because Métis are located both physically and sociologically within other communities, tied to each other by kinship, identity, and culture (for a discussion of this in the British Columbian context, see Barman & Evans, 2009; Evans, Barman, Legault, Dolmage, & Appleby, 2012). Rather than readiness, a model of preparedness was proposed, prioritizing knowing the community, recognizing and engaging the infrastructure within the communities, and being responsive to change. The Métis felt that readiness was very static, and investigating readiness as proposed would become burdensome

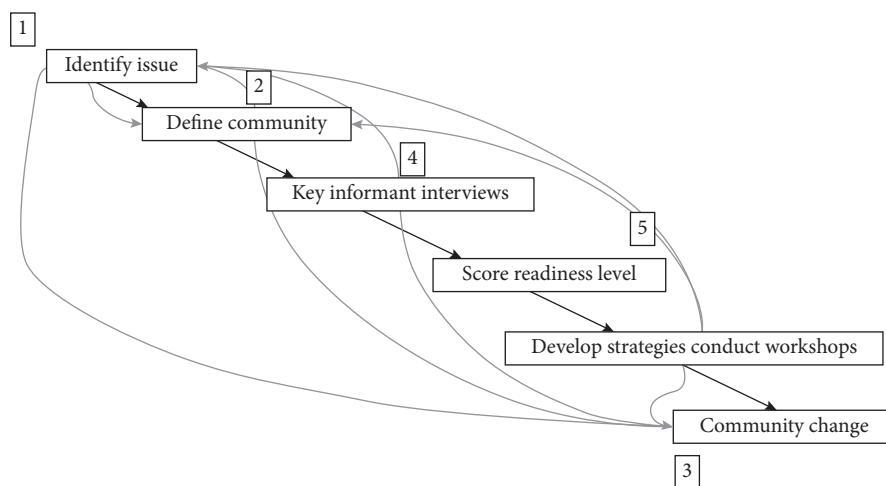


Figure 10.5 Revisioning the community readiness model within a Métis community.

to actually delivering programs to address community issues.

To illustrate the newly developed process of investigating preparedness to respond to Métis community issues, a Red River Cart was utilized (Figure 10.5). The Red River Cart, pulled by an ox or occasionally by a horse, was developed by Métis during the 1700s as a means of transporting people and goods across Canada. It is no longer used except as a symbol of Métis identity. To illustrate the new model, the Métis focused on the wheel of the cart while noting that the entire cart was representative of the whole of society (see Figure 10.6).

The rim of the wheel represents the community members interacting with service providers (represented by the spokes). The spokes are held in place by the hub and the rim. The hub is the community organized together as a political or advocacy group, whereas the axle is a group of Métis who work with multiple Métis groups at a larger geographic level (provincially and nationally). The Métis Red River Cart Model is a culturally salient image of and for community preparedness, through which multiple issues and agendas may form. The model also highlights the necessity for resource sharing because no

one single part can operate independently of the other; an increased number of spokes and a larger rim can be supported, but this requires a stronger hub and axle. The wheel on the other end of the axle is representative of the non-Aboriginal population; to assure equity in society (being able to carry a load in the cart), both wheels require the same number of spokes and the same strength in the hub and axle.

The mobility evoked by the cart image also reflects the reality that the Métis are not geographically bound, and Métis communities are frequently much more difficult to pin-point and encompass than those of other Aboriginal peoples. In terms of self-governance and determination, this requires the Métis to effectively communicate with the larger population, share resources, and utilize administrative centers or hubs. Communication is central to the success of any program; with established links between community members, service providers, advocates, and political representatives, Métis community members can find out about new programs, while service provider can find out about the needs of the community members and relay them to advocates and political representatives. As each spoke shares the load of the cart, so do service providers

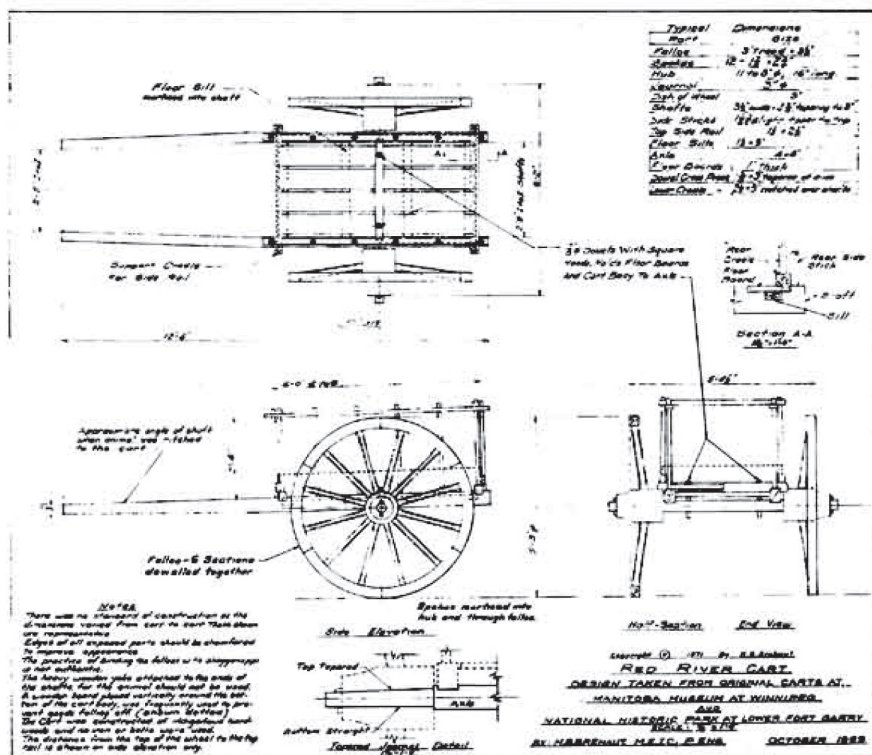


Figure 10.6 Historic diagram of a Red River Cart (Brehaut, 1971–2).

share resources when delivering services and distributing resource demand over many services. Having a centralized administrative hub reduces the need for each service provider to be expert in finances, grant writing, or political wrangling. Administrative centers can provide a central focal point for communication, networking, and development work between chartered communities.

So, as the wheel turns, the load is distributed across some spokes more than others. This represents when community members are in direct interaction with service providers. It is at this point that service providers are allowed insight into the community and any new, changing, or resolved issues. With this insight, the service providers can share their knowledge with advocates and political organizations so that they, in turn, can share it with the larger population in order to address the issue in a novel manner specific to the community. This model supports and promotes a community that is prepared to address issues rather than consume scarce time and resources through a model constantly re-researching issues to resolve. It promotes a method, then, that draws directly, appropriately, and compellingly from the community from which it comes.

Using the analogy of the Red River Cart as part of a community-building process iteratively embeds Métis values and protocols; CRM is thus transformed by these values into a process more appropriate (and yes, more Métis) than CRM in the first instance. Even though modern Métis may not have any dealings with a Red River Cart in their lifetime, the image resonates, and the icon matters in terms of motivating people to manage change—to be ready to move as it were. In our process, the possibility of using metaphors and meanings derived directly from Michif (the language of the Métis) did arise, but relative absence of Michif in the community today meant that language-based epistemological difference was less accessible, and the use of a cultural icon provided a better link between visual representation and realized process. The process, thus (re)constructed, was one of reiteration, reflection, and revision in a circular manner—like a wheel spinning forward.

Conclusion

That the effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada are profound is as obvious as the resistance that Indigenous peoples have mounted in response. At a fundamental epistemological and ontological level, Indigenous

methodologies are just that, Indigenous: they arise in the context of a response to colonial pressures. But these Indigenous ways of knowing, these ways of finding out, are also an autochthonous expression of the knowledge systems that order lifeways in and among Indigenous communities, and both Indigenous methods and methodologies in turn contribute to the vitality of those communities and people. At once part of decolonization, Indigenous methodologies are more as well; they are positive affirmation that Indigenous people themselves can draw on their own epistemological resources to enact something other than the chaos that characterizes the last few hundred years. Time will tell what new orders of things, people, and relationships may arise.

Future Directions

Indigenous studies has emerged rapidly over the past decade or so as a distinct academic discipline. National organizations representing and facilitating the work of scholars in the field are numerous, and, more recently, a transnational organization, the Native American and Indigenous Studies Organization (see <http://www.naisa.org/>) has emerged. The development of Indigenous methodologies is related to the rise of Indigenous studies as a discipline, but the relationship between Indigenous scholars and research (including that of non-Indigenous scholars in traditional Western academic disciplines) in Western institutions like universities and Indigenous communities remains conflicted.

Over the next several years, the nature and positioning of a professional practice in Indigenous studies will shift and develop. At issue are both institutional and wider political relations and how the specific research traditions of particular communities inform and interact with each other in the context of a more general practice of Indigenous research. That is, how do very specific Indigenous methods interrelate? What are the axes of similarity and difference between particular traditions, and how do these intersect with a common colonial history and commonalities that precede (and carry into and through) the impact of colonization? These are not simply questions for the academe or for Indigenous intellectuals and politicians as a group, but rather they are of immediate concern for Indigenous peoples in communities. There are very practical questions considering how the efficacy of Indigenous methodologies are assessed in their impact on the utility of research being done

in Indigenous communities. Do Indigenous measures of success emerge from the methodologies themselves and, if so, how? Furthermore, how do communities themselves take control of research practices? What are the basic capacities that communities need to develop to undertake research using Indigenous methodologies? How shall Indigenous researchers be trained? And when and how will the contributions of non-Indigenous researchers be integrated into contemporary Indigenist research agendas?

All these issues have implications for Indigenous people inside communities and inside educational institutions, and knowledge, power, and pragmatic concerns are very much in the foreground. This is as it should be, and the recognition of the affect of knowledge and knowledge claims on Indigenous people is a key step in decolonizing old systems of thought and reindigenizing new ones.

Notes

1. In this paper, we use the terms Indigenous and Aboriginal interchangeably. There is significant variation in the terminology from place to place, although in both Canada and Australia the term “Aboriginal” is in use. Even here, however, there are differences, with the term usually being used as an adjective in Canada and frequently as a noun in Australia. Naming matters (see Chartrand 1991), and so when the discussion is linked to a particular place, we will use the naming conventions of the Indigenous peoples of that place; consistent with the literature, the term Indigenous is used to refer to original peoples generally and collectively.
2. A careful reader will note a shift in voice here. This section of the paper is written primarily by AM, an Aboriginal scholar, describing research undertaken drawing on the knowledge and epistemology of his mother’s people. A similar but slightly different shift occurs in the second case study, where a plural pronoun is used to reflect the fact that PH and CD participated in the process described, and, more importantly, there was a direct and collective process through which conclusions were derived.
3. This is entirely consistent with Donna Haraway’s radical admonition in her 1988 paper “Situated Knowledges” that the overarching god’s-eye view of claims of Western knowledge systems be disputed from grounded and transparent positions and knowledge systems.

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