CJAR

Canadian Journal of Action Research
Volume 21, Issue 3, 2021, pages 95-114

DECOLONIZING ACTION RESEARCH THROUGH TWO-EYED SEEING: THE INDIGENOUS QUALITY ASSURANCE PROJECT

Lana Ray
Lakehead University

ABSTRACT

Action Research (AR) has been widely utilized in Indigenous contexts because of its emphasis on social transformation and synergies with Indigenous research approaches. Yet, while AR is seen as an attractive option for working in Indigenous research contexts, additional efforts are needed to ensure that AR adequately interrogates collaborations between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. The application of the principle of two-eyed seeing (TES), which refers to the process of seeing from the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing with one eye while using the other eye to see with the strengths of Western ways of knowing (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012), can center decolonial goals, addressing the shortcomings of AR. This article describes the operationalization of TES through the Indigenous Quality Assurance Project, focusing on the four key essentials of TES: co-learning, knowledge scrutinization, knowledge validation, and knowledge gardening (Bartlett, 2017).

KEYWORDS: Action research; Indigenous methodology; Two-eyed seeing

INTRODUCTION

Participatory Action Research[1] (PAR) actively engages community members, leadership and organizations through all stages of the research process to address a wide range of social, structural and environmental issues (Colborne et al., 2019). A key assumption underlying Action Research (AR) is that local knowledge is essential to an accurate

[1] The terms Participatory Action Research (PAR and Action Research (AR) will be used interchangeably. The author is aware that using the two terms interchangeably is debated; however, Chatterton et al. (2007) argue that relevancy is a key component within both PAR and AR, which each share the common goal of social transformation. This article is mainly concerned with meaningful collaboration as a key component to ensuring relevancy and achieving social transformation (Peterson et al., 2016).

understanding of needs (Peterson et al., 2016) and to the creation of relevant solutions which can benefit those involved in the research (Hardbarger, 2019). PAR allows participants to analyze and define their own solutions to problems and is often used when voices or perspectives are marginalized (Sinclair, 2007). It emphasizes redressing power imbalances between researchers and research subjects through collaborative action to benefit the community (Colborne et al., 2019; de Leeuw et al., 2012; Peltier, 2018; Sinclair, 2007).

Many Indigenous scholars including Linda Tuhwai Smith (1999) have identified and named research as a colonial act. Academic research has largely occurred to the benefit of non-Indigenous researchers, whilst Indigenous peoples are misrepresented and excluded from the research process (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2020). In response, Indigenous scholars and communities have called for meaningful, respectful research stemming from Indigenous worldviews (Peltier, 2018). Because of AR's emphasis on addressing oppressive research practices, it is widely utilized within Indigenous research contexts (de Leeuw et al., 2012; Fredericks & Adams, 2011). Many scholars have noted the synergies between PAR and Indigenous approaches to research (e.g. Evans et al., 2009; Peltier, 2018; Sinclair, 2007), which include community involvement in the design and implementation of research (Peltier, 2018; Sinclair, 2007), valuing of experiential knowledge (Kovach, 2005, as cited in Peterson et al., 2016), and a focus on benefits to the community (Peltier, 2018). Further, because of the collaborative nature of PAR, its capacity to provide space for Indigenous ways of knowing has also been recognized:

> For indigenous populations, PAR's inclusivity and moral/social consciousness provides an opportunity to reflect indigenous thought and ideology, and this approach supports and nurtures indigenous knowledge, and reconstructs indigenous 'voice' within the research discourse. PAR does not demand the separation of the mind, body, and spirit; rather these are viewed as legitimate ways of information gathering, and coming to knowledge. (Sinclair, 2007, p. 28)

Yet, despite its widespread uptake in Indigenous contexts, PAR can perpetuate colonial research relations (de Leeuw et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2009; Fredericks & Adams, 2011). PAR has been critiqued on the grounds of superficiality, falling short in achieving meaningful collaboration and promoting Indigenous self-determination during the research process (de Leeuw et al., 2012; Fredericks & Adams, 2011). For example, participatory research can imply community participation in academic research, whereby the researcher unilaterally sets the research agenda and approach to research (Rocheleau, 1994). Furthermore, Zavala (2013) cautions that an emphasis on these superficial modes of participation can lead to the long-term goals of research being overshadowed by the knowledge production of researchers.

While PAR is seen as an attractive option for working with Indigenous peoples because of its attunement to oppressive structures, Evans and colleagues (2009) contend that this may also be a shortcoming of the approach. Namely the inherent constructs in PAR, such as 'the oppressed,' can reinforce and reproduce racial othering. Fredericks and Adams (2011) expand this point, suggesting that from this framework emerges a scenario where non-

Indigenous researchers are positioned as 'good' and wanting to 'help.' Additionally, a lack of reflexivity on the part of researchers has been identified as a shortcoming of PAR (de Leeuw et al., 2012; Fredericks & Adams, 2011). In some instances, the opposite can happen and researchers become too focused on self-reflexivity, acting in self-interested and self-indulgent ways (Fredericks & Adams 2011).

I assert that AR has two main shortcomings when applied in Indigenous contexts. The first is AR's inability to conceive of Indigenous research projects as decolonial acts. This is evident in the various critiques of AR related to colonial relationships and superficial modes of participation. The second and related point is its lack of theorizing on what collaboration looks like when working within two separate and distinct paradigms – western and Indigenous[2]. While circumstances can exist in an individual project to address these shortcomings, there is nothing inherent in the culture of PAR to ensure that they are addressed. Additional structure to support the implementation of PAR in ways that account for these shortcomings is necessary.

Two-eyed seeing (TES) has been put forth as a framework to reconcile the use of western research approaches with Indigenous knowledge systems (Peltier, 2018). TES refers to the process of seeing from the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing with one eye, while using the other eye to see with the strengths of Western ways of knowing for the benefit of all (Bartlett et al., 2012). Albert Marshall, a Mi'kmaw Elder coined the term in 2004, and it has since been developed with his partner, Murdena Marshall, a Mi'kmaw Elder and Professor Emeritus of Mi'kmaw Studies, and Cheryl Bartlett, a non-Indigenous Professor Emeritus of Biology, through their collaborative work on integrative science (Bartlett et al., 2012).

TES has been utilized across a number of disciplines, including the field of education (e.g. Harder et al., 2019; Peltier, 2018), and it has a number of applications, including Indigenizing research approaches, program development, evaluation, and policy (Martin et al., 2017). TES is not a research methodology, but rather a guiding principle (Bartlett et al., 2012; Forbes et al., 2020) that encourages critical self-reflection (Forbes et al., 2020) and an examination of power inequities (Wright et al., 2019). It also creates space for the full recognition of Indigenous knowledges within Indigenous/settler interfaces of knowledge production (Bartlett et al., 2012; Forbes et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2019). This includes collaborative projects with Indigenous and settler participation (e.g. Bartlett et al., 2012) or Indigenous researchers working within university structures (e.g. Peltier, 2018). TES has been promoted as a framework to ensure cultural safety when working with Indigenous peoples (Harder et al., 2019) and is inherently tied to a decolonial agenda (Bartlett et al., 2012; Colborne et al., 2019). Overall, TES has the capacity to address the shortcomings of AR by ensuring that it works to meaningfully include Indigenous peoples in research in ways which promote reflexivity, challenge institutional norms, and do not reassert unequal power relations.

[2] Fredericks and Adams (2011) make a similar critique, advocating for AR to further think about what constitutes participation in the research process and noting the need to critically examine the scope of participation roles, such as advisory and participant, which can reinscribe power dynamics.

Despite TES being successfully utilized to bridge the divide between AR and Indigenous research methodologies, a gap remains regarding how to operationalize TES in the context of action-based research, including key considerations in its application (Forbes et al., 2020). This article seeks to address this gap by describing how TES was operationalized through the Indigenous Quality Assurance (IQA) Project. The IQA project was a 3-year Indigenous action-based research project between 6 northern colleges in Ontario which sought to build and implement a set of Indigenous quality assurance standards that are reflective of the Indigenous peoples and cultures of Northern Ontario. In the context of the IQA project, this article discusses four key essentials of TES as outlined by Bartlett (2017): co-learning, knowledge scrutinization, knowledge validation, and knowledge gardening. Co-learning refers to learning from and with each other in a collaborative and nurturing environment. This is predicated by the ability to understand and collaborate. Through knowledge scrutinization, the strengths of each knowledge system are identified and utilized for the benefit of all as collaborators learn to see the strengths of each knowledge system and confront fears of the unknown and of colonial relations embedded in knowledge production. The third characteristic, knowledge validation, refers to a collective peer review process in which Indigenous knowledges are validated through culturally relevant processes. Lastly, knowledge gardening promotes seeking out meaningful collaborative opportunities which privilege the needs and desires of communities (Bartlett, 2017).

TWO-EYED SEEING

TES enables seeing from the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing with one eye, while using the other eye to see with the strengths of Western ways of knowing (Bartlett, et al., 2012). It encourages researchers to consciously weave back and forth between Indigenous and Western ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies, and can be implemented through action-based approaches which encourage flexibility on the part of the researcher and meaningful involvement of Indigenous people and their knowledge systems (Wright, 2019). While referred to in various ways in the literature, including as an ethical protocol and as a framework (Wright et al., 2019), the originators of the term contend that it is a guiding principle (Bartlett et al., 2012).

Wright and colleagues' (2019) systematic review of researchers' conceptions and implementation of TES elaborates on TES, putting forth the following key characteristics:

- Equity;
- Co-existence and integration of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems;
- Decolonizing;
- Strengths-based;
- Reflectivity on the part of the researcher;
- Co-learning;
- Working toward a better world;
- Collaborative and responsive research designs.

These key characteristics share many commonalities with Bartlett's (2017) four key essentials of co-learning, knowledge scrutinization, knowledge validation, and knowledge gardening. Both describe TES has having a focus on co-learning and collaboration in the context of a decolonial, equitable, and critical space for the purpose of community benefit.

Mi'kmaq scholar Marie Battiste contends that Indigenous education must be decolonizing, which is characterized by its ability to identify and deconstruct hegemonic structures that perpetuate colonialism while also reconstructing new forms of education (Battiste, 2002; Munroe et al., 2013). This rebuilding must be relevant to Indigenous communities through the privileging of community specific Indigenous worldviews and processes of community engagement and accountability (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2020). When TES is implemented, AR can become a decolonizing act (Colborne et al., 2019). TES achieves this through its ability to recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge systems (Bartlett et al., 2012) and bring together Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in an equitable manner (Wright et al., 2019). Due to the enduring and ongoing history of colonialism of suppressing Indigenous knowledge systems, an equitable manner must be interpreted as an extensive transformation of education in which Indigenous knowledges serve as the foundation (Munroe et al., 2013). This is contrary to common approaches to Indigenous education where Indigenous knowledges are approached as an 'add-on' or 'other' way of knowing (Munroe et al., 2013; Ray et al., 2019).

In educational research, an 'ethical aspect' is needed to develop partnerships of trust to achieve equity so that colonial relations are not perpetuated (Battiste, 2002). While TES is not synonymous with an ethical space (Forbes et al., 2020), it is premised on its foundation. Aligned with Sium and colleagues' (2012) call to approach decolonization as a "tangible unknown" (p. XII) that provides a space for dialogue, dissent, and shared visioning, TES creates the necessary conditions for the persistence of an ethical space through a focus on giving voice and safety to diverse ways of knowing (Colborne et al., 2019).

The Indigenous Quality Assurance Project

The Indigenous Quality Assurance Project was a 3-year Indigenous action research project between 6 northern colleges in Ontario (2016-2018) which sought to build and implement a set of Indigenous quality assurance standards that reflect Anishinaabe, Mushkegowuk and Métis peoples' visions and expectations for post-secondary education in northern Ontario.[3] The project sought to address the proclamation culture trending within Canadian post-secondary, whereby western post-secondary institutions and bodies self-proclaim their excellence in Indigenous education (Ray et al., 2019).[4]

The project was built on the principle of TES in that it acknowledged the strength and opportunity within western knowledge systems (in this case, quality assurance) to move

[3] For more information on the Indigenous quality assurance project see: https://www.canadorecollege.ca/corporate/indigenous-education/indigenous-quality-assurance

[4] The term "proclamation culture" refers to an ongoing practice initiated during the historical era of royal proclamations where settler institutions and figureheads continue to unilaterally define the state and nature of Indigenous/settler relations.

past the proclamation culture in post-secondary education through enhanced accountability to Indigenous peoples, systems level change, and the overall betterment of Indigenous education at post-secondary institutions. In Ontario, colleges must undergo a quality assurance audit process that is led by an independently operated oversight and governance body. Currently there is no mechanism to ensure Indigenous participation in the audit process. The primary responsibilities of this body are to ensure that Ontario colleges conform to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' (MTCU) Credential Framework and to lead the audit process which assesses the effectiveness of quality assurance systems at Ontario colleges. There is also a self-reflective component of the review in which the college conducts their own self-study. The primary purpose of the college quality assurance audit process is to establish if institutional systems are functioning properly through an examination of program-level evidence.[5]

Overall, the IQA project team saw that the culture of quality assurance and mechanisms to ensure quality assurance could provide an avenue for indigenization efforts to move past mixed and additive approaches to become integral to the fitness of the institution (i.e., Indigenous education as a function of quality) (Ray et al., 2019). Yet, while the world of quality assurance was identified as an opportunity to improve Indigenous education at post-secondary institutions, the project team was mindful that power imbalances could be reinscribed if western approaches were being exclusively used to solve issues related to Indigenous education (Martin et al., 2017). Skolnik (2010) challenges the understanding of quality assurance as 'culture-neutral' and positions quality as a "political process" and "a socially constructed domain of power" (p. 1) that functions within a western lens under the guise of objectivity and universality. He further suggests that we must be aware that the question of who defines quality creates issues of ownership and privilege among the interests of particular stakeholders. I had witnessed this in the college quality assurance audit process when auditors made assessments about the quality of Indigenous education although they were functioning from the provincial standards, which do not address the distinct nature of quality from Indigenous standpoints (Ray et al., 2019). Meyer (2005) explains that from an Indigenous perspective, quality assurance is not about templates, comparisons, or aggregated data but rather about understanding how language, culture, and belief systems are strengthened through coursework and community participation. Meyer (2005) goes on to attest that quality is present when local cultures that are rooted to place clarify how they wish to be seen. It was important that the approach to building an Indigenous quality assurance system was founded upon Indigenous ways of knowing and being while borrowing from non-Indigenous practices and approaches when beneficial.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The Indigenous quality assurance project employed Indigenous participatory action research (IPAR) and institutional ethnography (IE) as the framework of inquiry. This approach was utilized because it offered the ability to draw on Indigenous research paradigms (IPAR) while challenging and disrupting colonialism (IE) (Kovach, 2009, as cited in Colborne et al., 2019). This section will demonstrate the intersection of these two

[5] For more information on college quality assurance audit process, see https://www.ocqas.org/quality-assurance/

approaches to achieve the goals of privileging Indigenous knowledge systems while interrogating colonialism. A discussion of how each approach was implemented throughout the project follows.

Indigenous Participatory Action Research

Action research can be effectively paired with Indigenous approaches and flow from an Indigenous paradigm (Peltier, 2018). For example, Bressette's (2008) Anishinabe Meno-Bimaadziwin Action Research design combined participatory components of action research with components of Meno-Bimaadziwin, an Anishinaabe word that translates to the "good life" (p. 116-117). According to Bressette (2008), this pairing ensures that the principles of reciprocity, relevancy, and reflexivity are present in the research. For Hardbarger (2019), IPAR was actualized through: the intentional use of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, decolonizing frameworks, and well-defined and developed guidelines that explicitly define protocols and assumptions when modifying PAR.

This project employed a research approach that was embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. While Indigenous peoples do not all share identical worldviews, most have a land-based, wholistic and relational worldview in which spirituality and interrelationships to the land are prominent (Colborne et al., 2019). This aspect is reflected through Indigenous stories, teachings, ceremonies, language, and practice.

The project also adhered to the "plan, act, observe and reflect cycle" of PAR (Kemmis et al., 2004). More details about the PAR cycle components employed in the design follow.

Plan: This phase consisted of relationship building, developing a governance structure and the creation of an IQA discussion paper. A steering committee was struck to support the governance of the project and the creation and implementation of the IQA standards. It was comprised of Indigenous leaders at each of the colleges (responsible for Indigenous education portfolio(s) at their respective college), Indigenous knowledge leaders (Elders who worked as Elders on Campus at their respective college), and quality assurance leaders (responsible for the quality assurance portfolio at their respective college). A researcher (the author) was also part of the core team whose role was to facilitate the development of the Indigenous quality assurance system based on the knowledge shared and guidance from the three groups. The Elders' vision for Indigenous education became the foundation for the IQA standards and guided the process at in-person sessions through ceremony, storytelling, and teachings. The three groups jointly participated in and made decisions regarding the finalization of the IQA standards and the design of an Indigenous quality assurance process in which to implement the IQA standards (together referred to as the IQA system).

***Act*:** During this phase, the Indigenous quality assurance system was developed. The three groups participated in three in-person gatherings. These sessions included prayer and ceremony, and we sat in circle. Central questions posed at the first two gatherings were: how do you envision education? And, what does it look like when we are doing it right? The voices of the Elders were privileged during these sessions and they largely shared their

vision for education through teachings and stories. Colleges took turns hosting the gatherings, with food and gifting as part of the process.

After each gathering the researcher compiled ideas, concepts, and concerns to draft and subsequently revise the IQA standards. A series of teleconferences were also carried out in-between the gatherings to review and discuss versions of the standards. To garner broader engagement in the development of the standards, larger gatherings took place at the colleges. During these larger gatherings, current quality assurance processes at the colleges were reviewed and current and potential Indigenous quality assurance processes were mapped (see Institutional Ethnography section for more detail). Additionally, the draft IQA standards developed by the steering committee were presented and discussed. The purpose of this exercise was to elicit college-specific examples of the standards from participants and to identify future opportunities to implement the standards at the college. A rubric was transposed on the meeting room wall and participants were asked to write current examples and future opportunities of Indigenous quality assurance standards on sticky notes and place them in the appropriate quadrant of the rubric (see Figure 1). This exercise supported a more granular development of the standards, specifically the creation of the standard rubrics.

Figure 1. *Indigenous Quality Assurance Standards Rubric Activity*

After the site visits, each college that participated received an individual site-visit wrap up report, and all results were collated into a comprehensive site visit wrap-up report.

Observe and Reflect: Two of the participating colleges undertook a mock self-study (self-assessment of quality) to observe the impact of the IQA standards. One college's self-study scope was of their entire institution, and another undertook a segment, focusing on their support services. Additionally, to test the implementation process, one college aligned their self-study process with Ontario's college self-study process, while the other college embarked on a stand-alone self-study. These results were presented to the rest of the members of the steering committee who functioned as auditors, asking questions about the self-studies. After the pilot was complete, colleges provided feedback to the researcher on the Indigenous quality assurance system using a collaboratively crafted discussion guide as the basis of the conversation.

Indigenous quality assurance training took place before the commencement of the pilot self-studies. A 'train the trainer' style approach was used so that project members could train others at their college. An Indigenous quality assurance training manual, "Building a Strong Fire: The Indigenous Quality Assurance Facilitator Training Manual," was developed to support training at the colleges. The Facilitator Training Manual includes: planning resources, training module outlines, and resource handouts to assist in the implementation of the "Building a Strong Fire" Indigenous Quality Assurance system. A training slide deck presentation functions as a companion resource to this facilitator training manual and includes facilitator resources such as embedded content, facilitator notes, and additional learning opportunities. Additional tools and templates to support Indigenous quality assurance data collection and reporting were also developed. Since then, open training sessions have also been held for other post-secondary institutions who wish to utilize the IQA system.

Institutional Ethnography

Identified as having the potential to make concrete differences in how Indigenous people experience post-secondary education (Restoule et al., 2013), institutional ethnography provides space to examine power relations and world assumptions within the operational documents and work processes within institutions through a multitude of methods including open ended discussions, analysis of secondary documents (Walby, 2005), and institutional mapping activities (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2020). Through mapping, institutional ethnography seeks to produce evidence about how individuals' activities and work are coordinated by institutional texts such as policies, forms, and procedures, revealing ruling relations of social interactions (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2020).

Through institutional ethnography's ability to interrogate social relations at a local level, it provides space for local voice and agency. Within an Indigenous context, this includes identifying and addressing how colonialism becomes normalized through 'work' (Restoule et al., 2012). Indeed, by examining how non-Indigenous policies and practices are applied in Indigenous contexts, IE can illustrate how despite best intentions, western institutions often perpetuate colonial relations to the disadvantage of Indigenous peoples (Morton, Ninomiya et al., 2020).

Through institutional mapping activities, world assumptions and power relations within the current quality assurance system become visible, allowing for the envisioning of alternatives. Specifically, current and future opportunities to Indigenize quality assurance processes throughout various aspects of the quality assurance process, such as program review and program development, were collaboratively mapped by Indigenous community representatives, Indigenous students, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty and administrators. The quality assurance mapping took place at three colleges over a two-month period. The Indigenous project leaders for each institution provided the researcher with operational documents on the current quality assurance process. In preparation for the site visit, the operational documents were reviewed and process maps of key quality assurance processes were created for each of the colleges. Prior to the collaborative mapping, the quality assurance leaders reviewed the process maps for accuracy. Concurrently, the Indigenous leaders were responsible for the identification and recruitment of potential participants. Overall, 39 individuals participated in mapping. The maps were enlarged which allowed mapping participants to review the current quality assurance processes. They identified current and future Indigenous quality assurance activities on sticky notes and placed them on the appropriate place on the process maps (See Figure 2). To support this activity, documents identified in the process maps were also provided to participants.

Figure 2. *Process Mapping Activity*

Implementing The Essentials

According to Bartlett (2017), there are four key essentials of TES: co-learning, knowledge scrutinization, knowledge validation, and knowledge gardening. In this section, I discuss how these four essentials were operationalized through the IQA project.

Co-learning

Collaboratively learning from each other in a nurturing environment is a necessary component of TES (Bartlett, 2017). Forbes and colleagues (2020) note that if an ethical space is not intentionally affirmed when attempting to engage in TES, the result can be harmful to Indigenous communities. Co-learning must be predicated on a foundation where those involved develop an understanding of each other's perspectives and cultures so that they may fully appreciate one another's input (Whiting et al., 2018). Ongoing teaching, observation, and listening facilitates an understanding of the strengths of each way of seeing (Whiting et al., 2018) as well as a knowledge and appreciation of spiritual wellness, effective communication skills, building trust, equitable relationships, patience in the process, honesty, openness to change, self-reflection, and valuing commonalities and differences in perspectives (Wright et al., 2019). Reid (2020) notes that this work should begin upfront as part of a process of defining how much weight should be given to one paradigm over the other.

To foster co-learning in the IQA project, scholars with expertise in Indigenous education and quality assurance were invited to a preliminary meeting to provide an overview of the work that they do and the knowledge assumptions behind their work. Including scholars from both Indigenous education and quality assurance was important in addressing false dichotomies related to Indigenous knowledge systems between community knowledge and academic knowledge, and the power dynamics that can permeate from such a stance. This event opened an ongoing awareness and conversation about the differences, tensions, and strengths of each respective knowledge system.

The need to privilege Indigenous knowledge systems and utilize quality assurance as a supportive tool was also established, which set out a framework for how to engage in co-learning. In the creation of the IQA standards, this meant starting from the ground-up, working with Elders to understand their vision of quality. This initial work was completed through Indigenous ways of knowing, including sharing circles, storytelling, and teachings. The first gathering among the advisory committee began with a pipe ceremony and the gathering took place using a circle format which worked to flatten power dynamics. The gathering was two-days which allowed time for the Elders to also reflect overnight and come back and share or affirm insights the following day. In this session, most members of the advisory group spent their time listening, while the Elders shared their vision for Indigenous education.

It was also important to respect the diversity of cultural practices and processes (Forbes et al., 2020; Whiting et al., 2018). The project took place on the lands of the Anishinaabek and Mushkegowuk people, where there is also a historical Métis presence. To honour this diversity, Elders from all three nations were involved in the process. Additionally, the

location of the research gatherings rotated amongst the colleges. The hosting college would aid in organizing the gathering, which would follow the practices and protocols that were deemed appropriate by the Elder on Campus for that college in collaboration with the Indigenous leader. Each college also gave tours of their college, which provided an opportunity for the advisory committee to learn about the different context, structures, and processes at each college.

Only once the project team had a firm understanding of quality from the perspectives of the Elders were western methodologies employed, including content mapping to map the IQA standards to the provincial standards. If they did not fit, they remained their own standard. Also, the Indigenous leaders played a vital role in creating space for the Elders' voices and Indigenous ways of knowing. These individuals have been advocates for Indigenous education within their own institutions for a number of years and are well-equipped to navigate TES.

Through this process of co-learning, space was created for more radical forms of transformative research that differed from inclusive modes to Indigenous education which expect Indigenous ways of knowing and being to fit within pre-existing western constructs and structures (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Moreover, privileging Indigenous voices and Indigenous epistemologies, including circle work within the framework of co-learning, countered the oppressed-oppressor relationship that can become normalized within AR.

KNOWLEDGE SCRUTINIZATION

Identifying and utilizing the strengths of each knowledge system while also confronting fears and power relations associated with knowledge production is key to operationalizing TES (Bartlett, 2017). It involves being responsive to changing circumstances to identify what elements of Indigenous or western knowledges are best at any particular time (Bartlett et al., 2012; Colborne et al., 2019). In the context of educational research, this requires acknowledging the longstanding efforts to erase wholistic ways of knowing from curriculum (Bartlett et al., 2012).

As previously mentioned, it was important that the project privileged Indigenous ways of knowing and doing because of the ongoing processes of colonialism, yet, as the project progressed we hit a roadblock. While the project advisory committee had developed an understanding of what quality might look like from Indigenous perspectives through the gatherings in which stories were shared and teachings were told, many were experiencing difficulties around how quality assurance could be used as a tool to achieve this. Moreover, those not well-versed in Indigenous education were frustrated at times by the lack of specificity when conceptualizing what quality Indigenous education looked like in practice. This barrier led to anxieties, especially on the part of some quality assurance practitioners on how this may impact their practice and roles.

While the use of Indigenous epistemologies was necessary to the creation of the IQA standards and was very successful in creating a space where individuals established enough trust and developed strong relationships in which they could voice concerns, an

additional approach was necessary. IE was an effective method to bridge Indigenous and western knowledge systems and to understand how they can work together. Through the visual mapping exercises, quality assurance leaders and administrators gained a better grasp of the 'how' of Indigenous education and its relationship to quality assurance.

Morton Ninomiya et al. (2020) assert that visual maps are a successful knowledge sharing method to communicate among diverse stakeholders. More broadly, IE's strength is its ability to involve community members and stakeholders in the research process through its participatory nature and ability to emphasize work processes over those conducting the work (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2020). Through the mapping exercise, everyone worked together in a very open and engaged way to identify clear steps within post-secondary processes that could be Indigenized through community involvement, mechanisms for involvement, and other work processes. In fact, in response to the concerns of quality assurance representatives on the 'how,' it was decided that rubrics would also be created for each of the standards. While not prescriptive in nature, this tool would allow for more detail on how quality Indigenous education, defined by Indigenous peoples, could be implemented and assessed.

Meanwhile, through IE, Indigenous representatives could see how quality assurance worked at the colleges and found it helpful for demystifying and translating knowledge on quality assurance. In one instance, a group of representatives from a college's Indigenous education council shared that by expanding their knowledge of the structures and processes at the college, they were in a better positon to advocate more strategically at their institution. Members of the advisory committee who participated in their respective college's session also mentioned that it was at this point where everything came together and they could truly see how quality assurance could be a tool to support the implementation of Indigenous education. This outcome was indicative of a TES approach in that other projects that implemented TES noted that their projects were transformative through methods that supported joint capacity building and encouraged healing processes (Forbes et al., 2020).

Lastly, having Indigenous leaders on the advisory group was hugely advantageous. These individuals bridged a divide between Indigenous and western paradigms. Essentially, their positions within post-secondary institutions involve navigating TES on a daily basis. These are Indigenous peoples who work closely with the Elders and communities, they are very knowledgeable about the college systems and structures, colonialism, and power dynamics, and they regularly function as advocates within western institutions and structures.

Knowledge Validation

When working between knowledge systems, it is necessary to have a peer review process in place which consists of individuals well-versed in both knowledge systems to validate the research through relevant processes (Bartlett, 2017; Colborne et al., 2019; Reid, 2020). This project had "the right people at the table" (Whiting et al., 2018, p. 40) and involved an advisory council with representation from within post-secondary education as well as Indigenous communities (Bartlett et al., 2012). Also, the project researcher is Anishinaabe

from northern Ontario and is experienced in Indigenous and western ways of knowing. Elders, Indigenous leaders, and quality assurances leaders participated in all discussions and decision-making processes from the beginning to the end of the project.

The knowledge validation process was iterative as the researcher presented results to the advisory committee after each gathering and after college-wide engagement sessions. Moreover, the broader engagement sessions, which included institutional mapping, provided an opportunity for the Indigenous and college community to affirm, interpret, and craft the standards. In this way, the project followed western processes of rigor through a triangulation of methods (storytelling, sharing circles, ceremony, and institutional mapping), which was relational and built through an interactive and inductive process where findings were confirmed or enhanced by ongoing data collection (Forbes, 2020). At times, it was a tedious process going over the standards line by line, but it was a necessary step of validation when transforming stories and teachings into standards. This process of checking is of utmost importance when engaging in Indigenous research as traditional knowledges have long been taken out of context to justify actions without meaningful consultation with Indigenous peoples (Reid, 2020).

For Indigenous peoples, epistemological processes are embedded in the land and the community (Colborne et al., 2019). Having the Elders involved throughout the process was necessary to ensure that IQA standards developed were relevant and reflective of Indigenous concepts of education and the Indigenous communities that the colleges serve. The Elders were fairly compensated for their time and expertise and they were also gifted items throughout the project, including wool blankets at the end of the project. The fair compensation and ongoing displays of gratitude worked to position them as authorities over their own knowledge systems, and thus essential to the knowledge validation process. In addition to the Elders participating in the iterative knowledge validation process, they also had their own systems of validation that they employed throughout the project, including dreaming and praying. These were not always visible to the advisory committee.

The role of the quality assurance leaders was complimentary to the Elders. While the inclusion of Elders ensured that the IQA standards reflected community priorities and notions of Indigenous education, the quality assurance leaders ensured that the standards were worded in a way that could be operationalized and evaluated. Although largely a wordsmithing exercise, this step of knowledge validation facilitated legitimacy and buy-in from the institutions who have not historically conceived of Indigenous education as a function of quality assurance.

Knowledge Gardening

Knowledge gardening promotes seeking out meaningful collaborative opportunities (Bartlett, 2017). These opportunities surpass an amalgamation of perspectives and instead thoughtfully integrate strengths of each perspective to solve problems for the benefit of the community (Wright et al., 2019). In the case of the IQA project, quality assurance (a western based concept) was seen as having the potential to advance Indigenous education at post-secondary institutions beyond a proclamation-based culture to one in which there

is accountability to Indigenous communities. This shift was established through the creation of Indigenous defined expectations for Indigenous education (IQA standards), which could be advanced through quality assurance processes and mechanisms.

Through knowledge gardening, a broader understanding of the logics and values that drive certain institutions can emerge in addition to cautionary promising practices for Indigenous collaborations and partnerships (Colborne et al., 2019). Through this collaborative endeavor (involving the inclusion of Indigenous concepts of education and Indigenous peoples), implicit language, concepts, and notions were interrogated and work processes related to quality assurance were clarified (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2020). This analysis occurred through IE as well as by an overall participatory approach in which Elders were involved in the design of the IQA standards and the mock self-studies. Namely, this collaboration expanded the scope of quality education to a more wholistic model in which education was conceived of as a physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual process that was inextricably tied to notions of identity, community, and land (Ray et al., 2019). This raised critical questions about the strengths, limitations, and future possibilities for quality assurance.

On a related matter, knowledge gardening identified areas where enhanced mechanisms for quality assurance were needed and directly challenged notions of universality in quality assurance. For example, as part of the self-study presentation, one college shared that they have cultural items on display which they described as being important so that Indigenous students see themselves reflected in the institution they attend. The Elders asked questions about how these items were being cared for and framed this as an important aspect of quality education. This idea had never been raised during the provincial quality processes, nor did the college have any mechanism to enable this work. Not only did the Elders' contribution expand the boundaries of quality assurance, but it also demonstrated how the universal approach to quality assurance can have unintended consequences in the everyday lives of the people the institution aims to serve (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2020).

Assumptions about institutional work were also revealed and clarified, which worked to strengthen Indigenous representation at the college (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2020). During the self-study process, for one of the colleges it was discovered that although there was the working assumption that there was a designated Indigenous seat at a governing table, this was in fact a seat that happened to be filled by an Indigenous person who was not there in a capacity to represent Indigenous interests. This led to an opportunity to update the table's terms of reference to include an Indigenous specific seat.

Lastly, a variety of training materials were created to support the implementation of the IQA, which reflected Indigenous and Western modes of transmission. When possible, the provincial quality assurance system's dissemination templates were adapted which provided a level of familiarity for quality assurance leaders. Custom templates were also created to support the implementation of the IQA standards, which combined Indigenous concepts of wholism with quality assurance tools. One example is the IQA rubric (Figure 3). It includes the medicine wheel teachings and colours to denote a circular and relational process in a rubric format.

Standard 1: CELEBRATION AND SHARING

Indigenous ways of knowing and doing are celebrated as invaluable to the entire college community and shared openly in well-informed and culturally-based ways.

SEVEN REQUIREMENTS	FOUR DIRECTIONS			
	SEE	RELATE	UNDERSTAND	ACT
1. Learners are provided with an opportunity to learn about Indigenous peoples, cultures, and histories ☐	Indigenous-centred learning is accessible to learners on their own time ☐	Indigenous-centred learning supplements or enhances program learning activities ☐	Indigenous-centred learning is optional and formally recognized by the college ☐	Indigenous-centred learning is mandatory and formally connected to program requirements ☐
2. Achievements and commitments in Indigenous education are recognized, communicated and reported on to the college community and Indigenous peoples ☑	The college community is aware of new and ongoing initiatives and commitments to Indigenous education ☐	Initiatives in Indigenous education are easily accessible and identifiable to the college and broader community ☑	Structures are in place to support achievements and commitments in Indigenous education ☐	The college actively reports on achievements and commitments in Indigenous education to Indigenous peoples ☐
3. Learners are presented with Indigenous knowledges that are accurate and reflective of Indigenous peoples ☐	Learning resources and tools that have been vetted by content specialists are available ☐	Learning resources developed by Indigenous peoples are utilized ☐	Indigenous peoples deliver Indigenous-centred learning activities ☐	There are partnerships in place with communities and organizations to support content delivery and programming ☐
4. Learners experience through Indigenous ways of knowing and doing ☐	Learning by doing is accessible to learners on their own time ☐	Learning by doing supplements or enhances program learning activities ☐	Intensive forms of learning by doing such as cultural camps, land-based learning and cultural placements/ mentorships are available to learners and formally connected to program requirements ☐	Learners are provided with the opportunity to complete program requirements in an Indigenous language ☐

Figure 3: *IQA Standard Rubric Adapted for Self-Study (Ray et al., 2019)*

Conclusion

Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall (2012) ask the important question of what can be done to ensure that Indigenous education efforts remain true to the ways of knowing and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples? The principle of TES can provide a framework in which to conduct Indigenous action research in the field of education in a manner which is decolonizing in nature. Specifically, the four essentials of TES – co-learning, knowledge scrutinization, knowledge validation, and knowledge gardening (Bartlett, 2017) – provide a way to ensure that action research works to meaningfully include Indigenous peoples in research in ways which promote reflexivity, challenge institutional norms, and do not reassert unequal power relations.

When the principle of TES is implemented it can bring together our different ways of knowing to motivate people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, to use all our understandings so we can leave the world a better place (Bartlett et al., 2012). Through the IQA project, which employed a participatory approach that included Indigenous methods of research and institutional mapping, the concept of 'weweni' was birthed as an approach to quality assurance. In the Anishinaabe language, the word 'weweni' embodies the concepts of 'that good way' and 'looking after something properly.' Achieving 'weweni' means building a learning system that is reflective of the worldviews, cultures, educational needs, and aspirations of local Anishinaabe, Mushkegowuk, and Métis communities. Otherwise put, it is a process of looking after something (education at the colleges) to ensure that we are looking after someone (the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples) (Ray et al., 2019).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chi-miigwetch to all of those who were involved in the project, particularly Mary Wabano, Deidre Bannerman and Lorraine Whiteduck Liberty. I have learned so much from your leadership and I am grateful for the time that we have spent together.

REFERENCES

Bartlett, C. (2017, June). Two-Eyed Seeing [Paper presentation]. *Indigenous Peoples' Health Institutes Advisory Board Meeting*, Edmonton, AB.

Bartlett, C. Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-Eyed Seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together Indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Science*, *2*(4), 331-340. http://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-012-0086-8

Battiste, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: A literature review with recommendations. *National Working Group on Education.* https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/24._2002_oct_marie_battiste_indigenousknowledgeandpedagogy_lit_review_for_min_working_group.pdf

Bressette, C. (2008). *Understanding success in community First Nation education through Anishinabe meno-bimaadziwin action research* [Doctoral dissertation, Western University]. Library and Archives Canada. https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/thesescanada/vol2/002/NR43043.PDF?oclc_number=662576246

Chatterton, P., Fuller, D., & Routledge, P. (2007). Relating action to activism: Theoretical and methodological reflections. In S. Kindon, R. Pain, & M. Kesby (Eds.), *Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place* (pp. 216-222). Routledge.

Colbourne, R., Moroz, P., Hall, C, Lendsay, K., & Anderson, R. B. (2019). Indigenous works and two eyed seeing: Mapping the case for Indigenous-led research. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, *15*(1), 68-86 http://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-04-2019-1754

de Leeuw, S., Cameron, E., & Greenwood, M. (2012). Participatory and community-based research, Indigenous geographies, and the spaces of friendship: A critical engagement. *The Canadian Geographer*, *56*(2), 180–194. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.2012.00434.x

Evans, M., Hole, R., Berg, L., Hutchinson, P., & Sookraj, D. (2009). Common insights, differing methodologies: Towards a fusion of Indigenous methodologies, participatory action research, and White Studies in an urban Aboriginal research agenda. *Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International*, 174. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/aprci/174

Forbes, A., Ritchie, S., Walker, J., & Young, N. (2020). Applications of two-eyed seeing in primary research focused on Indigenous health: A scoping review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920929110

Fredericks, B., & Adams, K. (2011). Editorial. *Action Learning and Action Research Journal*, *17*(2), 2-12.

Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative*, *14*(3), 218–227. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1177180118785382

Hardbarger, T. (2019). Cherokee perspectives on Indigenous rights education (IRE) and Indigenous participatory action research (IPAR) as decolonizing praxis. *International Journal of Human Rights Education*, *3*(1). https://repository.usfca.edu/ijhre/vol3/iss1/5

Harder, M., Johnson, J., MacDonald, C., Ingstrup, A., & Piche, M. J. (2019). A "Two-Eyed Seeing" approach to Indigenizing nursing curricula. *International Journal of Healthcare*, *5*(1), 23-28. http://doi.org/10.5430/ijh.v5n1p23

Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Retallick, J. (Eds.). (2004). *The action research planner (2nd ed.)*. Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development.

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts.* University of Toronto Press.

Martin, D. E., Thompson, S., Ballard, M., & Linton, J. (2017). Two-Eyed Seeing in research and its absence in policy: Little Saskatchewan Frist Nation Elders' experiences of the

2011 flood and forced displacement. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal, 8*(4). http://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2017.8.4.6

Meyer, M. A. (2005). Remembering our future: Higher education quality assurance and indigenous epistemology. *World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium: International Journal of Indigenous Education Scholarship*, (1), 18-27. https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/winhec/article/view/19252

Morton Ninomiya, M. E., Hurley, N., & Penashue, J. (2020). A decolonizing method of inquiry: Using institutional ethnography to facilitate community based research and knowledge translation. *Critical Public Health*, *30*(2), 220-231. http://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2018.1541228

Munroe, E. A., Borden, L. L., Murray Orr, A., Toney, D., & Meader, J. (2013). Decolonizing Aboriginal education in the 21st century. *McGill Journal of Education*, *48*(2), 317–337. https://doi.org/10.7202/1020974ar

Peltier, C. (2018). An application of two-eyed seeing: Indigenous research methods with participatory action research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17, 1–12. http://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918812346

Peterson, S. S., Horton, L., & Restoule, J. P. (2016). Toward a shift in expectations and values: What we've learned from collaborative action research in northern Indigenous communities. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*, *17*(2), 19-32.

Ray, L., Bannerman, D., & Wabano, M. (2019). Getting a quality education: Indigenising post-secondary institutions in Northern Ontario through the Indigenous Quality Assurance Project. *Junctures*, 20, 55-69. https://doi.org/10.34074/junc.20055

Reid, B. (2020). Positionality and research: "Two-Eyed Seeing" with a rural Ktaqmkuk Mi'kmaw community. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–12, http://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920910841

Restoule, J. Mashford-Pringle, A., Chacaby, M., Smillie, C., Brunette, C., & Russel, G. (2013). Supporting successful transitions to post-secondary education for Indigenous students: Lessons from an institutional ethnography in Ontario, Canada. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, *4*(4). http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol4/iss4/4

Rocheleau, D. (1994). Participatory research and the race to the save the planet: Questions, critique, and lessons from the field. *Agriculture and Human Values*, *11*(2), 4-25.

Sinclair, R. (2007). Participatory action research and Aboriginal epistemology. *Teaching & Learning*, *4*(2), 26-28.

Sium, A., Desai, C., & Ritskes, E. (2012). Towards the 'tangible unknown': Decolonization and the Indigenous future, *1*(1): I-XIII.

Skolnik, M. L. (2010). Quality assurance in higher education as a political process. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, *22*(1), 1-20.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books Ltd.

Walby, K. (2005). How closed-circuit television surveillance organizes the social: Institutional ethnography. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology, 30*(20), 189-214.

Whiting, C., Cavers, S., Bassendowski, S., & Petrucka, P. (2018). Using Two-Eyed Seeing to explore interagency collaboration. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, *50*(3), 133–144. http://doi.org/10.1177/0844562118766176

Wright, A. L., Gabel, C., Ballantyne, M., Jack, S. M., & Wahoush, O. (2019). Using Two-Eyed Seeing in research with Indigenous people: An integrative review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18*, 1–19. http://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919869695

Zavala, M. (2013). What do we mean by decolonizing research strategies? Lessons from decolonizing, Indigenous research projects in New Zealand and Latin America. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 2*(1), 55-71.

Biographical Note

Lana Ray, PhD, is an Anishinaabe scholar from Opwaaganasiniing. Dr. Ray is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Indigenous Learning at Lakehead University, and has prior experience working in public and not-for-profit sectors, with over a decade of experience working with Indigenous peoples and communities to implement Indigenous community-based approaches to research. She is committed to the use of Anishinaabe pedagogical practice and her work seeks to advance Indigenous social, cultural, and political realities through resurgent and decolonial praxis.