

THE PROMISE OF INDIGENOUS RESEARCH



What makes Indigenous research methods Indigenous? A partial answer is that Indigenous research methods have been made by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous communities. A more complete answer is that Indigenous research methods are Indigenous because of the theories and knowledge systems behind them.

Indigenous research methodologies emerge from Indigenous epistemologies, or knowledge frameworks, so they are always people and place specific¹⁻². The same Indigenous research methods may be used across many contexts but will always need to be tailored to that context to match community needs and understandings of knowledge and knowing.

To do research in a way that reflects Indigenous beliefs about knowing, relationships, place, and time is to do research in a way that is inherently critical of how it is usually done in the academy and critical of the colonial enterprise of knowledge accumulation that defines academic research.

Indigenous methodologies are tied to a larger project of Indigenous decolonization. They do not merely model Indigenous research, but “denaturalize power within settler societies and ground knowledge production in decolonization.”- Scott Morgensen³ (p.805)



Indigenous research methodologies and methods are discussed in plural form because they are numerous and diverse.

“Methods” refer to the activities of the inquiry project. It is important to remember that blood samples, bones, school records, and other documents ordinarily not considered to involve human subjects still once belonged to someone who was loved and important to others.

“Methodology” refers to the notions of knowing, being, and ethics that guide an inquiry project.



RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Critical to Indigenous methodologies is the concept of “relational accountability,” or what is most “important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship—that is, being accountable to your relations”^{4, (p. 77)}. Creating and maintaining respectful and mutually beneficial relationships between researchers and Indigenous communities is of utmost importance, in part because Indigenous peoples have sometimes been mistreated and misled by academic researchers in the distant and recent past^{1, 4, & 5}.

Critical Questions:^{4, (p. 77)}

- How do my methods help to build respectful relationships between the topic that I am studying and myself as a researcher (on multiple levels)?
- How do my methods help to build respectful relationships between myself and other research participants?
- How can I relate respectfully to the other participants involved in this research so that together we can form a stronger relationship with the idea we will share?
- What is my role as researcher in this relationship, and what are my responsibilities?
- Am I being responsible in fulfilling my role and obligations to the other participants, to the topic and all of my relations?
- What am I contributing or giving back to the relationship? Is the sharing, growth and learning that is taking place reciprocal?

AIMS OF INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

Numerous Indigenous scholars have described the distinct aims of Indigenous and decolonizing research^{1, 4, & 6-8}. These aims are adapted from Eve Tuck⁸:

1. Remember the true purpose of knowledge in & for communities
2. Uncover the quiet thoughts and beliefs of community
3. Map the variety of ideas in a community
4. Confirm that “indigenous traditions are the repository of vast experience and deep insight on achieving balance & harmony”
5. Make generational knowledge of elders, youth, parents, warriors, hunters, leaders, gardeners, fishers, teachers, and others available to other generations
6. Use Indigenous languages to express ideas, and to bring new language to new and recovered ideas
7. Honor all of our relations by engaging in the flow of knowledge in community
8. Reflect the cosmologies of our communities
9. Engage in place and land in ways that dramatically differ from more commonly held constructions of place and space.

INDIGENOUS THEORIES

Indigenous research methodologies emerge from Indigenous epistemologies and theories. Important theories include refusal, non-abstraction of land, and Indigenous sovereignty.

Though it is clear that these theoretical concerns are central to Indigenous research methods, their connections to Indigenous research methods with youth are yet to be thoroughly defined.

Other theoretical concerns not described below also drive the proliferation of Indigenous research methods. Further, The roles of research in improving Indigenous life and relationships to land are often considered self-evident, but the role of research in our theories of change needs to be more fully evaluated and understood⁹.

Refusal

Audra Simpson¹⁰, pg. 78 asks the following questions of her own ethnographic work with members of her Nation,

- “Can I do this and still come home; what am I revealing here and why?
- Where will this get us?
- Who benefits from this and why?”

These questions force researchers to consider the reasons not to pursue certain research topics or ask particular questions¹¹.

Non-Abstraction of Land

Brooks¹², Goeman¹³, and Bang et al.¹⁴ emphasize that their work is concerned with generating real and lived impacts for specific groups of Indigenous peoples on specific expanses of land.

Indigenous Sovereignty

The theoretical grounding of Indigenous research methods is concerned with the recognition, maintenance, and expansion of Indigenous sovereignty^{2, 15}.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

ALSO SEE INDIGENOUS TEACHING TOOLS: RESEARCH BRIEFS

- # 1 [Culture & Learning](#)
- # 2 [Indigenous Evaluation](#)
- #6 Indigenous Research with Youth

FOR MORE RESOURCES

- [University of Calgary: Indigenous Research](#)
- [Living in Relationships: Community-Based Research at the American Indian Center, Inc.](#)

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Image page 1: Courtesy of EMMAS project: Native Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math Summer Youth Program, 2014.

BUILDING CAPACITY AND CULTIVATING INNOVATION:
BCCI is designed to develop resources and practices that will have exponential impacts on efforts to improve Native student success across a variety of sectors.

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