1 Indigenous and Qualitative Inquiry: A Round Dance?

> Strangely, there has been very little attention paid to Indian methodologies for gathering data, and, consequently, the movement is primarily an ad hoc, personal preference way of gathering new ideas and attempting to weld them to existing bodies of knowledge.
>
> Vine Deloria, Jr (1999)

In writing this section on qualitative research, I seek out a glossary on qualitative terminology to locate the defining characteristics of this approach, and compare them against my own. As I reach for this book, I see Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996) nearby in the mishmash of books lining my shelf. I return to the glossary, flip to 'Q' and see 'Qualitative Inquiry.' It reads: 'Qualitative is a not-so-descriptive adjective attached to the varieties of social inquiry that have their intellectual roots in hermeneutics, phenomenological sociology, and the *Verstehen* tradition' (Schwandt, 2007: 247). *Verstehen* (German, meaning 'to understand') is a term associated with the interpretative tradition, emerging in the nineteenth century to contest positivist thought. In the late 1800s, German philosopher Wilhem Dilthey differentiated scientific inquiry into two classifications. One form, *Naturwissenschaft* – 'natural science,' from *Natur* (nature) and *Wissenschaft* (science, knowledge, intelligence) – deals with the abstraction of knowledge, while the second, *Erklärung* ('explanation, interpretation, definition, etc.'), concerns understanding of everydaylife from one's empathetic interpretation (Neuman, 1997). Reflecting upon this, my eyes wander again to Basso's book. I think of Apache Elder Uncle Charlie, whom I have met only through Basso's work, and wonder what he would have to say

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts, University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

about that. Would there be a common understanding about knowledge-seeking systems?

In traversing cultural knowledge paradigms, the first level of complexity arises with language. In considering Indigenous philosopher Anne Waters' analysis of the 'dualist binary ontology' of the English language compared with the 'nonbinary complementary dualist construct' (2004: 97, 98) that serves the thought and language of many Indigenous cultures, I am left contemplating how difficult it must have been for Indigenous people and the first visitors to understand one another given each group's distinctive language and culture. With colonization, Indigenous people were forced to forfeit their languages, and so a majority of Indigenous people in Canada now have English as their first language. Having a common language, however, has not served to increase cultural understandings. Rather, it has put Indigenous culture at risk. This suggests that a common language is not the panacea for a common understanding. Instead, understanding is a layered endeavour.

Given the complexities instilled within this word, *understand*, at what point can we say that we do indeed understand something? I begin to ponder my own immediate process of understanding in relation to others. I think of the students who come into my research class. The word *epistemology* sends us off into different directions, creating a dialectical force field. Tensions arise from the need to attach meaning to lofty and effervescent words like *truth* and *knowledge*. It seems that the interpretative nature of understanding fastens itself to the most intimate aspects of our experience, connecting us enough to find both foe and brethren. The space between these two places is deeply political, where representation, method, and meaning vie to be heard, to be understood. It is here, in this interpretative meaning-making, that qualitative research methodologies exist.

Qualitative research offers space for Indigenous ways of researching, yet any understanding of Indigenous methodologies alongside Western-constructed research processes (qualitative or otherwise) triggers recollection of the miserable history of Western research and Indigenous communities. The oft-quoted statement by Linda Tuhiwai Smith says it all: 'the word itself, "research," is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary' (1999: 1). In response, Indigenous scholars have been unified in their call for methodological approaches to research that respect Indigenous cultural knowings. From this starting place, it is not whether we need to consider Indigenous inquiry, but what approaches to it would look

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

like and how (or if) they might fit into the qualitative landscape. Indigenous researchers are finding ways to apply their own tribal epistemologies into their research work. Yet, why are Indigenous methodologies missing from the buffet table of qualitative methodologies available to researchers (e.g., community-based research, feminist methodologies, grounded theory)? Is there is no desire within Western academia to acknowledge Indigenous methodologies? Or are we simply lost in translation? Can the backdrop of qualitative research be a bridge for traversing worldviews?

This chapter offers a context for locating Indigenous methodologies (and their corresponding conceptual frameworks) within research practice, specifically alongside qualitative research. It positions Indigenous methodologies as distinct from other forms of qualitative inquiry and calls forth several questions. Why attempt to locate Indigenous methodologies within qualitative inquiry? What do they have in common within the *Verstehen* tradition? Before contemplating these questions and posing the argument that Indigenous methodologies are a viable research framework that embodies qualitative characteristics (though not exclusively), it is necessary to provide a preparatory discussion for exploring this positioning. This involves clarifying three philosophical assumptions that underlie claims about methodologies in general and about Indigenous inquiry specifically.

To start, this work is premised on a belief that nested within any methodology is both a knowledge belief system (encompassing ontology and epistemology) and the actual methods. The two work in tandem. Second, Indigenous methodologies can be situated within the qualitative landscape because they encompass characteristics congruent with other relational qualitative approaches (e.g., feminist methodologies, participatory action research) that in the research design value both process and content. This matters because it provides common ground for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to understand each other. Finally, and most significantly, tribal epistemologies are the centre of Indigenous methodologies, and it is this epistemological framework that makes them distinct from Western qualitative approaches.

The Backdrop of Qualitative Research

Given the interpretative nature of qualitative research, it is not surprising that there are different understandings of what exactly qualitative inquiry means in and of itself. Strauss and Corbin are grounded

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts, University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

theory methodologists who define qualitative research as 'any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification' (1998: 11). They argue that qualitative research, as a label, is confusing because different people can interpret it differently. Nevertheless, they formulate a working definition of qualitative research as a 'nonmathematical process of interpretation' for purposes of spotting patterns within the data and from which a theory can emerge (ibid.). Denzin and Lincoln add to this understanding of qualitative research by saying: 'Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry' (2003: 13). To build upon the interactive nature of qualitative research, Rossman and Rallis (2003) accentuate the reflexivity of qualitative research. It is an approach, they argue, that demands that researchers be continually aware of their own biases as a means of consistently locating themselves in the research.

Because qualitative research is interpretive, the stories of both the researcher and the research participants are reflected in the meanings being made. It is likely at this point that qualitative research diverges most clearly from traditional positivist quantitative approaches. Each guided by their own philosophy, one is a seeker of a singular static truth from an objective distance, while the other searches for contextualized realities and acknowledges many truths. These approaches differ significantly, but both stem from a paradigm defined and nuanced by Western thought.

In his seminal book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn defines paradigms as 'some accepted examples of actual scientific practice – examples which include law theory, application, and instrumentation together – that provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research' (1996 [1962]: 10). Whether it is quantitative or qualitative research, Kuhn's description of paradigms encompasses both theory and method. He is, however, contextualizing paradigms within Western thought, which influences this definition. Mertens uses the terminology of paradigms to provide us with a rubric for differentiating between research approaches, and describes how and where qualitative and quantitative methods fit within each schema. This rubric identifies positivism/postpostivism, constructivism, transformative, and pragmatic as each being a distinctive paradigm (2005: 9). Each paradigm is characterized by its own ontology, epistemology, and methodology, all of which, nonethe-

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts, University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

less, fall within the larger paradigm of Western thought. Paradigms within a paradigm, Mertens' rubric helps to clarify the diverse conceptual frameworks that encompass each distinctive research approach and how it differs from other approaches. Given the range and possibilities evident in the qualitative research tradition, contextualized knowledge (such as an Indigenous one) can find an ally with these paradigms.

The current field of qualitative research is an inclusive place. For example, the use of a self-reflective narrative research process, in conjunction with a philosophy that honours multiple truths, is congruent with a research approach that seeks *nisitohtamowin* (a Cree word for understanding) or 'self-in-relation' (Graveline, 1998: 57). Within qualitative inquiries, there are allies for Indigenous researchers. Participatory action research, a methodology found within the transformative paradigm, has utilized qualitative approaches, offering a research theory, method, and action for giving back to a community through research as praxis (McTaggart, 1997; Stringer, 1999). Phenomenology and narrative inquiry have been useful methodologies for Indigenous researchers who wish to make meaning from story. Denzin and Lincoln suggest that there are 'seven moments of qualitative research' (2003: 19), and that we are entering the seventh moment, where inclusivity of voices in research practice is possible. I am instinctively drawn to the idea of a seventh moment, for I think of seven generations, seven fires with all the hope implied in those terms. Yet my critical side will not be quieted without its say, and my inner critic says that there needs to be due attention to moments one to six, starting with what Denzin and Lincoln refer to as the 'traditional period' (ibid.).

In the traditional period of the twentieth century, qualitative research was largely influenced by positivism. Most prominently, ethnographical research design was employed as qualitative 'objective' studies of the 'other.' Ethnographies of the 'other' in the Americas usually meant depictions of 'exotic' Indigenous cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2003). These early qualitative studies were responsible for extractive research approaches that left those they studied disenfranchised from the knowledge they shared. In early educational ethnographies concerned with the plight of the marginalized 'other,' Native American children were a primary research sample (Yon, 2003). Educational ethnographies became a powerful tool to assist in the enculturation of Indigenous peoples through education. The ethnographers

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

themselves cited as problematic the short-term 'smash and grab' ethnographies that gathered qualitative data from quick in-and-out interview sessions (Martin and Frost, 1996: 606). Still, qualitative research as ethnography, with the powerful imagery of words unavailable to quantitative approaches that depended upon numerical symbolism, allowed researchers entry into the world of 'other.' Gaining access to this world, researchers of this period interpreted their observations from their own cultural stance, resulting in a skewed perception of what they were trying to understand. Perhaps these early researchers did not see this as an imposition, for they certainly did not and/or could not admit to it under the prevailing paradigm of scientific research.

I am not convinced that this is part of the research method's distant past. While critical theory and postmodern analysis have created space within Western science for representation, voice, and a multiplicity of truths, the essentialism of Western thought pervading research has not been fully challenged in the academy. In her recent work on cultural epistemologies, Ladson-Billings points out that Western epistemological privilege pervades the academy and that the 'epistemological challenge that is being mounted by some scholars of color is not solely about racism, however, it is also about the nature of truth and reality' (2003: 402). While anti-racist efforts that attempt to decolonize human relationships within sites of research (e.g., the academy) move forward, albeit slowly, there has been little systemic shift in the ideology of knowledge production.

From an Indigenous perspective, the reproduction of colonial relationships persists inside institutional centres. It manifests itself in a variety of ways, most noticeably through Western-based policies and practices that govern research, and less explicitly through the cultural capital necessary to survive there. The result has been, and continues to be, that Indigenous communities are being examined by non-Indigenous academics who pursue Western research on Western terms. While we may currently be in a more inclusive moment of qualitative research, Indigenous communities are still being 'researched,' albeit with more political finesse. Indigenous researchers have acknowledged the colonial history of Indigenous oppression and the political nature of Indigenous research. Ojibway scholar Roxanne Struthers succinctly summarizes the history of non-Indigenous research in Indigenous communities by saying it was not 'managed in

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts, University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

a germane manner' (2001: 127). Within a Maori context, Bishop states that research benefits often went to the researcher, 'not the people being researched' (1997: 36). In providing a context, these scholars remind us that regardless of whether research emerges from a positivist, constructivist, or transformative paradigm, it is still 'researching' Indigenous people, and it is still deeply political.

From a qualitative methodological perspective, I sense that there are two overriding political challenges as we enter into the seventh moment of qualitative research. The first involves finding (and using) a research approach that is not extractive and is accountable to Indigenous community standards on research so as to honour the tribal worldview. The second challenge is dealing with the undeniable. There is a fundamental epistemological difference between Western and Indigenous thought, and this difference causes philosophical, ideological, and methodological conflicts for Indigenous researchers. From the perspective of those who wish to employ a methodological approach guided by their own cultural epistemology, but cannot because it is personally and/or structurally shut out (intentionally or not), it feels as though the space is uninviting. This applies to quantitative research, qualitative research, and the post-secondary research environment in general. This sense of exclusion has a direct impact on Indigenous scholars and students within academia.

Eber Hampton describes the violence directed at graduate students who hold alternative worldviews concerning knowledge. He explains, 'I like the analogy of Cinderella's slipper because we are not Cinderallas; the slipper doesn't fit' (1995: 8). In line with Ladson-Billings, I have come to believe that a significant site of struggle for Indigenous researchers will be at the level of epistemology because Indigenous epistemologies challenge the very core of knowledge production and purpose. While this is not a matter of one worldview over another, how we make room to privilege both, while also bridging the epistemic differences, is not going to be easy. Indigenous methodologies prompt Western traditions to engage in reflexive self-study, to consider a research paradigm outside the Western tradition that offers a systematic approach to understanding the world. It calls for the non-Indigenous scholar to adjourn disbelief and, in the pause, consider alternative possibilities. Given these challenges, how do we situate Indigenous inquiries within qualitative research? Or do we even try?

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

An Insider/Outsider Relationship

Indigenous methodologies can be considered both a qualitative approach and not. While much of this book focuses on Indigenous methodologies themselves, this section offers a consideration of the relationship between Indigenous methodologies and qualitative research. There is a growing critical mass of literature by Indigenous scholars who attest to the interpretative nature of Indigenous knowledges (Little Bear, 2000; Henderson, 2000; Deloria, 2002; Cajete, 1999). From this perspective, Indigenous epistemologies fit nicely within the narrative aspect of a constructivist paradigm. Indigenous researchers often hear Heidegger's phenomenology calling. From another angle, introducing Indigenous knowledges into any form of academic discourse (research or otherwise) must ethically include the influence of the colonial relationships, thereby introducing a decolonizing perspective to a critical paradigm. Those active in Indigenous community research will look to a form of participatory action research methodology. From this juncture, one could argue that Indigenous inquiry fits within a transformative paradigm. Seemingly, Indigenous methodologies may simply be a subcategory of a Western paradigm that utilizes qualitative research approaches.

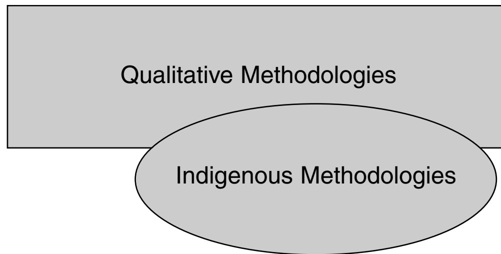
This can be helpful in assisting Western researchers in relating to each other on the topic area, and given the limitations of the language of interpretative concepts such as ontology and epistemology, a place to start is a place to start. Yet, I believe that there are at least two fundamental difficulties in presuming that qualitative research, a Western tradition, can fully bring Indigenous methodologies under its wing. The first centres on form or, more specifically, the language that holds meaning in epistemological discourse. Indigenous knowledges have a fluidity and motion that is manifested in the distinctive structure of tribal languages. They resist the culturally imbued constructs of the English language, and from this perspective alone Western research and Indigenous inquiry can walk together only so far. This is a significant difficulty for all those, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who do not speak a tribal language yet are inquiring into the nature of tribal knowledges.

The other matter relates to knowledge itself. Indigenous methodologies are guided by tribal epistemologies, and tribal knowledge is not Western knowledge. Knowledge is neither acultural nor apolitical. In speaking to Indigenous researchers, the Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson tells us that it is time to release our dependency on Western

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

Figure 1.1 Locating Indigenous methodologies in qualitative research



research traditions: 'These are dominant western system research paradigms. Now as Indigenous researchers we need to move beyond these, beyond merely assuming an Indigenous perspective on these non-Indigenous paradigms' (2001: 176). At present, there is a desire to give voice to Indigenous epistemologies within qualitative research, yet those who attempt to fit tribal epistemology into Western cultural conceptual rubrics are destined to feel the squirm. From my perspective, Indigenous methodologies and qualitative research at best form an insider/outsider relationship (see Figure 1.1). Although most qualitative researchers intuitively understand the dynamics of this relationship, it is here that we encounter the messiness of the work. The tension of the insider/outsider dynamic will persist until Indigenous research frameworks have methodological space within academic research dialogue, policy, and practice.

While discourse on the complexities of researching across knowledge paradigms will persist, mention must be made of the 'insider' space that qualitative research and Indigenous methodologies share. This matters because assisting Indigenous researchers (specifically graduate students) requires the involvement of the non-Indigenous academic research community. This is an educative process with a greater likelihood of success if Indigenous researchers and their non-Indigenous allies begin with some general understandings. It is correct to assume that Indigenous academics will be put in a position of educating their non-Indigenous contemporaries. If we do not take on this responsibility, Indigenous post-secondary students wishing to employ an Indigenous research framework will continue to be misunderstood and discouraged. While Indigenous methodology provokes substan-

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

tive political and ideological shifts within Western research contexts, I believe that an antidote for a certain level of inertia can be found in knowledge translation. Without exposure to Indigenous inquiry, non-Indigenous academics may not know how to recognize an Indigenous methodological approach that flows from tribal epistemologies. This requires intellectual acumen and skill given that the task demands traversing culturally influenced knowledge paradigms. The educative work on behalf of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars is critical here, for what cannot be seen is often not acknowledged, and what is not acknowledged is dismissed.

In commenting on the 'insider' space, Indigenous methodologies share two interrelated characteristics with other qualitative approaches (e.g., feminist methodologies and appreciative inquiry): (a) both approaches are relational, and (b) both approaches must show evidence of process and content. Given their holistic nature, Indigenous research frameworks involve evidence of a capital 'P' process within research. What is meant by a qualitative relational methodology in general, and what is meant by Indigenous methodologies as a relational approach in particular? One could argue that if qualitative research is founded upon an interpretive tradition, then it is, by necessity, relational. Rossman and Rallis submit that 'qualitative research is quintessentially interactive' (2003: 35). They go on to suggest that there must be a direct contact between researcher and research participants that includes the complex and varied responses that only an ongoing relationship can achieve. Given that any knowledge that emerges from qualitative inquiry is filtered through the eyes of the researcher, it follows that this new knowledge must be interpretative. A significant contribution of qualitative research, then, has been its ability to gain recognition that the researcher is not a neutral instrument of the research process.

Quantitative research, flowing from a positivist paradigm, assumes that objective neutrality can exist within research so long as lurking variables are controlled. Qualitative research, however, is built upon an interpretative presumption, and assumes that subjectivity within research will be a constant. The supposition of subjectivity and the interpretative nature of qualitative research imply a relational approach to research. *Reflexivity* is the term often utilized within a variety of qualitative research approaches to reference the relational. Reflexivity is the researcher's own self-reflection in the meaning-making process.

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

Feminist inquiry is a methodological approach that is highly reflexive. It provides a research methodology that allows feminist researchers to share the experience of conducting research and their own subjective experience with their research participants throughout the process. Integral is a gender analysis that contextualizes feminist research (Liamputtong, 2007: 11). Autoethnography, an approach with its foundations in ethnographical research, brings together the study of self (auto) in relation to culture (ethnography). Within this approach, self-reflection moves beyond field notes to having a more integral positioning within the research process and the construction of knowledge itself. As Gergen and Gergen state, 'rather than giving the reader pause to consider the biases, here the juxtaposition of self and subject matter is used to enrich the ethnographical report' (2003: 579). In postmodern research, reflexivity is a central component of the research process. It requires an awareness of the self in creating knowledge (ibid.). In anti-oppressive approaches, self-reflection is described as 'critical reflexivity,' which purposefully gives space for the political examination of location and privilege (Herising, 2005: 136). In line with these research approaches, decolonizing methodologies demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation within Indigenous research. It is rare that qualitative research conducted in the past decade does not make mention of the self-reflective component in its methodology, whether referring to it as reflexivity, critical reflexivity, self-reflection, or field notes (Gitlin et al., 2002).

Depending upon the specific methodology, the rationale for giving reflexivity its due can vary. A methodology that flows from a theoretical perspective that highly values 'self-in-relation,' such as autoethnography, will incorporate reflexivity as a necessary method to actualize its approach. For feminist and postmodern researchers, critical reflexivity brings forward the political and representational dimension of research in knowledge construction inherent to their particular theoretical standpoints. From other perspectives, reflexivity is associated with validity as a means of identifying bias within the research. Creswell (2003) situates reflexivity as an indicator of validity within qualitative research. He indicates that there are eight primary strategies to demonstrate validity, one of which is to clarify bias and create a transparency that readers will appreciate. Evidence of self-reflexivity is an acknowledgment by the researcher that her or his subjectivity may influence the research findings. For varied reasons, reflexivity attests to the relational aspect of research that is incorporated within

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

numerous qualitative approaches. From this place, I wish to acknowledge the progressive work by many qualitative researchers for creating the necessary space required by emergent methodologies, such as Indigenous inquiry, that place significant value on the relational, and that allow recognition of the experiential nature of Indigenous research frameworks.

Switching to the specific epistemic roots of Indigenous inquiry, Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria, Jr (1999) explicates the link between a relational worldview and methodology. Many Indigenous worldviews are based upon an animistic philosophy that attests that the human entity is but one clan group within its relational family. Deloria argues that a relational worldview, from a tribal perspective, is one that assumes relationships between all life forms that exist within the natural world. Relationship has a broad inclusive meaning within tribal understanding. Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete affirms the relational perspective of Indigenous knowledges: they are, he says, about 'honoring the primacy of direct experience, interconnectedness, relationship, holism, quality, and value' (2004: 66).

One methodological tool for such an epistemic positioning is observation. We gather knowledge by observing the relationships within the natural world (Deloria, 1999: 34). Here the words *relationship* and *observing* are equally significant. In making meaning, the relational quality of tribal worldviews suggests a highly interpretative approach. This is recognized among tribal peoples. In referring to her doctoral work, Manu Aluli Meyer states that the epistemology that governs her dissertation 'is an interpretative analysis of my own epistemology, shaped by dream, taped narratives and a lifetime of interactions' (2004: 86). Indigenous forms of inquiry find an ally in the qualitative approaches that assume the relationally constructed aspect of knowledge production. Granted, qualitative approaches are based upon a non-animistic premise, which differs from tribal epistemology, and so deeper questions remain: Relationally constructed via which relationships? What does it mean to privilege human-centric knowledge? Still, the relational significance found in each provides a place for mutual understanding of the other.

An indicator of a relational approach in research can be found within process and content, and the reader must be able to identify both in the methodology. Indicators that this holistic epistemology is present include explicit reference to personal preparations involving motivations, purpose, inward knowing, observation, and the variety

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

of ways that the researcher can relate her own process undertaken in the research. Another way to assess process is to see the inclusion of story and narrative by both researcher and research participant. In an Indigenous context, story is methodologically congruent with tribal knowledges. A product resulting from research using a tribal-centred Indigenous methodology ought to have a strong narrative component as part of its method and presentation of findings.

Researchers wishing to use Indigenous inquiry may use it alongside a Western approach that organizes data differently (e.g., grounded theory, phenomenology), thereby using a mixed-method approach. The data can be coded, emergent themes grouped and bracketed, and so forth, while transparently indicating that it is not an Indigenous epistemological approach to data analysis. This involves presenting research in two ways, but given the newness of Indigenous methodologies to the academy, this may be a strategic concession. The point is that if Indigenous methods (e.g., sharing circles, story, protocol) are being utilized, an Indigenous research framework with a tribal epistemology ought to be recognized, as opposed to assuming that Indigenous methods can be subsumed under a Western way of knowing.

Yet, while tribal epistemologies, and subsequently tribal-centred methodologies, are premised upon a relational perspective of the world, there are other characteristics of this approach that make it distinctive. Thus, Indigenous methodologies can only be categorized as relational to the extent that other relational qualitative methodologies can and are likewise categorized. Feminist methodology, for example, is relational but not generically so. Rather, its relational nature flows from a feminist epistemology that identifies it as distinct from, for example, autoethnography. It follows that Indigenous methodologies are not solely relational, but involve other characteristics that create a distinctive methodological approach. These traits include the tribal epistemology at the heart of this approach and a decolonizing aim, both of which are born of a unique relationship with Indigenous lands.

Furthermore, the relationships within Indigenous research approaches include the respect that must accompany the research process. Within Western research, this discussion is often found within ethical considerations. Relational research is concerned with doing research in a good way. As Wilson affirms, as a researcher 'you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research' (2001: 177, emphasis in original). Indigenous scholar Marie Battiste (2007) suggests that one of the most critical aspects of Indigenous research is the

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

ethical responsibility to ensure that Indigenous knowledges and people are not exploited. Research is about collective responsibility: 'we can only go so far before we see a face – our Elder cleaning fish, our sister living on the edge in East Vancouver … – and hear a voice whispering, "Are you helping us?"' (Kovach, 2005: 31).

Indicators and Issues within Indigenous Methodologies

In claiming the distinctiveness of any emergent methodology, the question lingers: Is it *really* different? This is not a surprising query, for it would be easier for the dominant majority if the surface features of the alternate methodology could be understood within the existing paradigms, to continue rather than interrupt a pre-existing, ongoing conversation. In fact, the resistance to epistemological disruptions within academia is so great that it can stymie that which it seeks to create – new knowledge. Within an Indigenous research context, the result has been an attempt to weld Indigenous methods to existing bodies of Western knowledge, resulting in confused efforts and methodological floundering (Deloria, 1999). This can be seen in the increasingly common approach to research within the Indigenous landscape: the non-Indigenous principal researcher (with a significant Western research record) includes a junior Indigenous co-investigator (without a significant Western research record) on the research team. The research design includes Indigenous methods (e.g., research circles) and cultural protocols (e.g., offerings, ceremony), and identifies the research strategy as flowing from a central methodology that has credibility within the Western research community (e.g., community-based approach, grounded theory). The research is institutionally funded, and while there is awareness that this does not really challenge the status quo, it mentors Indigenous researchers to gain the necessary social and cultural capital to reproduce this strategy independently. It is not perfect, but, it is considered better than the 'smash and grab' ethnographers of time past. And the beat goes on, yes, the beat goes on …

On my less cynical days, I believe that this approach is an attempt to recognize the history of Western research within Indigenous communities and make reparations. Yet it is nevertheless problematic. Indigenous methods do not flow from Western philosophy; they flow from tribal epistemologies. If tribal knowledges are not referenced as a legitimate knowledge system guiding the Indigenous methods and protocols within the research process, there is a congruency problem. Furthermore,

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts, University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

by not clearly recognizing Indigenous inquiry for what it is – a distinctive methodology – the political and practical quagmire will persist.

There have been attempts to problematize Indigenous methodologies, centring on the use of a specific tribal epistemology within an Indigenous research framework. In my case, I chose to centre Plains Cree knowledge in my methodology (see Chapter 2). Being Cree, I have an understanding of its epistemological premises and subsequent methods and protocols. A common response has been to ask how a researcher can privilege a specific tribal epistemology and still have meaning for other Indigenous cultures beyond that specific tribe. How can a Cree-centred methodology make sense in a Coast Salish context? Why, for example, did I use a Cree knowledge for my methodological approach instead of a pan-Indigenous approach? Primarily, these questions have come from non-tribal people who are well versed in matters of methodology and the like, but are new to Indigenous knowledges. Furthermore, there is a political dimension to this problematicizing that has its roots in colonial history, and often manifests itself in discourses of disbelief, and, within research circles, a desire for universal application.

My initial reply is to clarify why identifying a specific tribal knowledge is important. A part of this response is in itself political. Indigenous peoples have never been appreciative of a pan-Indigenous approach that attempts to homogenize our tribal practices. In a Canadian context, most individuals with a rudimentary knowledge of Indigenous cultures know that the coastal Tshimsian peoples have different practices than the land-based Plains Cree. The unique aspects of our tribal cultures are held in esteem because they emerge from those ancestoral interrelationships found in place. Our tribal affiliations must be acknowledged – it is about identity and respect. This brings me to the second point.

As Indigenous people, we understand each other because we share a worldview that holds common, enduring beliefs about the world. As Indigenous scholar Leroy Little Bear states, 'there is enough similarity among North American Indian philosophies to apply concepts generally' (2000: 79). Thus, when considering Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous people contextualize to their tribal affiliation. We do this because our knowledges are bound to place. Therefore, if I indicate that, as a researcher, I will be following Plains Cree traditions (because that is my tribal affiliation), other Indigenous people will understand that though the specific custom and protocol may vary, the underlying

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts, University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.

epistemology for approaching the research is known. In fact, research emerging from a specific tribal-centred approach is often as familiar, if not more so, to Indigenous peoples than methodologies from Western research approaches (even if they are allied).

Other queries centre on whether this approach would work with the urban Indigenous population. My first response is to say that I am an urban Indigenous woman living away from my ancestral territory, and I have been able to apply a tribal-centred approach to research – it is feasible. Second, all urban Indigenous people come from a specific tribal background (or a mix, as in my case), and we need to reclaim that. However, this approach demands that the researcher 'do the work' to honour those tribal knowledges. Right from the beginning, the researcher has to ask: Am I up for the journey?

There are many ways to problematize Indigenous epistemologies; this has been going on since colonial times. There has been a continuous expectation that Indigenous ways must be congruent with Western customs, even though it is understood that the cultures are philosophically diverse. Politically, I understand why this happens, but does it make sense logically? Indigenous researchers and our allies cannot get drawn into the same old, same old. Rather, we need to delve into the possibilities. For the non-Indigenous researcher, the question then becomes: How can a non-Indigenous researcher participate? (This is dealt with more generally in Chapter 9.) These are questions about Indigenous methodologies that require good talk. My first response is that not all research in Indigenous contexts will require an Indigenous methodological approach; it depends upon the inquiry question. However, it should be an option. Second, it may be that the form of scholarly research, with its dependence upon a sole principal investigator model, may need to be revisited. It is possible that non-Indigenous researchers may only participate in Indigenous methodologies where there are structures that allow for equal partnership.

While contrasting opinions about ontological and epistemological differences will remain, and the functional role of methodologies in seeking truth will diverge, this diversity need not be diminished, for it allows relevancy within a range of contexts. However, an enviroment, research or otherwise, that allows for equitable valuing of ideas and relationships in understanding the world, and the living entities within it, is necessary for relational approaches such as Indigenous methodologies to thrive. The context of qualitative research is a fertile garden for such a seed to grow.

Copyright © 2000. University of Toronto Press. All rights reserved.

Kovach, Margaret Elizabeth. Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts,
University of Toronto Press, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oronopda-ebooks/detail.action?docID=
Created from oronopda-ebooks on 2021-02-09 07:12:57.