

Methods for Reconciling Research Approaches

FACT SHEET 5

This fact sheet builds on the seven principles of Reciprocity, Relationality, Reflexivity, Respect, Reverence, Responsivity, and Responsibility outlined in Fact Sheet 4. These principles can be practiced through a variety of research methods. The table on the next page summarizes methods that we uncovered in our literature review, and in conversations with wisdom keepers and key informants. These methods emerge from both Indigenous and Western knowledges, across and beyond Turtle Island. The inclusion of methods from Indigenous peoples in the global south highlights the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems around the world. Methods do not inherently respect the seven principles. Instead, **connecting to important principles must happen intentionally, by practicing the methods with good intent.**¹ This includes remaining true to the context in which data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted.^{2,3}

Our literature review and conversations also pointed to the benefits of using mixed-methods. From Indigenous perspectives, mixing methods can contribute to the process of decolonization by challenging colonial categorizations, and fostering multi-directional idea sharing. This can in turn lead to new data collection tools and new theoretical frameworks. It can also contribute to the work of linking knowledge systems,⁴ particularly by privileging Indigenous knowledge⁵ and/or intentionally re-balancing power.⁶ Mixing methods also accommodates the complexity of intersectional theory.⁷

Innovating methods may also be necessary for upholding the seven principles and contributing to broader goals such as self-determination and social justice. An example of a specific methodological innovation is the development of culturally relevant surveys – grounded in all seven principles – which may include references to stories, songs, taboos, myths and proverbs.⁸

Finally, the literature offers several cautions and challenges related to applying methods in line with the seven principles. Central among them is failing to remain true to the complexity of intersecting and fluid identities,⁹ and mistakenly positioning oneself as “expert”, in all facets of the research.¹⁰

This is one of a series of five fact sheets drawn from a research paper called Learning across Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and intersectionality: Reconciling social science research approaches (2018) by L. Levac, L. McMurtry, D. Stienstra, G. Baikie, C. Hanson and D. Mucina. The fact sheets were authored by J. Stinson, designed by Ellyn Lusic and Tiffany Murphy, and formatted by B. Ryan. The fact sheets, full research paper, and related resources are available at www.criaw-icref.ca.

Methods that can support the seven principles

Method	Description and Considerations
Storytelling	Oral storytelling “builds on the seven principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy that form a framework for understanding the characteristics of stories, appreciating the process of storytelling, establishing a receptive learning context, and engaging in holistic meaning-making.” ¹¹ Oral narratives are often image-based and reflect the complex and textured nature of Indigenous ways of knowing. ¹²
Yarning	Yarning is considered by some to be a subtype of storytelling; one research team ¹³ describes it as an Australian Indigenous method that uses an informal and relaxed conversational process to share stories, develop knowledge and build accountable relationships to the community. ¹⁴ It prioritizes Indigenous ways of communicating, “in that it is culturally prescribed, cooperative, and respectful.” ¹⁵
Sharing circles and talking circles	Sharing circles and talking circles are group-based conversational approaches to gathering data. The talking circle is an Indigenous method of group information sharing and discussion, with a focus on cooperation within the group. A talisman is often used to denote the speaker at any given time. ¹⁶ In a sharing circle, participants gather together to discuss the research topic in a way that promotes “sharing all aspects of the individual – heart, mind, body, and spirit.” ¹⁷
Marae wānanga (w/ Whakawhiti korero)	<i>Marae wānanga</i> are meetings in traditional meeting houses where the researcher is positioned as a guest, and the format promotes cultural safety by, for instance, embedding ceremony in the data collection. ¹⁸ This method can be helpful when working with research participants who have experienced trauma. A method drawn from Maori daily life – Whakawhiti korero (i.e. the exchange of ideas and discussion) is used within a <i>Marae wānanga</i> session. ¹⁹
Halaqah	Halaqah is a traditional Islamic pedagogy, which has been adapted as a narrative inquiry method of research. This method positions participants as co-constructors of knowledge, celebrates the “sacred, spiritual and transformative nature of ilm (knowledge) and values the beliefs, cultural aspirations and collective autonomy of Muslims.” ²⁰

Methods that can support the seven principles

Method	Description and Considerations
Arts-based methods	Arts-based research methods use elements of the creative arts to offer participants alternative forms of expression to talking, or to better understand the significance of a research topic within a particular culture. These methods are participatory because they “directly involve the participants of the research in a practical and real way.” ²¹ Some arts-based methods include quilting, photovoice/photo interviewing/reflexive photography, and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. Within Hawaiian culture, quilting has been used historically as an (often private) expression of resistance to Western dominance and ways of knowing, and thus provides symbols of loyalty to Indigenous identity and community. ²² Photo interviewing (and associated techniques) is a widely used Western research method that originated in the mid to late 1970s. ²³ It can include using participant-supplied photos or videos as data (reflexive photography), examining participants’ responses to photos or video (photo interviewing), and encouraging participants to express their community through photos (photovoice). ²⁴ Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection shares some characteristics with photovoice, but instead of photos, uses paintings, drawings, sculptures, crafts, songs, teachings, or stories. ²⁵
Critical ethnography and auto-ethnography	In critical ethnography, research methods such as participant observation focus on language and acts within everyday life. Facts and truth are understood through their wide acceptance within a group or culture. ²⁶ This requires collaboration throughout the research process. Auto ethnography draws on the researcher’s own experience to understand a phenomenon. ²⁷
Hermeneutics	Hermeneutic inquiry is an interpretative research method that seeks to understand meaning within context. ²⁸ A researcher engaged in hermeneutics “[interprets] a relationship between memory, time, place and the text” they are studying, and understands a text or oral story as dynamic, meaning that the “energies of the Earth” and of humans are ever-changing. ²⁹
Collective consensual data analytical procedure (CCDAP)	The CCDAP is a team based data analysis technique to identify overarching themes within findings. It involves a process of visually representing and collectively organizing data. ³⁰ CCDAP seeks out multiple ways of knowing through collaboration and consensus, thus prioritizing principles of reciprocity, responsivity, and respect.

Methods that can support the seven principles

Method	Description and Considerations
Inclusion of wisdom keepers (i.e. Elders)	Within Indigenous communities, Elders are considered wisdom keepers and learning from them is considered by many to be an essential method of research. A key informant offered the following insight into the importance of Elders' knowledge: "The thing that's helped the most... is the time I've spent with Elders, which hasn't been near enough... It does me more good than pretty much anything else... That embodied part is...really important and is also the most difficult part to explain but until you embody it you haven't actually taken it up..." ³¹
Pagtatanung- tanong	<i>Pagtatanung-tanong</i> is a Filipino word that means <i>asking questions</i> . This interview method, is rooted in Indigenous Filipino culture, is adaptive to contextual norms, and is used in conjunction with other Indigenous research methods. Primarily, it addresses power imbalances between researchers and informants because both are afforded equal status, decision making power, and time to ask questions of the other. ³²
Talanoa and Faafaletui	<i>Talanoa</i> and <i>Faafaletui</i> describe two research methods that "claim meaning and significance from a common Indigenous Pacific, particularly Polynesian, worldview [and that use metaphors] to describe a process of storying and gathering narratives." ³³ <i>Talanoa</i> describes a process of coming together, of creating a collective discussion, and <i>Faafaletui</i> is the process of weaving together knowledges.

Using these research methods

Our research revealed examples of these methods being used across the social sciences, including in Indigenous studies, education, adult education, political science, social work, sociology, gender and cultural studies, anthropology, psychology, nursing, geography, ecology and sustainability studies, family sciences, and health policy. Across these fields, we uncovered research that raises and contributes to answering important questions about, for example, grounding environmental policy decisions in Indigenous knowledge, teaching about citizenship and science, improving health practices with seniors and young people, and building bridges between communities and academia. Researchers explain their application of the above principles and methods in terms of how they approach and undertake their work, how they describe their work, and how they are affected by their work. In other words, doing research that learns across knowledge systems, and that incorporates the idea of intersectionality, involves not only how we work, but also how we talk about our work, and how we change because of our work.

When explaining their research approach, many researchers give examples of how they implement the principles that guide their work. For example, researchers describe their efforts to build relationships with Elders and other Indigenous wisdom keepers, to acknowledge colonialism and its effects, and to design research in collaboration with, and for the benefit of, participant researchers.³⁴

Reflexive voicing is an example of how authors *describe* their work. Reflexive voicing involves writing as both individual and collective authors, and showing “the development of [the authors’] voices in response to each other... the presence or absence of particular voices, [and] how politics and power differences shape the call and response of voice.”³⁵

Finally, meaningfully engaging with these principles and methods involves being personally and professionally *affected* by our work as researchers. Sharing our stories with each other can be therapeutic,³⁶ and helps us learn about new ways of being and knowing in the world.

Conclusion

The methods outlined in this fact sheet are examples of research methods that complement the seven principles. But using these methods does not mean you are automatically enacting the principles. Research methods need to be chosen carefully, paying attention to the context and perspectives of those with whom you are working, so as not to erase differences by generalizing “Indigenous knowledge.” The importance of place within Indigenous approaches to knowledge makes it important to ask, “**Do methods have a place? Or do places have methods?**”? In other words, Western assumptions about the transferability of methods deserve further consideration.

As well, more research and attention are needed to describe the appropriate application of ethical protocols in research, beginning with the seven principles described in this series. More work could also be done to determine how fragmented academic disciplines can better engage with holistic Indigenous knowledge systems, and what kind of institutional reform is required to enable authentic community-university collaborations toward knowledge democracy.



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