

Implementing Indigenous Research Methodologies: Introduction to the Special Issue

Mary Kate Dennis
University of Manitoba

The focus of this special issue is how Indigenist researchers implement Indigenous methodologies. The catalyst for this special issue, Dr. Michael A. Hart, elicited submissions from social work researchers to share the ways in which they practice Indigenous methodologies in their research. There is a small but growing literature on the philosophies of Indigenous methodologies and very little on the implementation of Indigenist research methods. Indigenist research practices are based in Indigenism, the Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and practices that are based upon our long-held values, beliefs, and ways of being in the world that are lived out considering the present contexts we are in and relied upon as means to overcome the colonial oppression we continue to face. This collection of articles represents the application of Indigenist research methods, a reflection and sharing of insights for social work researchers thereby making important contributions to the literature.

My own relationship to Indigenous methodologies began when I was a doctoral student. I had the benefit of studying Indigenous research methodologies in a Native Studies course which brought to the fore the philosophical underpinnings of the Indigenist focused research including the often cited and foundational text *Decolonizing Methodologies* by Linda Smith (1999). For my dissertation, I conducted research with American Indian Elders living on a reservation. When I returned to campus after completing the research, I was alerted to new publications (at the time) by Kovach (2009) and Wilson (2008) who were foundational in further explicating the epistemologies in Indigenous methodologies.

Two important aspects of Indigenous methodologies are the relational approach and reciprocity for working with individuals and communities. It was refreshing to read these Indigenous methodological texts and to know that I could tell the fuller truth about how I

collaborated with the Elders, how we co-construct our relationship and the conversations, building the story and understanding of their lives. In working with my committee, I vividly remember sharing with them that the Elders had the power in the relationship, they would guide the conversation and share what they wanted me to know. Being able to describe this more realistically and revealing the intellectual as well as the spiritual connections related to conducting research with Indigenous Elders was transformative.

The transmission of Indigenous knowledges is relational and is a by-product of relationships related to language, the land, and people. A component of Indigenous methodologies is knowing one's place as a helper or recipient of knowledge development by understanding fully the responsibilities to the Indigenous people, communities and lands that share the knowledge. For us, this is an interactive exchange; it is not only extraction of knowledge, but there is a giving by the researchers. There are ethics related to the sharing of the knowledge, and inherently this is a challenge to the western academy and their approaches related to knowledge.

The authors curated in this special issue effectively illustrate that there is no single Indigenous method. The application of Indigenist philosophies is as unique as the researcher and their cultures and practices, their collaborators, and the communities they engage in their research activities. The authors reinforce that there is no checklist or list of steps that can be taken in practicing the tenets of Indigenist research methods. This research is personal, layered holistically and grounded in our own cultures. In some ways, we are asking the academy to slow down and to embrace the possibility that knowledge production may or may not be intended for wide circulation. After the research process, the community and researchers may conclude that the knowledge produced or curated is not for wider consumption, that it is for us or even just for the community where the research took place. The authors in this special issue illustrate how important this work is to our communities, and we thank you for your contributions and insights in sharing the implementation of Indigenous research methodologies.

References

- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. New York, N.Y: Zed Books Ltd

Wilson, S. (2009). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing.