

“Do it in a good way”

Community-campus partnership research with Indigenous communities



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Successful CU engagements depend on relationships of familiarity and trust



Ethics

Embodiments of trust



Research on research ethics in two SSHRC-funded 5 year projects involving CU Partnerships

Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics, Special Issue on CBR, Summer, 2008



Community Mandate: *“Do it in a good way”*

- ✓ Do your best
- ✓ Honesty, authenticity, sincerity
- ✓ Mean well
- ✓ Speak well
- ✓ Act well
- ✓ Follow cultural protocols
- ✓ Know where your needs leave off and the community begins
- ✓ Do it for the benefit of the others in addition to yourself



A tale of two journeys involving CU partnership research

SSHRC-CURA

2003-2008

Fathers Involvement

Nationally networked

7 component CBR projects across the country

My focus: Indigenous fathers involvement

5 First Nations community partners

First Nations community-based collaborators

University-based Indigenous project coordinator

SSHRC-MCRI

2002-2007

Child development

Provincially networked

10 component CBR projects across province of BC

My focus: Indigenous child development

4 First Nations community partners

First Nations community-based collaborators

University-based Indigenous project coordinator



3 assets that enabled both projects

1. Indigenous team members
2. Memoranda of Understanding
3. Community-responsive methodologies



1. Indigenous team members

Indigenous team members

Community-based collaborators

Indigenous project coordinator & non-Indigenous Co-P.I.

- Reciprocal CBC & University team training
- Indigenous research ethics
- Indigenous knowledge informing data collection procedures
- Community guidance in all phases



2. Memoranda of Understanding

Detailing project scope, possible activities & procedures, expectations, roles, dissemination

Customized for each community-university partnership within the project

“A mast to cling to in stormy weather.”



3. Community responsive methodologies

Narrative, group forums, structured interviews, questionnaires, community asset mapping, document review, video



Opportunities & challenges in a networked project environment

Relationships: Who knows who?

Can we develop relationships of familiarity and trust beyond the CBR project, in the larger collaborative project?

Rotating cast of characters (grad students, reps of community partners in the other projects)

Cultural safety: The loneliness of the sole Indigenous emissary

Who cares? Who has the time to care?

Most successful projects build on pre-existing relationships & understandings about the cultural & community contexts

Meaning well

After a history of exclusions...

Many academic project architects want to include
Indigenous community partners & topics

Some Indigenous groups want to be included in
“mainstream” or multi-ethnic studies

Many Indigenous groups in Canada seek their own
community-led projects, research & statistical institute,
where principles of Ownership, Control, Access &
Possession can govern activity (OCAP, see Assembly of
First Nations, RHS)

Indigenous partners on thin ice...

Indigenous research ethics are contested.

Indigenous research engagements are fragile

Indigenous research team members work in contexts of vulnerability

community: whose side are they on?

university: labyrinthine policies & procedures



Academics partners on thin ice

Accountability to funders: the MID-TERM REVIEW

Time

Money

Quantity of outputs

Control

Who knows what?

About the ethics, concerns about research, cultural protocols, needs & goals of community partners in a project?

Many universities lack Indigenous research protocols

Many academic investigators lack knowledge

Few graduate students receive education about Indigenous research ethics



5 lessons learned

Large-scale collaborative or networked projects are not a panacea. Assess pro's and con's of collaborative research engagements involving a minority of Indigenous project components.

Would an Indigenous specific project be more likely to provide cultural safety and success according to Indigenous goals for knowledge development and sharing through research?

1. Assess the learning readiness and resources of the collaborative team
2. Foreground the indeterminacy of research outcomes
3. Protect Indigenous knowledge (and funding allocation) through an MOU
4. Consider alternative structures for networked projects
5. Clear structure and communication of expectations

1. Assess the learning readiness and resources of the collaborative research community

Time

Geographic Location

Previous knowledge of Indigenous research

Inclination to re-think ideas about ethics, epistemology, dissemination

What are the opportunities to develop relationships of familiarity and trust among members within the larger collaborative team?

The larger the number of players, the less likely this will be possible.

Cultural safety: Are there other Indigenous members involved? Does funding allocation support involvement of more than one Indigenous team member?

Do key people in the collaborative study understand cultural protocols and issues of cultural safety?

2. Foreground the indeterminacy of project outcomes

Wait without hope for hope would be for the wrong thing... T.S. Eliot

Even with an MOU, research goals are not a contract to deliver a pre-determined product.

Who understands that?

Does the community?

Does the academic partner?

Does the funder?

Who can tolerate this level of indeterminacy?

- ✓ whether there will be data
- ✓ whether data will be sharable with the collaborative team
- ✓ whether knowledge created can be disseminated, and by whom, and in what format?



3. Protect Indigenous knowledge and resources through an MOU

Negotiated engagements

vs altruistic and informal agreements

MOUs: the syllabus for research goals, objectives, activities, expectations, & performance, including financial & in-kind contributions



4. Consider alternative structures for collaborative projects

From deep integration.....to consortium

High need for inter-relationships.....Low need for inter-relationships

- Structure projects based on a realistic assessment of project goals & the resources required to develop relationships of familiarity and trust

Success!

Fathers Involvement Research Alliance CURA (www.fira.ca)

- 7 population specific CBR project components
- Independent, no expectations for integration, visiting
- Clear expectations for data sharing
- Some omnibus activities

5. Clear structure & communication of expectations

Ambiguity and change tends to create a sense of unsafety.

“Emergent” or “evolving” project designs are not usually conducive to work with populations that are already in living with high levels of vulnerability.

Knowing what has been agreed to and following clear protocols formalized in an MOU creates trust and a basis for accountability.



“Do it in a good way”

Strong relationships of trust, nurtured within structures characterized by clear communication of expectations and mutual learning, are the backbone for ongoing negotiation of ethical practice in partnership research.

For more exploration,
visit www.ecdip.org/ethics/

