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COMMENTARY

The Heart of Indigenous Research Methodologies

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Last year, at the International Society for Education through Art conference at the University of British Columbia (UBC), discussions of Indigenous Research Methodologies were ample, which does not often happen at art education conferences. UBC is keenly aware of its occupation of Indigenous lands and the realization of such a relationship brought forward such conversations naturally. These dialogues were stimulating and timely, perhaps the result of a growing global awareness of Indigenous Research Methodologies. Still, such dialogues are not always included in the United States in the discussion of research methodologies. When Kryssi Staikidis and I edited our book, *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* (2017), we found that although our work was presented in some academic settings—an international qualitative inquiry conference, the Art Education Research Institute, the American Educational Research Association, NAEA, university seminars and symposia, university art education departments—where we were asked to share our findings, the conversation needed to advance beyond ourselves for sustainability.

"The use of Indigenous Research Methodologies presumes knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing and being."

In returning to the United States, Kryssi, Commentary Editor for *Studies*, shared information about this special issue with art educators Laurie A. Eldridge (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) and me, Christine Ballengee Morris (Eastern Band Cherokee). The theme of this

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issue is structured around three concepts: orientations, dispositions, and stances. These concepts encourage researchers to explore what they turn toward and turn away from.

In our initial discussion, Laurie and I found that we turn toward our Indigenous values when doing research. Research in our field has often limited us to utilizing traditional approaches, when there are other ways of knowing. We felt that it was important to explore Indigenous Research Methodologies in this commentary for the purpose of equity and inclusion. Below is our dialogue:

Laurie

As a Cherokee person, I attempt to adhere to Cherokee values. There are many Cherokee values, such as *gadugi*, a Cherokee word which means coming together as one and helping one another; and *detsadaligenvdisgesdi*—all must take responsibility for each other's well-being. The overarching themes I find in these values are respect and responsibility. Cherokee values focus on one's responsibility to act communally and respectfully. This is the heart of Indigenous research: Indigenous values, concepts, and ways of knowing and being in the world are central to an Indigenous research paradigm.

Respect is crucial when doing Indigenous research. Honoring the core beliefs and values of an Indigenous community creates a space where the gift of knowledge is acknowledged by giving back in some way to the individuals and community involved in the research. This coming together is *gadugi*.

The responsibility of doing research in such a way that you do not shame your relationships is overarching in the ethical stance of an Indigenous researcher. Individuals and communities must trust that you will protect sacred knowledge as you walk in their worlds. You are responsible for how you conduct yourself before, during, and after the research process in relation to those participating in the research. Thinking of the ways, positive and negative, that the research could impact the individual and the community is part of taking responsibility for each other's well-being. Thinking "what will the elders say?" is an important guide to me personally in my research and life.

Christine's Response to Laurie

As a Cherokee person, I have spent time contemplating Native Ways of Knowing, and as Laurie states, for her, respect and responsibility are key. I would add that relationships and dialogue are also key. Long before we had written language, we told our narratives through stories, poems, song, drawings, and dance. Stories not only convey information, but they have the power to change. The exchange of stories from teller to listener is a form of relational knowledge. As the story is consumed, the immediate reaction is heartfelt, and then as this reaction proceeds to one's intellect, self-reflexive engagement occurs, which can lead to reimagining and maintaining relationships.

Educators who guide their students to make meaning out of this complex and ambiguous world help them to make sense of their place and space. Learning how to make connections and not see subjects or people in isolated, unrelated ways is a lifelong skill, vitally important for our students to learn.

Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) recommends the need to remember relationality, storytelling, and ceremony. Kovach (2010) places storytelling as central to the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and teachings. Each story is alive with the nuances of the storyteller, and as Cook-Lynn (2007) argues, storytelling and incorporating tribal culture, knowledge, and historical perspectives assist in defining what Indigeneity is as they are bearers of knowledge, history, and myth. Through the concepts that Laurie speaks of—respect and responsibility in our research—we began to develop our academic ceremonies. We can realize that respect and honor for someone are considered important. Through responsible approaches to research by giving and exchanging dialogue (stories), the WE constructs,

maintains, and grows relationships that encompass mutual respect.

Laurie's Response to Christine

Christine, I must metaphorically shake your hand softly and give you tobacco, which we Cherokees consider sacred, as we continue this dialogue exploring Indigenous Research Methodologies. These elements of ceremony are important in Cherokee relationships. To build upon your comments, I would like to add that dialogue and stories are a significant part of reciprocity, which is another important overarching Cherokee value. One does not have to be Indigenous to utilize Indigenous Research Methodologies, but the use of Indigenous Research Methodologies presumes knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. We share stories to help one another. Research participant and researcher share stories with each other. The researcher shares stories with others in the field. And we do our best to share in a way that protects Indigenous knowledge from misuse and misinterpretation.

Some communities and individuals are more open to sharing their knowledge, beliefs, and lifeways than others. This is due in part to some Indigenous people being misled and misrepresented by researchers in the not-so-distant past. Approaching an Indigenous individual or community must be done in a way that is respectful and mutually beneficial for both the researcher and the research participant(s). This reciprocity should be part of the entire research process. For me, as I have undertaken research with Indigenous people, I have received an incredible amount of knowledge about art education and life, explored my identity as a Native person, and grown spiritually. My hope is that I have given back to those who have shared with me in as meaningful a way as I have learned from them.

Christine's Response to Laurie

Laurie, thank you for bringing it back to reciprocity. In doing so, you connected to this special issue's other two concepts: orientation (how we make sense of the world) and disposition (how we work with our research through and with our communities). Although I am Eastern Band and our histories differ due to your removal from our ancestral home to the western region, Oklahoma, our traditions and values are still intact for the most part; therefore, I too place a medicine bag in your hand and say *Wado* (thank you). One of many points made in the book, *Transforming Our Practices: Indigenous Art, Pedagogies, and Philosophies* was Sonya Atalay's (2017) interpretation of the concept of orientation. She states: "Research is at its *best* when everyday people are engaged in the work of studying, protecting, and teaching about their own cultural heritage" (p. 5). Our journey in this world is with many people, and through our relationships, conversations, and desires to change the world, maintaining our values and actions based on a good heart, we work toward transforming the world to a more just place for generations to come. This actually brings us to the concept of stance in how we, as Indigenous peoples, protect ourselves and others through our positioning and protocols.

In conclusion, we, all have many stories to share. As Native people we also have unique ways of viewing the world, affected by colonization, removal, and death, and yet, We Are Still Here! I find that Sonya Atalay's (2006) thoughtful voice brings us full circle:

> Bringing Native voices to the foreground is to share these experiences and worldviews, a critical part of readjusting the power balance to ensure that Native people control their own heritage, representation, and histories. If we wish to share these experiences and histories with each other and a non-Native audience, hoping to foster and protect them and to raise awareness and respect for them, then we must take seriously the job of educating and the important role of effective

> communication in the exhibits of the NMAI (National Museum of the American Indian). We must expect that the galleries will not only celebrate our presence but also value and honor the sense of struggle, as it is such struggle that provides a context for understanding and truly appreciating our survivance. (p. 597)

It is the survivance that fuels us in so many ways. The concept of survivance was articulated by the Anishinaabe critic and writer Gerald Vizenor (2008), which means that with an inventive and passionate heart Native cultures/people can get beyond colonialism and its frequent by-product, such as feeling powerless. Through Native stories, cultural practices, and resistance, survivance keeps us strong. The more we lean into turning with each other, the more we remember our purpose(s) and strength. Thank you for the opportunity to explore. Again wado.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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