

Etuaptmumk: A research approach and a way of being

Jenny L. Rowett

Introduction

The purpose of a theoretical framework is to “make visible the way we see the world” (Kovach, 2009, p. 41) and to give a focus to the research inquiry. It illuminates the researcher’s beliefs about knowledge, and how those beliefs will impact and make meaning of the research project, although this may not always be explicitly or truthfully expressed. In an effort to employ a decolonizing approach in research, I will utilize a theoretical framework that requires me to be reflective and transparent about my cultural positioning as a privileged, white person, and who will place Indigenous knowledges at the forefront of the research. This paper will describe Etuaptmumk (Mi’kmaw word for Two-Eyed Seeing), provide a review of its usage in the literature, and describe how it will contribute to relationality and relational accountability in future research.

Etuaptmumk

Etuaptmumk is an approach based on the teachings of the late spiritual leader, healer, and chief, Charles Labrador of Acadia First Nation, and brought forth in 2004 by Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall from the Eskasoni community, in Unama’ki (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012; Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2009; Marsh, Coholic, Cote-Meek, & Najavits, 2015). Chief Charles Labrador spoke about the intelligence and collaboration that exist in nature and explained how worthwhile it would be if we as humans followed this example with the practice of Etuaptmumk, “Go into a forest, you see the birch, maple, pine.

Look underground and all those trees are holding hands. We as people must do the same” (Iwama et al., 2012, p. 3). Bartlett et al. (2012) described Etuaptmumk as being the “gift of multiple perspective treasured by many aboriginal peoples” (p. 335) and explained that it is “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing” (p. 335), and bringing both eyes mindfully together, for the benefit of all. Elder Albert Marshall expanded with more detail:

Two-Eyed Seeing adamantly, respectfully and passionately asks that we bring together our different ways of knowing to motivate people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, to use all our understandings so that we can leave the world a better place and not compromise the opportunities for our youth (in the sense of seven generations) through our own inaction. (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 336)

Etuaptmumk is not limited to a specific subject area or discipline, rather, it is a way of being, seeing, and living life (A. Marshall, personal communication, December 18, 2015). It is a guiding principle that includes all aspects of our lives. It requires an openness toward learning about different perspectives and ways of knowing, rather than viewing one way of knowing as being superior over another. However, it does not seek to assimilate fragments of Indigenous wisdom into a Western knowledge system (Rowan et al., 2015). This approach has been described in the literature as a method to “link” knowledge systems and explore differences (Rowan et al., 2015, p.5).

As a researcher, I will be observing or seeing through my first orientation which is a Western worldview. This worldview is the mainstream, or more precisely, “whitestream” lens in Canadian society (Tuck & Gaztambide- Fernández, 2013, p. 81). As a whole,

Canadian universities have maintained the entrenched assumption that Western knowledge is necessary and superior (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002). However, it is only one way of knowing. The second lens that I will humbly be attempting to see the world through is an Indigenous, or more accurately, Indigenist, way of knowing. John (2015) describes Indigenist as referring to “a theoretical, personal, professional, ethical, and cultural framework that allows non-Indigenous students and practitioners to practice and study in Indigenous contexts without appropriating Indigenous knowledge” (p.1). As a non-Indigenous doctoral student and counselling practitioner, I am hopeful that the term Indigenist will contribute toward a culturally humble way of describing my relationship and appreciation of Indigenous knowledges. Over the past several years, Mi’kmaw and Wolastoqey knowledges have offered me new ways of seeing and being in the world, and this research will reflect my “internalization” of these ways of knowing (Wilson, 2008, p. 136). Presently, I am seeing through an Indigenist lens and a Western lens, and therefore, Etuaptmunk is a natural and appropriate theoretical orientation as a researcher. The intention of utilizing this theory, however, will not be to further explain Western, mainstream knowledges, rather, Mi’kmaw and Wolastoqey knowledges will be at the centre of this research.

A Review of the Literature

Etuaptmunk has been described as a theory, a method, and an approach in the literature. Martin (2012) provided an in-depth description of how Etuaptmunk could be utilized as a theoretical framework for research seeking to improve the health of Indigenous people and communities. She identified Etuaptmunk as being a decolonized approach to research and advocated that “Indigenous worldviews *must* be included in the discussions that influence their health and well-being” (Martin, 2012, p. 30). She asserts that

Indigenous research must position Indigenous knowledge as the essential source of information about health and well-being, however, Western understandings of health have also contributed toward Indigenous health. With Etuaptmunk as the guiding principle, one way of seeing is never dominated by the other. When both eyes are utilized mindfully together for the good of all, a new way of seeing the world is created, one that respects the differences that each can offer. “Two-Eyed Seeing embraces diverse understandings of reality” (Martin, 2012, p. 32).

Marsh et al. (2015) described how Etuaptmunk brought Indigenous and Western healing methods together to treat intergenerational trauma with substance use disorder through a wholistic program called *Seeking Safety*. By bringing these two knowledge systems together, the creation of *Seeking Safety* resulted in a culturally sensitive and competent treatment model. The authors concluded that there is a need for future research to demonstrate how Indigenous knowledges of traditional healing practices from different geographical regions, and Western models could be interwoven at the community level. My proposed research hopes to contribute toward these suggested recommendations.

Bartlett et al. (2012) described how the *Integrative Science* undergraduate program at Cape Breton University was co-created with Etuaptmunk. Of particular interest, eight lessons were highlighted as being essential for bringing Indigenous and Western ways of knowing together in various settings: (1) Acknowledge that we need each other and must engage in a co-learning journey; (2) Be guided by Two-Eyed Seeing; (3) View science in an inclusive way; (4) Do things (rather than just talk) in a creative, grow forward way; (5) Become able to put our values and actions and knowledge in front of us, like an object, for examination and discussion; (6) Use visuals; (7) Weave back and forth between our worldviews; and (8) Develop an advisory council of willing, knowledgeable stakeholders,

drawing upon individuals both from within the educational institution(s) and within Aboriginal communities. These lessons will guide my application of Etuaptmunk, and highlight the importance of collaboration and action in the research.

Rowan et al. (2015) discussed a challenge when Etuaptmunk was used as a methodology. When researchers from the mainstream culture described themselves as being actively involved with Indigenous culture and within Indigenous communities, interpretations of this varied between individuals. In the early stages of their research, the authors (Rowan et al., 2015) described how members of their team became grounded in Indigenous culture through “active” (p. 8) participation in ceremony. However, they observed that the concept of active participation was variable and inconsistent, and problematic to define. This perceived challenge is reflective of a Western worldview, which values consistency and the constancy of measurement (Sue & Sue, 1990). Therefore, clear articulation of which lens the researcher is looking through when describing successes or challenges related to the research and Etuaptmunk was a crucial lesson for me.

Relationality and Relational Accountability

Wilson (2008) puts forward that “relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality” (p. 7), and this is the essence of relationality and relational accountability, which are central in an Indigenous research paradigm. Wilson (2008) explains that research must be relational, or based in a community context, and it must be accountable as it is put into action, and demonstrate respect, reciprocity and responsibility. This is congruent with guidance received from Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall who taught that research must include the four R’s: Respect, Reverence, Reciprocity, and Responsibility (personal communication,

December 18, 2015). I learned that I must embody respect and reverence in all of my relationships with people, ideas, the cosmos, Mother Earth, my ancestors and future generations. Elder Albert Marshall explained that reciprocity ensures that the research process is a shared, “back and forth” collaboration (personal communication, December 18, 2015). Finally, I was taught that I have a responsibility for this research to serve the common good of all, including Mother Earth. As my Elders reminded me, “Knowledge can’t be separated from the responsibility to share the knowledge” (personal communication, December 15, 2015). Knowledge that is gained in research must be valuable for the community, and it must be brought back to the community.

The implementation of Etuaptmumk, an Indigenous approach, and the cultivation of an Indigenist lens, will also assist in the fulfilment of relationality and relational accountability in this research. Over the past several years, I have been developing an Indigenist lens through the spiritual journey of making sacred drums, engaging in regular ceremony such as sweat lodge ceremonies, and attendance at community events such as funerals, celebrations, feasts, and Pow Wows. I have been spending time with Elders, teachers, and building friendships within communities. I have also received permission from Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall to utilize Etuaptmumk in my research as the theoretical framework, since they originally brought this approach forward (personal communication, April 24, 2016). As I learn to embody Etuaptmumk, I remain accountable to my Elders, my co-researchers, the Indigenous communities that I work with, the ancestors, future generations, the Mi’kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre, the Faculty of Education, my Supervisor and doctoral committee, the University of New Brunswick, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. I am responsible and dedicated to the growth of my Indigenist vision through continual reading,

studying, and staying active and connected to sacred ceremonies, Mother Earth and communities throughout the research process.

Wolastoqi Elder, Lapskahasit Cihkonage, from the Sitansisk community (St. Mary's, New Brunswick), emphasized the value of learning from different knowledge systems when he said to me, "You are very fortunate that you are getting the teachings of many perspectives" (personal communication, February 25, 2017). This is indeed the purpose of Etuaptmunk, to bring the teachings of different knowledge systems together, to be utilized mindfully alongside each other, for the good of all. In the context of this future research, Etuaptmunk will also be a theoretical framework, and a tool for sharing the ways in which I, as a researcher, perceive knowledge. Finally, it is a personal and interconnected daily practice, a way of seeing and being in everyday life with all of my relations, including Land, and the stories that are shared here. Finally, my Elders have wisely reminded me that this journey of Etuaptmunk will require ongoing self-awareness, courage, humility, self-compassion, and patience.

References

- Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-eyed seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together Indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(4), 331-340.
- Battiste, M., Bell, L., & Findlay, L. M. (2002). Decolonizing education in Canadian universities: An interdisciplinary, international, Indigenous research project. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 82-201.

- Iwama, M., Marshall, M., Marshall, A., & Bartlett, C. (2009). Two-eyed seeing and the language of healing in community-based research. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 32(2), 3-23.
- John, R. (2015). *Skills and practice for counselling*. Retrieved December 5, 2016, from the University of Victoria Web site: <http://www.uvic.ca/education/psychology/assets/docs/EDD%20522%20Course%20Outline%20.pdf>
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Marsh, T. N., Coholic, D., Cote-Meek, S., & Najavits, L. M. (2015). Blending Aboriginal and Western healing methods to treat intergenerational trauma with substance use disorder in Aboriginal peoples who live in Northeastern Ontario, Canada. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 12, 1-12.
- Martin, D. (2012). Two-Eyed Seeing: A framework for understanding Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to Indigenous health research. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 44(2), 20-42.
- Rowan, M., Poole, N., Shea, B., Mykota, D., Farag, M., Hopkins, C., Hall, L., Mushquash, C., Fornssler, B., & Dell, C. A. (2015). A scoping study of cultural interventions to treat addictions in Indigenous populations: Methods, strategies and insights from a Two-Eyed Seeing Approach. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 10(26), 1-9.

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (1990). *Counseling the culturally different*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Tuck, E. & Gaztambide-Fernández, R. A. (2013). *Curriculum, replacement, and settler futurity*. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 29(1), 72-89.

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.

Jenny Rowett, PhD Candidate, is a Licensed Counselling Therapist, yoga and meditation teacher, and an instructor at the University of New Brunswick. She is currently working with Indigenous Elders and community members in her doctoral research.

Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed to jen.rowett@unb.ca.