

Participatory action research: exploring Indigenous youth perspectives and experiences

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to expand on existing data concerning the Aboriginal experience of ethical issues in psychoeducational research. The research question focused on exploring the experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal youth who participate in action research conducted in their communities. Through a qualitative approach, the study examined the experiences of five Aboriginal youth from a British Columbia setting who had participated in a recent participatory action research project. The purpose was to identify both appropriate and damaging research practices employed by researchers working in an Aboriginal youth context. Three major themes emerged from the data, Research Design and Methodology, Benefit to Participants, and Benefit to Community, all with several categories and sub-themes also identified. Major findings regarding ethics include implications for participatory action research, cross-cultural sensitivity by researchers, Aboriginal control over research, and directions for future ethical research design.

Keywords: Aboriginal, Participatory Action Research, Ethics, Psychoeducation

INTRODUCTION

Historical oppression at the hands of colonial government has marginalized and disempowered Indigenous peoples in Canada since first contact (Green, 1997). Research with Indigenous participants often reflects this power imbalance (Piquemal, 2001). What are the perceptions of Indigenous youth regarding their experiences as participants in a research project? This qualitative study sought to identify the salient issues in the research relationship between non-Native researchers and Native participants by clearly articulating the ethical issues that arise when academics enter Native communities.

The issues involved in psychological research with Indigenous peoples have had profound effects on the functioning and well being of Native Indian communities that are both positive and negative

(Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001). In comparison to the dominant culture's existence, Natives have a distinct culture, social structure, and way of life (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993; McCormick, 1997), which is not always reflected in the ethical dimensions of research practice (Piquemal, 2001). In contrast to Native worldviews, the Western academic perspective, despite certain theoretical grounding in diversity, remains an extension of the dominant culture's base of western values, ethics, and norms. Previous studies have identified culturally inappropriate approaches to doing research with First Nations (Choney, Berryhill-Paapke, & Robbins, 1995). Many researchers have suggested ways to adapt research procedures by incorporating some Native cultural practices into the research relationship (Darou, 2001; McCormick, 1997; Medicine-Eagle, 1989). This study, however, employed a design that sought to address already recognized problems with researching First Nations, through a qualitative phenomenological approach. The intent of this research was to address some of the wider relating themes and problems of marginalization in the cross-cultural research relationship and greater society.

The general purpose of this study was to identify and analyze, through a qualitative inquiry, both damaging and appropriate/effective research practices with Indigenous participants in order to assist and inform other psychological or educational researchers to be sensitive to Indigenous communities in future research projects and to generate further research into ethical issues in Indigenous psychological research. The participants were selected on the basis of being Native youth and all having participated in one previous academic research project. A specific purpose of this study was to provide information to empower Indigenous communities to exercise control in psychological and/or educational academic research conducted with their peoples. Finally, this study is important to the Indigenous community because it addresses the possibility of an equitable relationship with non-Native psychoeducational researchers based on a newly defined structure that could benefit community rebuilding and healing for First Nations. Because many researchers have employed the same time-worn methodologies and perspectives that have historically oppressed and disempowered Indigenous peoples (Piquemal, 2001; Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001; Herring, 1999; Darou, Kurtness, & Hum, 1993), another goal of this project is to offer suggestions that researchers can employ to effectively design and implement an ethical psychoeducational research approach with Native research participants.

One reason that healing is required in Native communities is that generations of domination have caused shame and unworthy feelings for many Indigenous people about themselves and their culture (Hodgson, 1990). The long-term effects of disempowerment and acculturation can be seen in epidemic proportions of low self-esteem within Native communities (Green, 1997; Weenie, 2000). Renewal of self-esteem and other forms of emotional healing can occur through a return to traditional ways achieved by renewing the legitimate authority, power and knowledge of Elder and community leaders, and individual participants in a research context, whose strength and support in raising self-esteem is a necessity in restoring community health (Martin & Fares, 1994).

In current literature about educational research with Indigenous peoples, the following issues are identified as potential problems or dilemmas in research design and implementation: knowledge of the historical context of Indigenous peoples (including trust and power) and cross-cultural research design

(including community control, informed consent, and benefit to the community) (Herring, 1999; Darou, Kurtness & Hum, 1993; Piquemal, 2001; Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Context

Indigenous groups in Canada today live shrouded by a long history of genocide, oppression, and control at the hands of colonial governments (Choney, Berryhill-Paapke, & Robbins, 1995; Green, 1997). This history has resulted in mistrust and suspicion by Natives of many non-Native researchers and practitioners (Darou, Kurtness, & Hum, 1993). Today, Indigenous communities, in every action and decision, work toward autonomy, self-determination, and healing the social and economic ills that have resulted from historical and continued colonization and assimilation (France, 1997; McCormick, 1997).

Colonization and assimilation practices as employed by Canadian and American federal governments, such as residential schools, the creation of reserves, and denial of land claims, have had far reaching implications for Native life in Canada (Alfred, 1999). Essentially, the explicit agenda of the North American dominant culture to systematically breakdown traditional ways of life and knowing, cultural norms, and beliefs and values has had a devastating impact on Native communities over the last 500 years. Colonization effects continue to perpetuate many of the barriers to Indigenous knowledge, health and healing (Herring, 1999). Through governmental cultural elimination tactics, many First Nations people have lost their connections to cultural roots, knowledge, spirituality, their families, and communities (Hodgson, 1990).

In the history of research practice with Natives, researchers have tended to generalize Native culture when concentrating on specific Native problems (Smith & Morrisette, 2001; Darou, Kurtness, & Hum, 1993). General research results or “truths” are culturally inaccurate (Herring, 1999; Smith & Morrisette, 2001) because each Nation is unique and different. Being knowledgeable about this historical information is necessary to a successful research relationship with any Indigenous group (Herring, 1999, Garret & Herring, 2001).

Cross-Cultural Research Design

Cross-cultural knowledge becomes invaluable when considering communication with Natives because research has historically been wrought with general problems of cross-cultural communication (Darou, Kurtness, & Hum, 1993). In sharing language, particularly English, with First Nations in a research context, it is recommended that the importance of the social values of the Native worldview be the foundation. Communication with First Nations also means identifying ways of respecting differences for the express purpose of minimizing cultural biases. Hudson & Taylor-Henley (2001) write that respectfully discussing and consulting with Elders and local Natives is a key and initial step to creating partnerships agreements of research with communities.

The notion of community control in cross-cultural research demands that research processes empower the community by respecting cultural values and belief systems, which traces back to a basis of ensuring informed consent. (Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001, Piquemal, 2001). Integral to a Nation’s

control over research is authority over a project's agenda (its purpose and methodology), budget, and participant selection (Piquemal, 2001). Also, the Nation and not the researchers, should themselves select First Nations leaders and elders who are to act as consultants throughout the research process (Choney, Berryhill-Paapke, & Robbins, 1995). However, Hudson & Taylor-Henley (2001) caution that control is something that must be measured by degrees and that it is unrealistic to believe that a community can have complete control over a research project implemented by outsiders; instead, the relationship should be viewed as a partnership agreement, but with major decisions ultimately made by the First Nation. A deeper look at the theme of control suggests that if there is social or political dissent or problems within a band, deciding which members should be legitimate spokespersons might be difficult: Piquemal (2001) writes of possible problems with identifying the legitimate authorities within Nations to give informed consent. In some cases, tribal councils are distanced and mistrusted by the community itself. Thus, bearing in mind each community's unique social and political landscape is also important (Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological Approach

The general approach to this study was qualitative, in which a phenomenological design was employed. The nature of the qualitative paradigm was effective in uncovering personal and subjective experiences of youth in the present research context.

Additionally, the research project in which the participants had previously been involved was a participatory action research (PAR) project; it is important to make the distinction that this thesis project does not employ a participatory action framework and instead uses only the phenomenological approach detailed in this section.

Sampling

Participant selection relied on purposive qualitative sampling. Participants were five Indigenous youth, two female and three male, who resided in two First Nations reserve territories within an urban area but were not necessarily members of either Nation. Both male and female participants were selected as equally as possible for balanced gender representation. Four of the participants were students at an urban secondary school and were between the ages of 16 and 19. The fifth participant was a 25 year old youth who was an employee in a First Nations community service agency.

The participants all met the criterion of having previous knowledge of and/or participation in psychoeducational research. The four student participants had had direct research experience as participant-co-researchers in a recent psychoeducational participatory action research project. The older youth had been interviewed by one of the student-co-researchers. Additionally, the older youth possessed knowledge about research in the local Indigenous community due to his position as community youth worker in the urban area. The older youth did not provide data that was significantly different in content or meaning from the younger youth; he had similar comments and views to the other youth. The greatest difference was his ability to more clearly and confidently articulate his views, which did not vary in content from those of the

other youth.

All of the participants in this study had been involved in the same previous research project, over the course of about one year. The researcher preferred the homogenous nature of the participants in terms of their previous research experience because it created a strong and common experience regarding their research experiences. The narrow, shared experiences of these participants reflected my choice of purposive sampling that is in keeping with the narrow, phenomenological approach of this study. The researcher sought to examine lived and shared experiences of a sample of youth who had all participated in the same action research project. Youth were used in sampling because it was the researcher's view that Indigenous youth today face different and unique futures, more so than any generation past. Youth today are situated in radically different contexts and face different challenges than previous Native youth generations due to the burgeoning global economy, drastic increase in technology, and the post-colonial rebuilding and healing currently underway in Native communities.

Recruitment was accomplished through posters placed at various locations in the community where young Native people were known to be, as well as by word of mouth at the University of Victoria and throughout the Native community.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the main source of data. Each participant completed two interviews, taking about 1-1/2 hours total time. The first interview was audio-taped, and at the second one, field notes were recorded. The research project was exploratory in nature, therefore open-ended and unstructured interviews were appropriate (Van Manen, 1990). Research questions posed to participants were:

1. What have your experiences of working with academic researchers been like?
2. What were the most positive/most difficult parts of the experience?
3. Describe the relationship between yourself and the researcher(s).
4. What issues arise with researchers?
5. What are the particular issues associated with research involving Aboriginal youth?
6. What are your feelings and thoughts about psycho-educational research in your community?
7. What research procedures and practices should be used?

To ensure an on-going process of consent, informed consent was revisited, orally, throughout the interviewing and research process; at the beginning of each meeting with participants, they were reminded of the purpose and objectives of the research and asked if they wished to continue their involvement. Interviews were conducted within 35 to 50 minutes. Interviews were then transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. These transcriptions and analyses of the interviews were then shared with the participants in a second interview for confirmation of identified themes. This interview was recorded by field notes taken by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of participant interviews, field notes, and field journal. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed for thematic content and relevant issues, according to an inductive content analysis framework designed by Bogdan and Biklen (1992). The researcher's field

notes were typed and added to the data collection for analysis. The researcher also kept a detailed and consistent journal throughout the research process that, along with the transcribed interviews and field notes, was also analyzed and completed a triangulation process necessary for internal validity (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998) relating to accurate data analysis.

The analysis of all the data was inductive by nature and followed the steps below, described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992). This qualitative analysis seeks to uncover deep meanings and insights from participant statements.

Line by line content analysis was conducted and did not contain any interpretation, only reflection of the content “meaning” of each statement. Codes were assigned to the content reflections that provided a meaningful description of the content of the statement. These codes were called sub-categories once the themes had emerged.

Categories were then formed of codes grouped together by related meanings. Categories listed were not necessarily in all transcripts but were in at least one. Themes were formed by groupings of categories that were found within all transcripts.

Preliminary themes were reviewed by the participants, with their comments and feedback recorded in field notes. Prior to the final writing of the study’s results, the findings were taken to the Songhees and Esquimalt band offices, where Elders and band members reviewed the findings and gave validation to results. Participants were informed in the consent letter of this community council review of the study’s results.

RESULTS

The three overarching themes that were embedded in the data: 1) Research Design and Methodology, 2) Benefits to Participants, and 3) Benefits to Community (Figure 1). Fourteen different categories comprise the three themes, with overlap of three categories of Support, Change, and Learning occurring across Themes Two and Three, presented with the Data Results Themes in Figure 1.

Four meetings occurred in total with the two First Nations Band councils, two meetings with each Nation’s office, to disseminate and confirm results with councilors and Elders to ensure respect, accuracy, and ethical action on the part of the researcher. Piquemal (2001) writes that providing the Aboriginal community with data throughout and upon completion of the research project is part of the researcher’s ethical responsibility. As a result of this study, both the Band Chiefs and councilors have asked the researcher to create an ethical protocol for their bands for use with future researchers entering their territories. At the time this project was conducted, neither Nations had a research protocol in place. The researcher agreed to draw up a draft research ethics protocol based on research results for this study, and to collaborate with the Elders, Council members, and Chiefs on completing the protocol to become the property of their respective Nations.

Themes:	Theme One: Research Design & Methodology	Theme Two: Benefits to Participants	Theme Three: Benefits to Community
Categories:	Control		
	Community		
	Participatory Action Research		
	Instrumentation		
	Collaboration		
	Respect		
	Permission		
		Support	Support
		Change	Change
		Learning	Learning
		Negative Research Experiences	
		Positive Research Experiences	
			Teaching
			Cohesion

Figure 1. Data Results Themes

Themes & Categories

Theme One: Research Design and Methodology

As an overarching theme within and across all transcripts, content categories related to research design and methodology arose. The issues within and about research were grouped into seven categories, and into additional sub-categories that further specify the dimensions of the categories. The seven categories that comprised the theme of research design and methodology are: Control, Communication, Participatory Action Research, Instrumentation, Collaboration, Respect, and, Permission.

Control

The concept of Control as a category was referred to by participants in two sub-categories: control by participants and control by the community. In this context control refers to control over research processes, results, outcomes, and with whom the research is conducted within a given group or community. All participants expressed a belief that they as participants in the research project preferred to be in control as the decision-makers of how the research was designed and implemented.

One participant explained that the relationship with researchers was enhanced because the researchers gave the participant creative control over specific steps in the research process. The participant thus felt able to “get along” with and enjoy the company of the researchers.

Participants also spoke about the band councils and Elders requiring control over research done in their community. Specifically, one stated that prior to commencing a research project in an Indigenous community, researchers from outside needed to inform Elders and allow them make decisions regarding design, implementation, and participant selection.

“Before you start [researching], you need to tell the Elders what’s going on and let them say its okay and how it [the research] should be done, who’s involved.”

Communication

Participants talked about communication within the research context. Two sub-categories describe communication within the research context by the participants: oral and dialogue. Oral communication refers to a verbal or non-text-based mode of communication, such as the use of language. Participants unanimously stated that an oral form of transmitting information, such as talking, by the researchers was preferential to being given information written on paper.

One participant used the context of the research relationship with the researchers to describe how having a dialogue with the researchers had impacted. The dialogue had allowed her to view the researchers positively and to feel compelled to engage more freely in talks. The reason for this sense of freedom to talk and positive view of the researchers was because the researchers were open with the youth and gave them space to talk and share their voice in a non-judgmental atmosphere.

The relationship was good because I could talk with them and ask questions about anything and they would show me, tell me without judging me or making me feel dumb. I could talk about or ask anything. They were very open and willing to talk back and forth with me, and I liked that. I liked that about them.

Participatory Action Research

All participants directly or indirectly discussed a preference for the use of participatory research design for research implemented in their community. One participant, and older youth, explained that participatory action research was a good fit for the local Native youth population because by design it addressed issues such as knowledge of culture and respect for the community's culture by researchers, the need for community input in the research process, and research to benefit the community.

I guess community research is good because it looks at health issues that are a problem in the community from the people’s own perspective...It’s giving back to the people what they need. You know that with community-based research why these people [the researchers] are here, what are they really trying to find out, together with the youth, so I think giving information [back to the community

about the research results], in terms of using culturally appropriate knowledge, is needed.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation was well addressed by all participants in terms of two sub-categories of Technology and Interviews.

Technology

All participants cited enjoyment of the use of technology in their research experience. All liked using video/audio equipment to carry out their project, which was designing, filming, and editing an 8-10 minute video on a health topic of their choice, because it was a method that was visual, oral, and rendered their research results easily accessible to different audiences. Computers and video/audio cameras were cited as being especially good to use to document the research they were conducting because the technology met the youths' interests in computers and video and allowed them to learn more skills in the area.

Interviews

All participants perceived interviews as the most favored tool for researchers to use in their community mainly because talking was held as the preferred way to communicate with others. That is, talking was preferred over written interview instrumentation such as questionnaires, checklists, or rating scales. Thus, the oral nature of such interviews is what participants deemed most important about choosing interviews as a way for them to conduct community research. Also, it was expressed that those in their families/community understood the value of oral communication in their culture, as this tradition was handed down through generations. For example, one participant explained that his grandparent had informed him that taking with others was the best way to gather information. This youth used this knowledge that he had gained from his family to guide him through the interviewing aspect of the research project

A cultural way [of doing research], I would say, is just sitting down and talking. Because what I have heard from my Great Grandma, is the best way to get to know somebody and learn from them is to sit down and actually talk to them and listen to what they have to say. And that's pretty much what I did when I did my research.

Collaboration

All of the participants talked about collaboration as an important component to their experience with the researchers. Collaboration was described by participants through dimensions, or sub-categories, of "Asking not telling", Working together, Helping, and Listening. Participants expressed that the researchers' collaborative actions along such dimensions demonstrated to them a level of respect for and integration into their community that was important to these youth.

Respect

Respect is a recurrent category in the transcripts in terms of interactions with researchers and how research is implemented. Mutual respect was identified by all of the participants as a very important

aspect to their experiences with the Participatory Action Research researchers. Mutual respect was cited as important because the youth expressed their definition of relationship as being based in respect, particularly mutual respect. What seemed important about mutual respect was that it was reciprocal and gave the youth a sense of validation regarding their positions as co-researchers in the project.

Respect for culture, specifically First Nations culture, was cited by participants as an important issue in how this research was conducted. The youth felt that respect for culture was a necessary dimension to respect because it made them feel accepted for who they were as Native people. In other words, respect for culture meant accepting their identity as Native, and this made them feel proud of themselves for who they were. Also, respect for culture was stated as being especially important for them because of historical negative experiences when non-community members had entered their community to do research and had blatantly disrespected both their cultural practices and identities by inaccurately representing their experiences and their words.

Permission

Participants enjoyed being asked permission to become involved in the research project. They also valued being asked to give permission to be helped at various points throughout the research process. Similar to the category of Respect in Theme One, youth like being asked to do certain things within the research process rather than being told that they had to carry out a certain action or step within the research project.

Participants mentioned a need to consult with community leaders and obtain their permission prior to engaging in community research.

A participant simply stated that before entering a community to do research, it was necessary to consult with local leaders. Reasons for this were cited as respect for traditional Native ways, which entailed “checking in” with Elders and leaders, and the need for guidance that only these Elders and leaders had authority to give.

What it is, is that you just gotta check in with Elders and the like before you start anything [research] in an Aboriginal community because that's the way we do it and it deserves respect. Also, those Elders know things about the community that we don't, and we need to listen to them for guidance in what we do.

Theme Two: Benefits to Participants

Research benefits to participants were widely discussed across all transcripts, and are noteworthy as parallel to three of the categories (Support, Change, and Learning) in Theme Three. It is necessary to mention that themes two and three both deal with the issue of benefits of research, with each theme delineating the difference of benefit in

terms of who, specifically, is the recipient of such benefit.

Five categories emerged in this theme. These categories are: Support, Change, Learning, Lack of Negative Research Experiences, and Positive Research Experiences, and, and are presented in Figure 1.

Support

All participants felt much supported, as illustrated by subcategories of support by: researchers, their own families, and their communities, throughout their experiences with research.

Researchers

All participants emphasized the benefit of feeling supported by the researchers as manifesting in a sense of self-efficacy and as a positive research experience. Participants were quite enthusiastic, according to field notes, when they spoke about the support given them by researchers throughout the project. As was discussed in several categories within Theme One, participants held their relationships with researchers in this project as very personal and close, not merely as a traditional “research relationship” that a subject would have a traditional researcher. This closeness of relationship was reflected in how they talked about the support given to them individually as they learned, and sometimes struggled, with different aspects of research protocol and procedures.

Community

Community in this context refers to classroom, social/peer group, or Indigenous band/urban affiliation. Participants said that they had felt supported by the community throughout their participation in a research project, and that this was important in terms of succeeding in implementing a community-based research project.

Family

Participants mentioned that their families were supportive of their participation in research and that this further enforced and enhanced the positive nature of their research experiences. Family was not a huge category across the data, but it did occur significantly in the context of support experienced by participants in their research efforts.

One participant spoke of family support for her research in terms of accomplishment. Her family had told her that it was “good” that she was accomplishing something with the research that benefited her in terms of learning a new skill (research) and the community in terms of learning about a health issue.

My family thought the video was a good idea, yeah, they thought it was a very good idea. Because I was learning to do research and teaching the community health stuff.

Change

Change was effected for individual participants within two sub-categories: Technology Increase and Healing.

Technology Increase

All participants described change as having occurred for them through research that brought an increase of technology in their lives. This change of technology in their lives overlaps somewhat with the learning of technology that was expressed by participants in the sub-category of Learning within this theme. The major difference here is that participants discussed an increase of technology items per se, such as computers and video cameras, which were placed at their disposal as a result of the research experience, and not the acquisition of skills related to such technology. All participants mentioned that such equipment was not previously available to them.

Healing

Healing occurred for participants through learning about themselves in a way that provided a catalyst for change in a previously held belief or behaviour. For example, participants spoke about learning about issues that related to their lives personally, and through this learning about an issue, they altered their actions and belief in accordance with the knowledge acquired.

One participant talked about learning to have healthy relationships with peers. More specifically, she talked about learning that bullying was unjust and wrong. Her experience in making a video on bullying demonstrated to her in concrete terms that it was “stupid” to bully others. For her, bullying now became something that was unjustifiable.

... I didn't really think about being a bully and trying to get in it, so it [the video research project] made me realize more how stupid it was to bully someone for stupid little reasons and stuff.

Change in the form of healing of emotional/spiritual issues associated with loss of control was described by all participants. Participants described that as they learned about certain community health issues, they were able to change or heal unhealthy behaviours or beliefs. More specifically, participants explained that by educating themselves about community health issues, they were able to effect personal healing and empowerment through learning and implementing research processes in their community.

One participant felt that he had benefited from the research experience by changing his views on racism. He also felt that if he could change his views as a result of producing or viewing a video, so, too, could others. For him, a key aspect to change was understanding and receiving knowledge that could empower a person to change their mind or have a “change of heart”.

Well, you can benefit, you can benefit just by doing your thing [research], and it's just a benefit of learning and empowering yourself with that learning so you can make healthier choices. And it's just a good experience to learn and change, like learning about racism so we can make changes, change people's minds about it, and give them the power to have a change of heart about race and stuff.

Learning

When the researcher probed as to why a youth's particular research experience has been good, often the answer was “because I learned something.” Learning seemed to be a very important aspect to these participants' research experiences and lives in general. All participants spoke strongly and highly of the rich and multi-dimensions of learning that had occurred for them through their research experiences. There were nine sub-categories of learning: Relationships (including further specifications of with researchers or peers), Role Models, Health, Strength (particularly of their culture), Research, technology, and Career Goals and Opportunities.

Relationships

Through research experiences, participants were given opportunities to interact with people they would not have otherwise met (i.e., researchers) and forge and strengthen connections with such people.

Participants saw this as valuable because they all seemed to find relationships integral to success both in the context of the research project in which they were involved and in life in general.

Participants also spoke frequently about how relationships with peers were impacted by the research project. Relationships with peers were cited as strengthened, improved, and made closer by the research experience. In essence, participants felt that they learned about their relationships with friends and learned to improve these relationships through their research experiences that had them work together with peers and rely on each other for help, support, and cohesion.

Role Models

Participants reported that they learned what characteristics constitute a role model for them and who those role models in their communities were. Two participants also stated that through their experience in a research project, they themselves become role models or helpers to others in their communities, which fostered a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence in these participants.

Strength

Participants discussed having learned about strengths in their culture that they gained access to through their experiences in the research project. Specifically, the participants talked about learning the strength of their Native culture to aid them as Native individuals through times of crisis, stress, or weakness.

Research

Participants felt that learning about research and how to do it in their communities was a salient and valuable aspect to their experience in the participatory action study. Field notes and journal entries reflect that research seemed to satisfy participants' curiosity and hunger for knowledge, especially knowledge related to health issues that affected them directly through personal and group life experience.

One participant spoke of learning about research as a valuable aspect to her research experience. This participant felt herself to be a "real expert" in the field of research due to her relationship with the researchers who came to her class. For her, there was a sense of gratification in term of self-confidence that evolved through learning from the researchers, whom she felt were "the best" at what they did, how to do research, and this showed in her demeanor as she spoke in the interview (recorded in field notes).

"I am kind of an expert about research like them [the University researchers] now, so I learned from the best, that is all I can say about them now, learned from the best. I know how to do it and can be a researcher now if I want to."

Technology

Youth expressed a benefit from learning about technology through their research experiences. Technology was a great area of interest and the youth all expressed a hunger for knowledge and skills with computers and video equipment that was satisfied by their involvement in the previous research project. It was noticed and mentioned by all participants that they would not have the opportunity to gain information and skills with such technology without their participation in the project.

Career Goals & Opportunities

Learning about new career goals and opportunities was a salient point of learning for all participants interviewed. Each participant stated specific ways that being involved in a research project (that was a participatory project) allowed them to discover new horizons such as designing and implementing research projects, conducting field interviews, doing camera work (filming), doing video editing on computers, working with communications equipment that sparked an interest for future occupational possibilities. Three of the participants stated that doing research had become one of their career goals due to their experience as co-researchers in a previous project.

Lack of Negative Research Experiences

A lack of negative research experiences was continuous throughout all interviews. Again, this must be viewed as contextual and relevant to their experience in the PAR study, in which they were involved in every aspect of the research project, including formulating research questions, implementing the research, and disseminating results to the community. Also, the researchers in the PAR project demonstrated culturally sensitive modes of communication and behaviour with the Indigenous youth, according to the youths' own reports on interactions and relationships with the researchers. Two sub-categories emerged: Nothing Negative To Say, and Glitches with Technology.

Nothing Negative To Say

There was an obvious lack of negative things said by the participants about the research experience. Field journal entries suggest that participants took a very dismissive stance when they were asked about their negative experiences with research. Basically, their responses to that question succinctly stated that there was nothing negative to say about their research experiences.

One participant said that because researchers had been respectful, there had been no negative aspects to the experience for her. This participant had spoken previously about the value of a close relationship with researchers, and that a central aspect to this relationship was respect.

“No they [the researchers] were respectful, nothing really negative happened.”

Glitches with Technology

Technical difficulties, or “glitches”, with the video equipment, the computer software, and computer hardware were the only negative experiences that participants related concerning the project. Students complained about losing files on the computer related to their video projects, and of having audio/video difficulties related to the camera they were using.

Positive Research Experiences

All participants spoke strongly about the positive aspects of their research experiences. It must be noted that because all participants were involved in a PAR study, their favorable view of research must be viewed in the context of the project in which they participated, and cannot be generalized to all research conducted with Indigenous youth or peoples. The researcher was somewhat overwhelmed by the veritable plethora of positive sentiments that the youth had for their research experiences, as is evidenced by field journal entries of the researcher's reflections, and by field notes that recorded participants' attitudes as “overwhelmingly positive” toward their research experiences and prospects for

future research. Participants described their research experiences within two sub-categories of Fun and Excitement.

Fun

All participants described their participation in the project as “fun”, thus fun became a sub-category because of its numerous occurrences throughout all transcripts. Research as fun seemed to have great appeal to the youth, whose level of enthusiasm and animation in the conversation with the interviewer appeared to increase significantly, according to the researcher’s field notes and field journal, when they were asked directly about their research experiences.

Excitement

Excitement also emerged as a second sub-category of Positive Research Experiences. That all participants found their experience in research to be exciting in one way or another led directly to their statements of having a positive experience. Two of the participants tied the categories of fun and excitement together, while the three other participants spoke of the excitement of research as tied to other categories such as Learning, Change, and Teaching. For example, one participant said that research was exciting because it afforded the opportunity to learn about something. Again, a desire to learn appears as a thread that ties together many aspects of the participants' comments about their research experiences throughout the data sets.

My feelings and what I thought: I was really excited when I first did my first one [research project], and really happy and stuff because I learned something...

Theme Three: Benefits to Community

All participants provided ample data to substantiate the benefits of the participatory action research (PAR) on the community. Participants identified five categories of benefits of research to community: Support, Learning, Change, Teaching, and Cohesion. Each category possesses sub-categories which the youth identified as specific aspects to each category.

Support

Participants noticed and valued support given them as a group by the researchers. All expressed feeling supported as a group.

The researchers made statements conveying interest in them as youth in particular. Participants felt that the researchers supported youth by examining health issues related specifically to youth. In the context of being high school students in one class, the youth experienced support from researchers who made themselves known and readily available, without being intrusive, to the participants throughout the research project for practical

help (such as with interview designs, video and computer equipment operation) and encouragement. Also, researchers were cited as being supportive of the outcome and findings of all participants’ video projects.

Change

Youth underwent change as a part of their research experience through two sub-categories: Healing and Technology increases. This category parallels the Change category in Theme Two (See Figure 1.)

Healing

The sub-category of Healing was formed by the researcher to describe meaningful personal positive change that was described by all participants. Healing in this context meant changing negative feelings/views/beliefs/perceptions about an issue that were previously held by a participant. All participants discussed one form or another of this sort of change as occurring at group/class level. The opportunity participation in the research project gave the students as group occurred in terms of healing issues such as racism and identity by the gaining of knowledge and understanding of these issues through the research process and the presentation of research findings.

Technology Increase

Another change experienced by youth due to their research experience was an increase of technology availability and use in their classroom and their lives. Video equipment was brought into the classroom for them to use, along with computer software and knowledge about how to use such technology. Thus youth as a group experienced greater education through their acquisition of skills and knowledge of video-making and editing, and designing and conducting community-based research.

Learning

Learning at the community level was one of the largest categories discussed by participants. All participants reported that, in one form or another, they had learned about themselves and about youth in general. Learning at the community level was characterized by the participants who identified and explicated three sub-categories: Role Models, Health, and Relationships that exist in their communities.

Role Models

Youth learned about research in the context of the Participatory Action Research project in which they were involved. For them, one dimension to learning was learning about community role models and exposing the community to these role models by capturing them on film and showing the film to the community. Youth came into contact with Elders, professionals such as counsellors, various program coordinators and directors, and teachers, to name a few role models that the youth interviewed for the research project.

One participant explained that filming one person who worked in the community at a successful art gallery gave people who were watching his video an opportunity not only to learn about the health topic he was investigating, but to see a successful Indigenous person in the greater work force.

Yeah, it was cool because he talked about racism, but seeing him on the video really showed up that Natives can work out there and get good jobs and do good things.

Health

All participants explained that they as a group discussed and learned about health

issues in their community. Also, three participants discussed learning about health issues in the context of community. Learning about health at the community level was described by participants as relating to issues such as racism, addictions, teen pregnancy, identity, peer pressure, and bullying.

Relationships

The youth also learned different ways to strengthen or create new relationships with peers by collaborating with classmates to do joint video projects. This is similar to the sub-category of learning about relationships with peers in Theme Two, where learning was described at the individual/participant level. A difference with learning about relationship at the group level was that it occurred together in a way that seemed very powerful and fostered a sense of collectivity among the students.

Individual participants as a group of youth learned how to forge and maintain relationships with adult researchers. The youth worked literally alongside University researchers as they chose topics of investigation for the study, formulated interview questions, recruited participants, and negotiated camera work and video editing to create an 8 – 10 minute video production. Interaction through these processes allowed youth to build relationships with researchers and with one another.

One youth related that as a class, the participants learned how to adapt to the researchers as who they were in terms of being in the class not to just teach about research but to work with the students on the research project. For this youth, it was beneficial to learn how to get along with researchers, who were different than teachers or other adults who came into the classroom because their agendas were different. That is, the researchers were there to work with the students and not tell them how to do something as a teacher might. Another difference mentioned was that the researchers were goal-oriented in their relationship with the youth, that is, they were there to “make friends” and get the research done, and this participant liked that about the research relationship.

“We learned a lot, we learned about how to adapt and hangout and get to know new people[the researchers] ...and them coming into the class taught us how to get along with them as researchers, cause it was weird at first. They weren't teachers and definitely not students, but they were here to make friends and get our video projects done. It was cool to work together ...and we had to learn to get on with them to do it.”

Teaching

Youth were able to teach each other and their communities about three sub-categories: Role models, Health, and Strength. The category of Health was further specified by participants along dimensions of peer pressure, bullying, teen pregnancy, addictions, identity, and racism. Through their involvement in the project, youth were able to teach other youth about timely and relevant issues facing their community. Each video that was created by the youth taught other youth in their classroom, and community members who attended screenings, about a particular health issue documented.

Cohesion

Participants described cohesion as a sense of togetherness and family that exists within the Native community. Research was described as promoting cohesion within the community through the explication and presentation of Native identity in the videos.

Identity

Participants expressed the power of research to assist and affirm their community identity as a collective that works together, to do research and to deal with community health issues such as peer pressure, bullying, addictions, teen pregnancy, identity, involvement in sports, etc.

One of the participants felt that working together within the classroom dynamic had fostered a sense of shared identity and self-confidence about the videos produced and about themselves as a class. He explained that because everyone had worked hard together to make the videos, had learned new skills, they could all feel a sense of accomplishment as a group of student researchers.

“We [the students] all worked real hard on the videos, worked together. Now we really have something to show. Now we can say, hey, we’re not just kids, we’re researchers who can get the word out there. We all learned we can do something as class and succeed at it. The research was a success story for us as a class.”

IMPLICATIONS

Participatory Action Research

While not advocated or referred to directly by participants, the type of research about which these youth spoke was participatory action research. The fact that the youth had nothing negative to convey about their research experiences speaks volumes about PAR as a method of doing ethically-sound research with Indigenous communities. PAR is a method that describes itself as doing research “with” rather than “on” individuals within a community (Whyte, 1991). “Community” is also a key concept within PAR (Sommer, 1999) and this evidences itself in this investigation in the ways participants described research as benefiting the community.

Participatory action research appeared in the literature as early as the 1940s, when Lewin (1946) conceived of action research as a method of research requiring the active involvement of the potential users of the information throughout the research process; this notion is not in agreement with traditional research practices (Sommer, 1999). In support of participatory research, Herring (1999) writes that educational research with minority individuals and groups must be conceived of and carried out through a process of praxis in order to be ethical. Meeting the needs of cross-cultural research participants is the rationale for an investigation into PAR as a possible effective and ethical methodology for implementing research with marginalized participants such as Indigenous youth.

In summary, PAR is usually value-driven (i.e., ethically-motivated) instead of value-neutral, and has several related objectives: to improve the lives of the participants; to advance knowledge about health; and to improve the practice of PAR through a critical examination of the collaborative process (Sanford, 1970; Whyte, 1991; Hart, 1995).

Cross-Cultural Sensitivity by Researchers

A second implication for research design with Indigenous youth rests on cross-cultural competency and sensitivity, regarding issues of respect, control, communication, non-interference, permission, and control demonstrated in the PAR study these youth experienced.

There is a need for non-Native researchers working with Indigenous youth to understand and undertake Native ways, which vary across communities, of interacting both on personal and professional levels in order to meet ethical standard outlined by participants in this study. In terms of the ethics of personal interaction these youth have expressed desires to “have things done their way” by researchers in terms of asking and not telling them how or what to do, giving space and autonomy within research projects, communicating in oral, respectful, non-threatening and non-interfering manners. The students identified significant leanings and benefits from their experiences in a PAR project with researchers who were educated and capable in First Nations modes of communication, world view, and cultural ethical practices and thus able to undertake ethical cross-cultural research.

Indigenous Control over Research

The participatory action project in which the youth were involved and this project both followed consultation with community members throughout the research process. This form of giving control to the community over research implemented with its peoples was acknowledged by participants as critical to effective and ethical research design and methodology .

Ethical research practices with First Nations must require elder input, be marked by community control, and produce outcomes, such as transfer of technological skills, that benefit the community (Hudson & Taylor Henley, 2001; Piquemal, 2001; Stubben, 2001).

Directions for Future Research and Policy

Future cross-cultural research into ethics with Indigenous youth might include larger samples, and long-term follow-ups on the effects of benefits of research. Also, a comparative study that examined benefits from a PAR project and a non-PAR project would further add to the literature ways of doing research with Native participants. In addition, future researchers may want to examine what other factors enhance or negate ethical research experiences for Indigenous youth participants, with a greater focus on how research contributes to decolonization and healing in Native communities. This has great implications for policy on research because it gives a foundation to the need for community based and Indigenous research to be the norm in Native communities. For example, the role and impacts of local Native researchers as compared to non-Native or non-local Native researchers in one Indigenous community could be explored.

SUMMARY

It must be acknowledged that this study is an initial step to understanding some current and future ethical needs or issues associated with conducting research with Indigenous youth in one specific area. Further research into the area of cross-cultural ethics in research is needed to develop a broader scope of implications and implementation of academic research. This study was significant because if research, such as the participatory action research project as described through the experiences of five

Indigenous youth, is to be truly ethical and appropriate, it must be rooted in local cultural ways and norms and sensitive to individual and community needs. The results from this study described the importance of ethical dimensions such as research to benefit the participants, youth, and community, as well as culturally appropriate research design and methodology as exemplified by the participatory action project in which the youth had been previously involved.

This study illuminated some of the ethical benefits of doing research in an Indigenous community from a participatory action research framework. This study also conveyed the significant enthusiasm and zeal that these particular participants held for their experience in a PAR project and the necessity for researchers to be culturally sensitive to community ethics when working with Indigenous youth. The PAR project incorporated the youth in the research process. It appeared to have created a catalyst for change in the participants in a variety of areas. These areas included: self-efficacy, career possibility, identity renewal, and a return of power and control to the community in the research context. In addition, research experiences for these youth allowed for personal change that could be viewed as turning marginalization into empowerment through healing. Ethical research with First Nations means meeting the needs of both researchers and participants while benefiting the community through positive change.

This research could provide an opportunity to increase policy support for participatory action research projects as an ethical and effective research methodology in Native communities. In this study, participatory action research has been documented ethically appropriate because it enabled Native community members and leaders to take greater control over research implemented in their territory, which can lead to further decolonization through knowledge, empowerment, and healing.

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