The Tsimshian Protocols: Locating and Empowering Community-based Research

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This article highlights examples of community-centred research that demonstrated respectful long-term research relationships; that developed and followed community specific ethical protocols; and that resulted in beneficial educational curricula. The principles and development processes of the Tsimshian protocols are described. Anthropologists and other social science researchers have often struggled with research ethics and issues of power. This article demonstrates one important path out of this quagmire: "to work with communities and individuals in ways that respect their realities, their needs, and their futures."

The papers in this volume are remarkable for the ethical methodology they exhibit. The ethics of ethnographic research is one of those areas of crisis the anthropological community has discussed for many years. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) in the US both have provided leadership in creating guidelines that emphasize the necessity of taking responsibility for research involving human subjects. The AAA ethics lists "Principles of Professional Ethical Responsibility" (original and revised in 1971, 1998) with a focus on responsibilities to communities and an admonition not to do research that may harm the community. The SfAA code of "Professional and Ethical Responsibilities" (original and revised in 1949, 1963, 1983) discusses the professional responsibilities towards communities, colleagues, students, employers, and society at large. More recently in the US, the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology presented a set of ethical principles as "Ethical Guidelines for Practitioners" (1988) that acknowledged the special circumstances of anthropologists involved in policy related consulting. (Discussed in Gwynne 2003, p. 95ff)

In Canada, anthropologists also have found it useful to articulate ethical guidelines. The Society for Applied Anthropology in Canada (SAAC) developed and promulgated unofficial guidelines in meetings during the early 1980s. The Society published them in the Society's communication tool, Proactive, in 1994 (McDonald et al 1994) but did not officially adopt the guidelines.

Applied anthropologists follow several other Canadian ethics documents. One widely used document in northern research, not just social research, is the "Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North" articulated by The Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (ACUNS, Graham and McDonald 1998). Laws in the northern Territories of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories require all types of

researchers to obtain research licences and to adhere to the ACUNS Ethical Principles. The ACUNS document emphasizes the importance of working with communities to define and conduct research. Research is thus encouraged to be community-based, although this community orientation varies depending on the nature of the research. In the case of some research by physical or biological scientists, the observance of local laws and protocols that respect community life in the research area may be sufficient; in the case of social research, the above should be supplemented with more elaborate community "buy-in" and participation to produce ethical practice. ACUNS originally presented the Ethical Principles in English, French, and Inuktitut, to make them widely available to the people affected by northern research, both the scientists and the community people. The Association has since translated the document into Russian at the request of Russian academics associated with northern Russian universities and the Russian Academy. A suggestion to have the Ethical Principles translated into other languages spoken in the eight Nordic countries is under consideration, which would make it a Circumpolar document.

In summary of the situation today, standard anthropological ethics call for specific types of respect for the community as well as for individuals who are the subjects of the research. Formal ethical guidelines are widely accepted as a useful, some would even say a necessary, tool for the regulation of relationships between researchers and communities.

So, anthropologists have the tools, but do we have the practice? Do we walk the walk? This is the crux of the ethical crisis that has preoccupied us in our recent history. The research reported in this volume advocates community-based research as an important thrust in ethical research. Community-based research is about respect, respect for the people who provide us, as anthropologists, with the information we need as professionals. Community-based research is also about community involvement. To achieve this, progressive minded researchers often advocate for either Participatory Research (PR) or Participatory Action Research (PAR). Herlihy and Knapp (2003, p. 305) use these terms in order to distinguish between research to produce useful knowledge aligned with social movements (PR) and research to produce change by meeting a social need (PAR). The methodologies underlying both of these strategies towards community-based research are intended to promote community participation.

Ervin (2000, p. 199) describes PAR as democratic. Others have said Participatory (Action) Research decentralizes the process of producing scientific knowledge (Herlihy and Knapp, 2003, p. 302) and, in doing so, accomplishes a series of tasks important for political and scholarly reasons. In a recent volume of Human Organization devoted to the topic, Herlihy and Knapp describe several of these tasks, including how PR

enables putting the process of producing knowledge into the hands of the community, breaks down the dichotomies of researcher-researched and subject-object, enables the integration of the three processes of education, consciousness raising, and mobilization for action, and is committed to the rights of local people, in particular to their intellectual property rights (Herlihy and Knapp, 2003, pp. 302-304).

Often the decision to decentralize research is not a "gift" from sensitive researchers but a condition imposed on the research by the community. As Wuyee Wi Medeek states in this volume. "As Gitkxaala we are no longer interested in sitting back and watching our country being exploited by outsiders. Developing protocols of research … is part of our declaration of sovereignty." He describes a wide spread situation and reflects a new political economic context for research. In the Canadian north, for example, northerners take a variety of roles as researchers as members of a research team, as partners in a research collaboration, as research subjects, as sources of information, as users of completed research, as clients, as funders, as licensors, and as individuals experiencing and living with the impact of research (Graham and McDonald, 1998, p. 2). Along with existing legislation that controls research in the three Canadian northern territories, these nine types of important roles empower people at the local level, and any or all of the roles can structure community-based research.

Many applied researchers advocate participatory methods. In particular, feminist researchers and researchers working with Indigenous communities have advocated participatory research methods because of the potential to diffuse the power relations inherent in the production and dissemination of knowledge (see discussion in Ervin 2000). In practice, however, participatory approaches remain susceptible to imbalanced power relations and there remains a danger that a paternalism can emerge, especially where leadership roles fall to researchers, particularly in situations where the participants in a research coalition are all subsumed into a single framework from which one collective voice emerges. Such a voice may be one which speaks for the community, while not necessarily being of the community (Evans, McDonald, and Nyce 1999).

Advocates often argue strongly for the empowering aspects underlying the political and ethical reasons for community-based research. There are also convincing scholarly reasons for participatory research. Yet, we should also realize that an important argument based on quality could also be made. This argument is, simply, that with more community participation in all stages of research design and implementation, researchers are more likely to achieve results that are not only reliable but that also probe more deeply into the research topic. Anthropologists have known this for a long time. After all, what is the purpose of participant observation or, more fundamentally, of Anthropology's basic drive to do field work?

The domination of positivistic approaches during much of the twentieth century interfered with this fieldwork mandate by imposing preconceived, often ethnocentric notions onto the process of knowledge production (Kuper, 1988, p. 5; Smith, 1999, p. 67). A frequent result was the often unwarranted privileging of Western understandings while collecting local knowledge. The late 20th century critiques of writing ethnography gave us correctives and showed us how to do research that is both reflexive and critical. However, it was Sol Tax's arguments for Action Anthropology and, later, Paulo Freire's descriptions of a pedagogy for the oppressed that provided the early reference points towards community-based research designs that were later followed, like the Inuksuks of the Arctic, by an increasing number of researchers. The respect for local epistemologies and knowledge that underlies community-based research can produce better research results, especially for the anthropological cross-cultural approach. Community participation and input does not take the teeth out of research, it adds the meat.

Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has given us an articulate discussion of the relationship between knowledge and power in social research, of how Imperialism frames the Indigenous experience with research, of the importance of methodologies that incorporate community protocols and values, and of the importance of community definition of research and of the critical questions communities ask about research. She argues, 'the instruments or technologies of research were also the instruments of knowledge and instruments for legitimating colonial practices" (p. 60). Although she places her discussion in the context of Aboriginal communities, her commentary applies broadly to community-based research.

The methodology for doing community-based research is complex. For one thing, the notion of community is complex. Internal structures and dynamics vary over time and space. Not all communities are spatially placed, as instanced by communities of interest, or virtual communities. However, that is not the issue I want to discuss here but, rather, a related question that underlies the discussion of the ACUNS ethics document: "how is northern research to be centred?"

Those discussions held during the 1997 Annual General Meeting of ACUNS in Ottawa, with a diverse group of researchers represented all types of northern science, from ice crystallography to ethnography. We encountered various arguments for why community control would compromise research or would subject research projects to the vagaries of shifting community politics. We also encountered the reality that not all researchers are entirely humble about their entitlements. This is no revelation, I am sure, but it is an ethical issue because humility is important for doing respectful research, as well illustrated in the experiences shared in the present volume.

The discussions about the Ethical Principles made me appreciate how deeply embedded academic research agendas can be. This is a huge problem with community-based research. Smith's 1999 book tackles the issue well through her discussion of the cultural archives researchers carry with them and her explication of the differing agendas that Indigenous communities may have. The question arises: does a community-based methodology resolve the problems? There are two points I want to contribute to the many that can be made in answer to the question. First, community-based research is located in communities. So what? Almost by definition, ethnographic research is located in communities. As student anthropologists, our professors train us to do community research. The issue is that community-based research needs to be about something more than location.

Second, much of what passes today for community-based research is community-based in form but not in content. What does this distinction mean? To satisfy the form of community-based research, anthropologists may adhere to the protocols of a community, work with the people, and listen to their concerns. Much of this is the recursive and reflexive research methodology we teach students as a basic principle in research design used for developing their research plan and then for modifying that design as their community interactions teach them about what they are doing (grounds their theory). LeCompte and Schensul (1999) lay out this perspective in their introduction to the Ethnographer's Toolkit series. I cannot imagine doing anthropology that has any value without this approach. I think the principle of community-based research is the foundation of the theory of anthropological field research (i.e., the form) but not necessarily of the practice of anthropological community research (i.e., the content).

The methodology of community-based research is about form but must also be about content. As papers in this volume argue, research is about power relationships and the production of knowledge. We base our conventional model of research on the concept of the "expert." In the traditional and, I hope, now old fashioned way of doing anthropology, the expert is the person in command of the research because, as an expert, that person knows what is needed to be done and what is needed to be recorded. The "new ethnography" we teach to prospective practitioners is "a set of field techniques designed to produce an understanding … meaningful to the members of a given society and … [to] help cultural anthropologists to reduce, if not eliminate, their own cultural biases" (Gwynne, 2003, p. 43). This new ethnography is intended to be more reflexive and to acknowledge the positioning of the researcher, including the power relationships between the expert and the research (Gwynne, 2003, p. 41). But does the problem remain? Does this acknowledgement threaten the cultural formations of "Western" research, or does it continue

to protect the cultural archive? Does it provide a form without necessarily enabling the content? Smith quotes Audre Lorde: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1999, p. 19). Her important point is that "Western" research is based on assumptions underpinned by a cultural system of classification and representation, by views about human nature, human morality, and virtue, by conceptions of time and space, and by conceptions of gender and race, all of which helps determine (identify, understand) the researcher's reality (p. 44). Adhering to the form of community-based research does not necessarily alter the content. Community-based research needs to be about re-positioning the power so that the community holds it, as appropriate. What is appropriate?

The form of community-based research can be beneficial to communities in many ways. Community-based research generates knowledge and can transfer capacity to understand and conduct research by the community and its individual members. However, the content of the research may still be tied up in the power relationships and may remain centred in the researcher's research agenda, an agenda that represents years of training and experience and that remains situated in the intellectual world of the researcher. The paper by Orlowski and Menzies in this volume provides an excellent discussion of this point in the illustrative context of curriculum development.

At this point, I want to use a conceptual distinction between research that is community-placed and research that is community-centred (Singer, 1994, p. 340; Ervin, 2000, p. 10). Appropriately, positioned community-based research is research that is centred in the community, in the community's experiences, in the community's agenda, and in the community's cultural values. With reference to Smith's distinction between "Insider/Outsider Research" (1999, p. 137), the question of centring the research is obviously especially germane for a researcher from outside the community, but insider researchers are not automatically qualified to answer the question simply on the basis of community membership. Insiders may be better positioned to answer the question well but may not be able to do so because of how they are structured into the community or into the community's history. The situation of Insider/Outsider is complicated in many ways. Edosdi in this volume describes herself as both Insider to some extent as a First Nations woman, but also as an Outsider to the Gitkxaala community because she is not from there.

So, how can we do community-centred research or "decolonized" research, to use the terminology of Linda Smith (1999)? A practical answer, as I learned at Kitsumkalum, is to submit the research design and the research to community control. To be clear on what this really means: the definition and ultimate test of community control is whether the researcher is positioned to quit the research project at the community's

suggestion. Can this can be done without compromising academic integrity?

We have several models: the mentorship model of ethnography that relies on community members acting as mentors teaching researchers about the culture, or the adoption model that teaches through participation, the PR or PAR models that utilise power sharing, or the empowerment model that is based on partnerships.

Examples of the mentorship model abound because mentorship has been the stock in trade for ethnographic research for decades. Hugh Brody's work in northern British Columbia is a case in point, and his Maps and Dreams (Brody 1988) is a wonderful articulation of the evolution of the research effectiveness of a field worker as the mentorship takes place. Some anthropologists have even acquired a sort of insider status by adoption of the culture and/or actual social adoption by a family in the community.

In the early 1970s a remarkable PAR study was conducted with the Inuit in Canada's far north in the then more extensively defined Northwest Territories that stretched from Baffin Island to the Mackenzie Delta (Freedman, 1976). This government-sponsored study was set up with Inuit and Canadian government officials on the oversight board and with Hamlet leaders working closely with the scientific team to record knowledge important to both the Inuit and the Federal government. Other examples include Michael Robinson's useful approach to Land Use studies and co-management outlined in a community-oriented manual that highlighted collaborative work and community control through community defined Community Action Committees supported by Technical Action Committees (for example, Robinson, Garvin and Hodgson 1994). Robinson, Garvin and Hodgson (1994) described the goal of the applied researcher to be to train him or herself out of work by transferring the research capacity to the participants in a project. "They should not create a dependency relationship with their client community" (1994, p.6).

These examples illustrate the emergence of a research model that advocates and applies PR/PAR principles to research design and implementation. In British Columbia, there is also an emerging model that I consider to be the Tsimshian Protocol or the Nisga'a Protocol, in recognition of the two nations involved. These two nations, the Tsimshian and Nisga'a, share many aspects of their cultural heritage and, not surprisingly, enable similar approaches to research protocols. I believe the protocols are also followed elsewhere in northern British Columbia, modified according to fit local cultural norms. The examples that follow, combined with the papers in this volume, provide description of the protocol and information on the generalized principles underlying the research relationships.

At the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), community-based curriculum projects in First Nations Studies (FNST) have been

oriented to an empowerment model. To use examples from the first five years of UNBC's operation (1994-1999), the development of methods for FNST curriculum resulted in the creation of cultural and language courses and a set of two year training programs to acquire certificates in specific topic areas such as Traditional Knowledge, Nisga'a Studies, Métis Studies, and General First Nations Studies.

The curriculum development process started with the creation of steering committees consisting of community experts and Elders who worked with University experts and instructors. As reported in Evans, McDonald, and Nyce (1999), these committees based their work on the explicit recognition of the mutual autonomy of the institution and the community rather than the elimination of such boundaries. Our position was that, without the acceptance of mutual but distinct interests, the potential for a kind of institutional assimilation was great. Ingas in this volume grappled with a similar concern. Such recognition enabled the mutual recognition of the needs of both the community and the institution. Community values could be brought to the fore to guide the community aspect of the work, while basic global institutional values that defined the nature of a university education, a goal sought by the community, were also acknowledged. These curriculum projects premised their development on principles of mutual respect and accommodation rather than on a perceived need to assimilate the curriculum to one set of values, whether those be traditional community-based forms of teaching or traditional institutional based forms. The projects explicitly recognized the needs of both UNBC and the community as necessary for the achievement of the pedagogical goals. In doing so, they followed a series of six steps that empowered both the community and UNBC in ways appropriate to the respective cultural traditions of each partner.

Ignas' work on public school curriculum is set in a different context than my work on university curriculum. Significantly, a university may have greater freedom in regards to curricular development than does a public school, which is governed by a Ministry of Education, a College of Teachers, one or several collective agreements, and so on. The curriculum development project described by Ignas was set in a context more complex than the other projects - more complex because of the presence of the public school hierarchy. Kiwako Okuma (1996) examined how education systems (e.g. residential schools) colonized First Nations people in Canada and the ways in which Aboriginal-controlled education can be a method for decolonization. She also documented the impact outside structures, such as the Ministry, had on the ability of the Aboriginally run Nisga'a school district to operate and teach according to Nisga'a values. Compromises and negotiations on a number of issues were necessary. Ignas' paper is an instructive discussion on the definition of the goals of a col-

laborative and participatory curriculum project in the public school system and on the negotiation of a more community-centred curriculum.

In another example, a series of studies conducted over a 25-year period under the umbrella organization the Kitsumkalum Social History Research Projects (KKSHRP). The work involved methods that have been increasingly based on recognizing the way that knowledge is structured, transmitted, and controlled in the community. I am referring to not only the structuring apparent through age and gender, but also the social structuring through lineage, phratry, and village. This series of projects also recognized that the community did not transmit knowledge simply by reading and teaching. These are examples of the contemporary pedagogical emphasis discussed in the community, often through cultural institutions and practices, such as the important feast or potlatch. Such institutions validate the knowledge, and through the agency of individuals who are tasked with holding and transmitting particular domains of knowledge (such as lineage history).

The principles learned during the KKSRHP experience informed the methodology for the production of a heritage resource book, *The People of the Robin* (McDonald, 2003), initiated by the leadership of the First Nations community of Kitsumkalum. In this case, those who initiated the project responded positively to a request from me to establish an advisory committee in the community, which would set the project's agenda from the on-set. With a preliminary direction identified by the advisory committee, we went on to further organize the research project along the lines of the community's internal political structures and to incorporate the community's culturally defined ways of holding knowledge. This approach is how we generated the knowledge needed for the book. The papers by Wuyee Wi Medeek and Menzies in this volume support the principles in the Kitsumkalum and KKSHRP collaborative model as described, for example in McDonald 2003. The remarkable similarity in the development of these protocols causes me to label them "the Tsimshian Protocol."

The Forests for the Future project built collaboration by recognizing the mutual needs of the community, as represented by the Gitxaala resource management group in their Treaty Office, and the academic partners in the "three streams" design (treaty, education, and academic) described by Butler in this volume. In this case, the basic tools to build a project that respects each partner's needs and expectations are local protocols, academic ethics (another form of protocol), and the recognition of intellectual property rights. Wuyee Wi Medeek, in this volume, details a set of protocols that researchers need to follow in his community in order to avoid difficulties in cooperative research and to establish "appropriate research relationships and the protocols for establishing and conducting research." The papers from the other collaborators (in particular Butler,

Ignas, and Orlowski) demonstrate how the protocols of Wuyee Wi Medeek can produce quality research results at both the conceptual and the technical levels.

The similarity goes further in research with Indigenous communities. I mentioned the Nisga'a Protocol but other Indigenous groups around the world are also advancing such an approach. Linda Smith, who is a Maori researcher, articulates an "indigenous methodology" for research centred on the community's agenda and describes this as Kaupapa Maori Research (1999). She describes how, by following the Indigenous "Whanau principle" of the Maori supervisory and organizational structure, the community connects Kaupapa Maori research to Maori philosophy and principles. In the case of Kitsumkalum, the approach used a concept characterized, in parallel with the Whanau principle, as the "feast principle." The feast principle centres research by situating it in the governing structure of the potlatch or feast. The social structures of the Kitsumkalum feast and feast hall provided governance for the research. These structures include, in particular, the four phratries and numerous lineage corporate groups called Houses in English, and the matriarchs and chiefs of each House. Culturally, individuals with a certain status hold and transmit specific types of knowledge, for example the knowledge explaining the acquisition of corporate group rights and privileges. In preparing the resource book, we consulted with those people according to community protocols. The result was a book the community publicly claimed as its own.

The Tsimshian Protocol is the model Wuyee Wi Medeek elaborates for the Gitkxaala context and researchers should read his comments carefully for the clear direction provided. Menzies' detailed step-by-step account fills out the form of the model with a careful explication of how the Forests for the Future Project enacted the model, complete with a discussion of the challenges these researchers faced, both positive and otherwise. The negotiations he describes were not simple. They were complex.

The Tsimshian Protocol is a realistic approach that acknowledges the power structures of the community, including the three levels of Menzies' negotiations: customary structures primarily empowered by the feast hall, structures primarily empowered under Canadian law, and individuals empowered by being part of the community. As should be expected with such complicated situations, negotiations were protracted and involved many ups and downs. Practitioners must be aware that collaborative research of this type requires practical skills that go beyond the traditional teachings of Academia.

This community-centred approach of the Indigenous methodology provides several opportunities: to identify community needs and issues, to organize community "guides" and mentors, to work with and apply community standards. The approach takes the focus off the individual, as

in the concepts of the "gatekeeper" or the local individual expert, shifts the focus on to the appropriate group (lineage) that gives the individual the status to speak, emphasizes local theory (not just knowledge, which can be appropriated), and acknowledges and uses local epistemologies and metaphysics rather than Western ones.

The papers in this volume demonstrate a variation and development of the community-centred approach to research design as applied to the field of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that is the focus of the Forests for the Future project. TEK is a growth industry these days, so the discussion is very timely. I use the word "industry" very deliberately because, in Canada, at least, there is a lot of time, energy, and money going into TEK research. Practicing anthropologists and related researchers and consultants are having, literally, a field day. The popularity often seems to have fad-like qualities, especially in the effort to re-invent ethnographic methods and anthropological theory without a solid understanding of more than a century of experience "seeking to understand the relationships between humans and their diverse environments," as Menzies put it in his introductory essay. Sometimes the re-invention comes across as old-fashioned colonial-style research wearing the sheep's skin of politically correct rhetoric. However and fortunately, such research can also come across with the respect that is crucial to collaborative research that sets out to "decolonize knowledge" (Smith 1999).

The grounded discussion in this volume provides an enlightening orientation of TEK to a deep history of social science as well as a more recent history of collaboration between Aboriginal groups and academics to achieve political ends. This collaboration has come a long way since Milton Freeman's now prototypical demonstration of the collaborative approach by combining ethnographic and participatory methods in his work with the Inuit hamlets in the early 1970s (Freeman, 1973). This is the exciting part of the papers. They show how far ethnography has come, ethically, from a self-regulated discipline using abstract principles of good practice. We now work in contexts that enable community-centred research guided by community protocols that guide us towards best practice.

I started my comments by saying the papers in the volume are remarkable. I conclude by saying that the papers in this volume provide a successful model for ethical research based on the community-centred approach. No single template can apply to all social research in all circumstances. We can only learn from models of how to work with communities and individuals in ways that respect their realities, their needs, and their futures. These papers share with us the Tsimshian Protocols.

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