Community of Practice (CoP) Discussion Summary
"Readiness to do the work in communities"

January 2024

Guest speaker, Jemma Llewellyn from the University of Guelph, shared how her experience of using the _Decolonial Praxis_* of '_Ethical Questioning' as theorized by researchers Afolabi, Kozak, and Smith_ helped her to determine her readiness and responsibility in documenting non-indigenous youth's experiences of participating in a settler-Indigenous reconciliation education workshop series.

Community of Practice participants were challenged to critically reflect on how academic institutions prepare graduate students, staff, and faculty to engage in socially just research, practice, and scholarship in/with communities.

Here is a summary of what CoP participants shared

Outside of research ethics approval, how do we know when we are 'ready' to engage in community-based research?

1. Understand your positionality as a researcher
Reflect on one's values and identity and the potential power dynamics that might exist within the research team and community. Be conscious of your responsibilities to the community as a researcher.

2. Start small, find a mentor and establish personal boundaries
Find a mentor who can help you navigate the complex world of community-based research. Start with small projects and practice self-care by establishing personal boundaries.

3. Spend time building trust and relationships
Establish trust and relationships with the community before initiating research. Take the time to invest in community partnerships and understand cultural norms.

4. Align with community priorities
Ensure the research is driven by community needs rather than imposed top-down directives. Researchers should explore how to share available resources from the research project to serve the community.

5. Enter the community with humility
Actively listen to the community and be respectful of community norms and wisdom.

6. Go beyond traditional research ethics
Practice ethical reflexivity and go beyond traditional research ethics processes to practice a community-centered approach to research that is respectful of local protocols.

7. Be prepared for long-term relationship building
Community-based research is built on the foundation of strong relationships. Consider strategies for maintaining long-term relationships beyond the research project's duration.

8. Beyond the project
Explore the need for institutional support for community-based research. Advocate for relational accountability and more flexibility to accommodate evolving research needs.

What steps should be taken by researchers/by institutions before entering the community?

CoP Participants shared best practices

Determining Readiness for Community-Based Research:
- Reflect on one's positionality, values and identity, as a researcher and identify potential power imbalances.
- Practice epistemic humility to align with community timing and needs.
- Understand cultural norms, especially regarding equity deserving groups.
- Be mindful of potential harm and unintended consequences.
- Familiarize oneself with the community through immersion and engagement.
- Listen attentively to community needs and priorities.
- Establish genuine relationships, dispel stereotypes, and seek guidance from community advisors.
- Utilize community introductions or endorsements and advocate for institutional support.

Preparation Steps Before Entering the Community:
- Establish memorandums of understanding before ethics processes.
- Prioritize flexibility in methodologies, embracing community-led approaches.
- Enhance reflexivity through self-reflection and mentorship.
- Employ arts-based methods and co-production strategies.
- Expand knowledge beyond academic sources to include community perspectives.
- Adapt institutional structures to allow flexibility and redesign.
- Invest time and effort in building meaningful relationships.
- Enable community leadership roles and ensure reciprocity in research outputs.

Maintaining Long-Term Community Relationships:
- Improve informed consent processes and address conflicts of interest perceptions.
- Develop engagement plans with ongoing community input and participation.
- Create community profiles to understand participants.
- Foster knowledge sharing and ongoing benefits.
- Advocate for guidance on better research practices.
- Extend funding timelines to support relationship-building.
- Continuously assess and communicate the value researchers provide.
- Enhance communication of research outcomes through Ethics Boards.

Thoughts for responsive and ethical facilitation of meaningful community engagement

Institutions   vs.   Researchers

Institution considerations

- Discuss the role of institutional processes, such as ethics reviews and funding requirements, to be more flexible in accommodating the evolving needs of a community-centred research approach.

- Discuss strategies for defining project scope through dialogue with stakeholders, considering the needs of all involved parties, and ensuring inclusivity.

- Define the impact of institutional frameworks on research methodology and adaptability to community needs.

- Raise concerns about the rigidity of institutional structures, such as ethics boards and grant requirements, and calls for more flexibility to accommodate evolving research needs and readiness.

- Address the need for institutional adaptability to better serve community-based research initiatives.

- Consider strategies for maintaining trusting relationships beyond the research project's duration and ensuring ongoing value to the community.

- Focus on institutional support for sustaining beneficial relationships with communities post-research.

- Examine institutional strategies for inclusive project scoping, incorporating stakeholder input and community needs.

Researcher considerations

- Researchers must approach communities with humility, understanding cultural norms, and mitigating potential harm, ensuring respectful and culturally sensitive interactions.

- Actively listening to community needs, fostering relationships, and challenging stereotypes are essential actions for building positive connections and dispelling biases.

- Utilizing community brokers or advisors facilitates effective engagement, emphasizing the researcher's reliance on community intermediaries.

- Advocating for reciprocity in research relationships, including compensation and co-publishing, underscores researchers' responsibility in fostering equitable partnerships.

- Navigating power dynamics and ensuring ethical standards are challenges researchers face, emphasizing their role in maintaining community well-being.

- Ethical concerns and the need for clear researcher roles within community partnerships must be addressed to ensure integrity and transparency.

- Practicing continuous self-assessment, reflection, and engagement with community stakeholders and define the researcher's proactive role in meeting community needs.

- Prioritizing research curiosity over predefined questions and embracing dialogue-driven approaches fosters flexibility and collaboration in research design.

- Researchers should consider their suitability for projects, ensuring alignment with community needs and equitable distribution of labor, addressing ethical obligations regarding unpaid labor.