

“Viewpoints” Indigenous-led Project Methodology

Exploring Reconciliation Through Community College Education

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Abstract

Researchers present emerging possibilities towards Indigenous community self-determination through the use of the “Viewpoints” research project methodology and design. The Viewpoints methodology is useful for research taking place within geographical areas that encompass the Traditional Territories of different First Nations, and its application encourages Indigenous community self-determination. This research project methodology remains flexible for individual researchers representing their communities to have autonomy over their distinct inquiry processes and engagement protocols. Although there may be differences between the researcher’s community engagement processes, Viewpoints researchers maintain the same overarching research question and goals for the research. Viewpoints ensure that the research collaboration functions within a container, but enables flexibility and respect for the diverse needs, intellectual freedom, and autonomy of each of the Nations involved. This inquiry project methodology seeks to provide space for multiple “Viewpoints” throughout a geographical landscape. Through the application of Viewpoints within the SSHRC project titled, “Exploring Reconciliation Through Community College Education”, this methodological overview includes a case-study reflection, with important learning and considerations for future applications. This overview also provides insights on the ethics application and review process, and introduces ways that Research Ethics Boards (REB’s) can better understand the Indigenous researcher’s presentations of non-western research methodologies and ideas.

Note on Terminology – Researcher and Primary Investigator are used interchangeably in this document.

Key aspects of the Viewpoints Methodology:

Viewpoints Methodology:

- Allows for multiple stakeholders to be represented within a research project through the participation of multiple Primary Investigators or Researchers.
- The overarching research question and project goals remain the same, but the Primary Investigators represent their own communities’ interests, cultures, protocols, and individual priority areas of focus related to the research topic and engage in their own research project design.
- Primary Investigators have their Nation Government’s permission to participate as community representatives in the project on behalf of their Nations and cultures.

- Primary Investigators engage in their own independent inquiry processes and ensures that their research is authentic in seeking knowledge creation through preserving and representing their Nations worldviews.
- Primary Investigators are responsive to their community protocols and needs in their research design, and their study conduct is in alignment with their Nations protocols.
- Researchers identify all pertinent details around intellectual property and data housing within their individual ethics applications or collaborative research agreements with their Nations and the grant holder/funder.
- The institutional or organizational liaison functions as a neutral facilitator to coordinate the project, advocate for the self-determination and autonomy of each researcher for the duration of the project.
- Without interference from the liaison/facilitator or project coordinator, the Primary Investigators maintain autonomy over individual research processes.
- The project liaison/facilitator or coordinator provides support as needed and ties the project together with support and feedback from all research team members in co-authorship and final reporting.
- While research findings and outcomes may be distinctly different from each researcher, there may also be emergent themes.
- This project methodology respects the cultural diversity and self-determination of Indigenous peoples, governments structures and diverse world-views.
- The Viewpoints project methodology does not standardize the data collection process, analysis, findings, intellectual property or data housing, nor does it assume an umbrella heading or single “Indigenous perspective” or a “component” within a research project.
- The Viewpoints project methodology can routinely rotate the listed names of the cultural groups involved, which precludes the commonplace misunderstanding that any single cultural group in a shared overlap territory is more formal, preferenced or established by always being mentioned first—which is a common practice in the semantics of composing Western English subject lists.
- Nation invitations remain open within a reasonably identified timeframe after the project start date, providing that it does not inhibit the other researchers from completing their milestones and the final reports.

Case-Study Application / Learnings

This methodology was developed and applied through the research process of “Exploring Reconciliation Through Community College Education, a SSHRC funded project at Selkirk College through the Applied Research and Innovation Centre. As this project methodology was emergent, many of its concepts specific to Indigenous viewpoints only became known through the process of this research process. Some key learnings from this SSHRC project include:

Ethics

Applying for Institutional Research Ethics Review Board (REB) approval is a challenge with this model. Here are a few key insights for consideration on future project methodology application:

1. It would have been helpful to clearly articulate the Viewpoints overarching Indigenous research project methodology early on to the Institutions Research Ethics Review Committee.
2. It would have been helpful to pre-establish a mechanism for waiving institutional REB approval when the Indigenous Nations have their own Research Ethics Board, and when assessing applications that are submitted by Indigenous researchers who are working in the interest of their communities. The REBs prioritize their standard REB policies when, in contrast, the researchers prioritize their community protocols above those of the institutions.

Examples of how REBs could be enabled to better support Indigenous research methodologies:

- Ethics approval could be sought and granted by the Indigenous Nations if a letter of approval is submitted to the grant holding institution's REB.
 - A letter from the Nation could state that the research proposal has met their Nation's ethics approval process, and is consistent with their community protocols.
 - The letter could indicate that the Nation assumes the liabilities and responsibilities related to the research project conducted within its communities.
3. For researchers involved whose Nations do not have their own ethics review boards, the researchers prepare and submit their own research ethics applications under the common project title referencing that it is part of the overarching project employing the Viewpoints methodology and specific project title to the grant holding entity.
 4. When ethics proposals are submitted to an institution's ethics review board, the review committee is responsive to the TCPS Chapter 9 considerations.
 5. It would be recommended and expected that there would be REB members who are Indigenous and have experience with Indigenous Research.
 6. While the TCPS has considered many articles pertaining to Indigenous research in chapter 9, it lacks a course for REB's to confidently apply the consideration in chapter 9 when assessing applications.

Key Considerations

The Viewpoints Methodology maintains an invitation and placeholder for diverse Nations within Shared Territories to participate in the project within a reasonably identified timeframe after the project start date, providing that it does not inhibit the other researchers from completing their milestones and the final reports.

This methodology is Indigenous-Led, meaning that Nation Members from within the region that the research is conducted are best suited to engage in research within their own communities.

This is important because not only do they understand their community worldviews and are familiar with their community protocols, but they are also better able to determine or seek advice from knowledge holders on the research design and other research components. Insider community research attends to their communities' protocols, including aspects of data collection and data housing, participants' engagement, and determining the cultural methodologies that best fit their community's needs.

Viewpoints provides a mechanism for Indigenous voices and self-determination to be presented through distinct research processes, and helps ensure that the sole authority for determining what is ethical with respect to Indigenous knowledge doesn't rest completely with the western institutions and worldviews.

It also introduces ways that ethics processes can be more inclusive of Indigenous cultural viewpoints, and encourages researchers to present their diverse perspectives in conceptualizing, gathering, analyzing, reporting and disseminating Indigenous knowledge in the form of scientific research data, with assurance that it is not assessed solely through non-Indigenous filters.

Potential Application of Viewpoints for Diverse Projects

This project methodology could be a potential approach to research projects across multiple sectors undertaken within Traditional Territories that are shared by multiple Nations. i.e., business, tourism, land development, environmental restoration, health, social sciences, technology, innovation, Traditional Knowledge, and other areas of study where Indigenous Nation consultations and perspectives would be valued or required.