Principles & Protocols for Research About First Nations Children and Communities in Canada

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Intercultural Partnerships

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Objectives:

1. Respond to the pressing need in Canada and in the majority world to develop principles, methods and tools for understanding Indigenous children's development and needs and the impacts of infant and early childhood programs on development.

2. Create a team-learning community for Indigenous research capacity development, demonstrating community-university collaborative approaches.

Who are Indigenous peoples in Canada?

- 1.5 million descendents of original inhabitants before contact, including:

- 700,000 First Nations (605 registered Bands, 56 distinct languages)

- 50,000 Inuit, Inuk & Innuvialuit

- 750,000 Metis

- Young demographic, high birth rate

- Traditional territories and reserve lands

- Historical treaties except in BC

A short history of long oppression

- Contact: 'nation to nation'
  - Conquest & cooperation
- Colonization: Indian Act (1876)
  - legislating how Indians were to be governed (denied self-governance and right to vote in colonial Canada, reservations, movement controlled by passes)
- Cultural assimilation programs:
  - Indian residential schools, 60's scoop, denial of Status, prohibition of all major cultural, sacred, social and political forms of life
- Capacity depleting policies:
  - Denied access to higher education, denied government office, women denied Band Council positions, denied personhood
- The seventh generation since the beginning of the holocaust for Aboriginal people in Canada is now

Indigenous self-governance movements

- Native Indian Brotherhood: Indian Control of Indian Education (1970)
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)
- The 'Apology' (1997) by Dept. Indian Affairs
- Aboriginal Healing Fund (1998)
- Aboriginal Transitions to Delegated Authority in Health Care, Child & Family Services (2000)
- Aboriginal Head Start (1997)

Community development priorities

- Regaining ownership & control of lands
  - Land resource management
- Revitalization of cultural forms, skills for living on the land, recovery & recording of Indigenous Knowledge and heritage languages
- Reduced infant mortality, improved population health, & education achievement starting with Early Childhood Care & Development at the centre of a long-range vision of holistic community development
- Strengthening community capacity: administration, training, research, policies, practice, evaluation, presentation

Ethics: What does it mean?

- 'Ethics': What does it mean?
- Whose ethics?
- 'Ethical practice': What are we doing?
- Who's definition of what IS research?
- Whose research priorities?
- Who's in charge?
- Who benefits?
- Reflective practice: Who are we, where do we fit in the picture on historic & ongoing oppression, & what do we really want (what are our hidden as well declared agendas)?
- Who's reality (needs, goals, methods for selecting data and legitimating truth claims) matters most?

Ethics of research with First Nations

- Tri-Council Policies
  - Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
  - Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council (NSERC)
  - Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)

- University of Victoria: 2 tiered negotiation of consent / 2 tiered review

Towards a national Aboriginal code of ethics

- First Nations specific protocols

- Communities ('on-reserve') vs. urban / individual ('off-reserve')

- OCA : First Nations Regional Health Survey
  - Ownership
  - Control
  - Access

Intellectual Property

- Who's questions guide the research?

- Who owns the data?
    - What do you mean…we'll be anonymous
    - Data will be stored in locked cabinets in a university office?
    - Data will be destroyed after the project is over?
    - Who owns the 'knowledge' acquired/constructed?

Principles

- Partnerships, based on relationships & reciprocal recognition of the contributions of each partner

- Accept the primacy of Indigenous needs, goals, preferences, & approaches
  - Emerging Aboriginal research agenda in Canada
  - Do not duplicate previous research efforts
    - "I come from a long line of research subjects…"
  - Negotiate & respect local protocols governing conduct, research, data sources (esp. Elders), protection of Indigenous knowledge & representation.
    - "Research is a four letter word around here…"

Principles

- Ensure Indigenous representation in all phases

- Build on Indigenous knowledge & methods

- Use Participatory Action Research when possible

- Recognize the diverse cultural and spiritual aspects of Indigenous people in relation to what is being studied (e.g., language, children, families, the land)

- Be transparent

Principles

- Ensure knowledge translation & dissemination in ways accessible & useful to participating communities & Indigenous people in general
    - "They came, they took, they left…It's all sitting in a museum somewhere that we can't get at it."

- Contribute to Indigenous capacity
    - E.g., create or support training programs, support recruitment of Indigenous people into forums for dialogue about research

Challenges & Opportunities

- Fresh questions, perspectives, concepts, methods, data sources
- Status: 'Expert at what? Towards communities of learners, based on respect & reciprocal sharing of knowledge & expertise
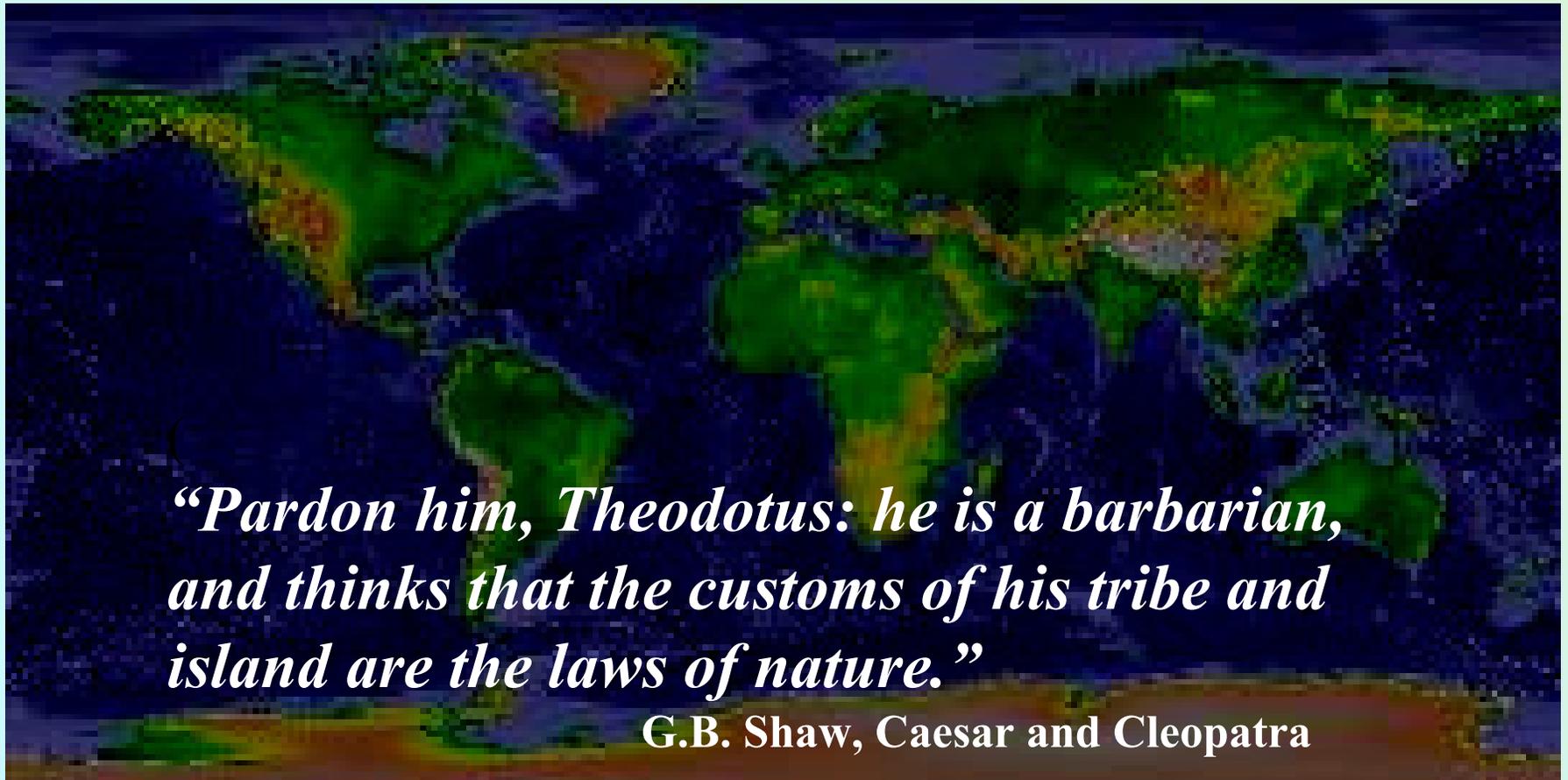- Indeterminate outcomes: Tolerating ambiguity

Challenges & Opportunities

- Costs of research to communities to control
  - A challenge for traditional funders
  - Time: Need to recalibrate the pace of engagements for purposes of research, ongoing negotiation of agreements
- Prestige: who gets credit?
- Credit for what & what for?
  - Clarifying ego & status investments
  - Sharing publications

Concluding Comments

- Researchers have much to learn from Indigenous communities about ways of knowing & of organizing & using knowledge.

- Many Indigenous groups in Canada are cautiously receptive to collaborative partnerships based on mutual respect & sharing

- University-based researchers have a valuable yet unrealized contribution to make in supporting recovery & positive development of Indigenous communities. Research is an intervention. Ethical practice in research can be situated with reference to principles of social justice.

Research with Indigenous people around the world

"Pardon him, Theodotus: he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature."

G.B. Shaw, Caesar and Cleopatra

Lights to guide us

- Peter Cole: Aboriginalizing Methodologies: Considering the Canoe
- Linda Tuweihe Smith: Decolonizing Methodologies