

INDIGENOUS "INSIDER" ACADEMICS: EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH OR ADVOCACY?

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Abstract / Résumé

This paper critiques social science research as a representation of the western academic thought that has invented an "Other" as the object of research. This leads to a critical appraisal of some existing research terminology and their in/appropriateness when the invented "Other" (referred to as an "Indigenous insider") becomes the academic researcher. With a portrait of experience, it illustrates some research strategies, a combination of which an insider can use to address those research questions. The strategies are most effective in allowing insider knowledge as legitimate and sufficient basis for research without overlaying and encumbering it with mainstream research methodology.

Ce travail critique la recherche en sciences sociales en tant que représentation de la pensée académique de l'ouest qui a inventé un «autre» comme l'objet de recherche. Ceci conduit à une évaluation critique d'une certaine terminologie existante en recherche et leur in/opportunité quand le «autre» inventé (auquel on fait référence comme un «indigène initié») devient le chercheur académique. Avec un portrait d'expérience, elle illustre quelques stratégies de recherche, une combinaison dont peut se servir l'initié pour parler de ces questions de recherche. Les stratégies sont les plus efficaces en tenant compte de la connaissance initiée comme légitime et base suffisante pour la recherche sans lui superposer et l'encombrer avec les méthodologies de recherche à tendance dominante.

....Fundamental questions must be raised about what knowledge is produced, by whom, for whose interests, and toward what ends. Such arguments begin to demand the creation of a new paradigm and organization of science—one that is not only for the people, but is created with them and by them as well. (Gaventa, 1993, p.40)

Social Science Research and the Indigenous “Other”

I literally agonized trying to come up with a research methodology that could adequately describe my lived experience as a teacher and a member of my community, and those of the people who were going to be involved in the research. Much of this agony stemmed from the realization that some of the existing research methodologies and the subsequent terminology has until recently excluded personal experiences of historically disadvantage people as a basis of study and analysis (Vidich, 2000). Part of the reason this knowledge has been excluded is because of epistemological notions so that meaning as contained in texts and the study of texts, particularly their deconstruction, becomes the primary focus of education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). There is also the argument that experience cannot speak for itself, again putting the focus on the meaning contained in texts and the forms by which they are constructed. There has also been the contrasting argument that experience is too comprehensive, too holistic, and, therefore, an insufficiently analytic term to permit useful inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Consequently, the voice of academic researchers with “insider” knowledge, the kind of knowledge that is based on experience and not found in texts, is often silenced or excluded (Ahlberg, 1991; Ndunda, 1995).

Yet, Ron Scapp argues in reference to a classroom setting, “when one speaks from the perspective of one’s immediate experiences, something’s created in the classroom for students, sometimes for the first time. Focusing on experience allows students to claim a knowledge base from which they can speak” (cited in hooks, 1994, p.148). It is from this understanding that I began my search for a mode of inquiry that would accommodate my experiences as an insider¹ academic. I knew right at the onset that my research: 1) must not be *on* “others”, 2) must include the *shared experiences* of all people involved in the research, 3) must be *dialogic*, and 4) must be *sharing of skills* so that the process continues long after I had left the field.

Research Must Not Be On “Others”

Social science research has recently been criticized by some aca-

demics as being the representation of academic thought that has invented the "other" as the object of research (Alcoff, 1991; Fine, 1994; hooks, 1990; Vidich, 2000). It therefore becomes problematic when individuals from the invented "other" become the producers and interpreters of knowledge. Indeed, Wright points out that "African thinkers who espouse ideas that appear strange to the West are viewed as primitive, childlike, or inconsequential" (cited in Tedla, 1995, p.13).

This insistence that Western culture is superior to all other cultures has effectively barred out from consideration other ways of interpreting and understanding the world. (Tedla, 1995, p.13)

Tedla (1995) argument concurs with Fine (1994) who also argues that much of qualitative research has reproduced, if contradiction-filled, a colonising discourse of the "Other" by reinventing the hyphen of Self-Other that both separate and merges personal identities. Fine argues further that this re-invention of the "other" has made critical, feminist and or Third World scholars view social science as a tool of domination (1994).

Fine's argument resonates with that of Alcoff (1991) who says that speaking for "Other" has come under increasing criticism and, in some communities, it is being rejected as "arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate" (p.6). This ultimately makes hooks (1990) to wait for "them" to stop talking about the "Other" (p. 151).

Often, this speech about the "Other" annihilates, erases: "no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself...only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in away that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still the author, authority. I am still the coloniser, the speak subject, and you are now the centre of my talk. (hooks, 1990, p.153)

One of the reasons why our experiences as insider academics have not been embraced in the academic research terminology originates from the very description of social science. In the social sciences, the relationship between the researcher and those researched has been "obscured in social science texts, protecting privilege, securing distance and laminating the contradictions (Fine, 1994, p.72). "There has been a tendency to view the self of the social science observer as a potential contaminant, something to be separated out, neutralized, minimized, standardized, and controlled" (Fine, 2000, p.108). Doing research from this perspective would not answer to that call of "inclusion of subjective experience of the researcher" (Fine, 2000) that would enable the academic insider to conduct research *with* and *not* on the community members.

Research as Shared Experiences of All People Involved in the Research

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) define social science as being concerned with humans and their relations with themselves and their environments, and, as such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experience. I knew right at the onset that experience would be the starting point and key term for my inquiry. The challenging task for me was to sort out the appropriate methods of data collection that would be congruent with the experiences of the members of my community and particularly the teachers who would be directly involved in the research. Some of the methods of data collection and analysis I have encountered in my academic life do not allow experience sharing as a basis of inquiry. Positivist inquiry, for instance, suggests that we must observe phenomena exhaustively and define them precisely in order to identify specific cause and effects. The researchers should stand apart from their subject and think of it as having an independent object-like existence with no intrinsic meaning. The knower and that which is or can be known are considered separate, so that the social scientist can adopt the role of observer of an independently existing reality. And since social investigation is a neutral activity, we should strive to eliminate all bias and preconceptions, not be emotionally involved with or have a particular attitude toward our subject, and move beyond common sense beliefs to discover causes and to make predictions (St. Denis, 1989). Doing this research from such a paradigm would render the experiences of the insider useless.

Research Must Be Dialogic

Paulo Freire (1970) encourages researchers to initiate an interactive process, which he refers to as dialogue. This way of doing research, in my opinion, shows commitment to bringing the participants of the study into the process of knowledge generation. It also supports the epistemological position that places the importance on:

- a) experiential knowing that emerges through participation with others;
- b) beliefs that people can learn to be self-reflexive about their world and their actions within it. (Reason, 1994)

Research Must Be Sharing of Skills So That Process Continues

Knowledge produced by social science is a powerful and effective means to influence decisions regarding people's everyday lives. Whether this knowledge is used for the advantage or disadvantage of the group of the people being researched "depends on who controls the research process" (St. Denis, 1979, p.1). Reynolds & Reynolds (1970) argue that

research and the consequent knowledge generated "has worked to make the power structure relatively more powerful and knowledgeable, and thereby to make the subject population more impotent and ignorant" (Gaventa, 1993, p. 27). For third world academic researchers who often have little control of the research process in terms of research funding, loyalty to certain schools of thought and academic institutions and the consequent distribution of the knowledge, it would be a miracle to expect their experiences to play any significant role in the knowledge generated. I would therefore conclude like Gaventa that:

Where knowledge is produced about the problems of the powerless, it is more often than not produced by the powerful in the interest of maintaining the status quo, rather than the powerless in the interest of change. (1993, p. 26)

Because I'm historically situated within this traditionally powerless group Gaventa refers to above, my research had to be educative, a "dialogical approach to research that attempted to develop voice as a form of political process" (Pinar, 1995). All I had to do was "provide these individuals with a lens through which they could see themselves, become aware of new ideas, or recognize concepts that they were intuitively acting upon but that lacked clear articulation" (Goodman, cited in Pinar, 1995, p. 259). Doing research this way would ensure greater collaboration with teachers. This interaction would become part of the curriculum, thus, providing some skills that could be used long after I had left the field.

Because of the commitment to the four criteria, it was important that I select carefully the qualities in various research methodologies that would lead to a social investigation involving full participation of the researcher and those targeted for research: an educational process and a means of taking action for change. The section below provides a detailed description of how I met this challenge.

Finding My Niche: A Paradigm Cocktail

Indigenous people around the world are re-affirming the validity of their own cultures and re-defining their political, economic and social priorities in the twentieth century (Barman, 1986). Central to this process is the re-socialization of the youth with their own culture, giving them a sense of pride in their own cultural heritage. It is a shift made necessary by centuries of colonial domination and its neo-colonial offshoot, which deliberately undermined the cultural values of Indigenous people through assimilative and later integrative educational policies (Kirkness, 1992). It is against this background that educators of Indigenous people are facing the challenging task of recovering the cultural heritage while providing preparation for successful participation in a cultur-

ally diverse, modern technological society (Hamme, 1996). While Indigenous people are developing strategies to face this challenge, the Kenyan educational system priorities are almost opposite. In Kenyan schools, traditional cultures and languages have a lower priority for policy makers, parents and educators. For example, curriculum is developed by the Ministry of Education and distributed to all the schools for adoption regardless of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Kenyan people. The teachers adopt the curriculum as prescribed and implement it to specifications. Consequently, the local wisdom, cultural values, skills and beliefs that have the potential of enriching the curriculum remain largely untapped. The learners fail to see the connection between school knowledge and their local realities, which ultimately give them a weak cultural identity. It is against this background that my study sought to explore ways in which local resources would be used to enrich the school curriculum. It also explored ways in which curriculum could become a place in which the cultural values, knowledge, skills and beliefs that provide foundations for identity could be understood, defined and interpreted.

From the beginning it was imperative given my insider position that my research had to be educative, a "dialogical approach to research that attempted to develop voice as a form of political process" (Pinar, 1995, p. 259). I had to provide these individuals with a lens through which they could see themselves, become aware of new ideas, or recognize concepts that they were intuitively acting upon but that lacked clear articulation (Pinar, 1995). Doing research this way would ensure greater collaboration with the participants. This interaction would become part of the curriculum change, thus, providing skills that could be used long after I had left the field. For me to do this effectively, I was informed by writings from various perspectives and which I refer as a paradigm "cocktail." The reason I use this term is to highlight the enhancement that resulted from my use of selected and combined perspectives that worked in my situation: feminist theory, critical theory and participatory action research played a significant roles. Each of these research perspectives in a way enabled me to use the research process as a place to intervene and advocate; collaborate; dialogue; share skills and knowledge; produce reflective practitioners; reciprocate; privilege all forms of knowledge and theorize collaboratively. These research strategies enabled me to do positive research in my community.

Elders² use abstract metaphors of space to describe the place from which they speak. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1993) talks about "moving the centre" to create many centres that reflect the diversity of world peoples and cultures. This is a recognition and acknowledgment that there could never

be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their cultures and environment as the centre (Ngugi, 1993). Ngugi's "moving the centre" provides me with the "language" in which to verbalize my feelings/ thoughts/ experiences that consequently enable me to locate my speech. Working within such an ideological framework I'm able to work comfortably within multiple locations.

My feelings at this point could well be verbalized within some feminist theory perspectives. Feminist research is concerned with the process as an occasion for intervention and advocacy (Patai, 139). Harding (1991) for instance argues that, by documenting women's representation of their own reality, "we were engaging in advocacy. We felt that our work was indeed, political and that it was for women" (cited in Patai, 1991, p. 143). Interpreted for my research context, it would mean removing the notion of political neutrality emphasized by traditional research enabling me to recognize my work as a political act. Feminist research has challenged the pose of neutrality and objectivity that has for so long governed positivists' social science. It has also challenged the hierarchical division that separates researcher and those who are researched. The model of a distanced, controlled, ostensibly neutral interviewer has been replaced with that of "sisterhood, an engaged and sympathetic interaction between two individuals united by the fact of gender oppression" (Patai, 1991, p. 143). This way of doing research may be what Klein refers to as *conscious subjectivity* and, Weskott adds, *inter-subjectivity*: the kind of research in which the "researcher compares her work with her own experiences as a woman and a scientist, and shares the resulting reflections with the researched, who in turn might change the research by adding her opinion" (cited in Hale, 1991, p. 125). For my research situation, it meant comparing my own experiences as a member of the community, a teacher, parent and curriculum theorist and sharing the resulting experiences with the teachers who in turn might change the research by adding their opinion.

Intervention and Advocacy

I wrote a letter to the principal of my local secondary school long before I got to there. In the letter, I explained clearly that I was a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia seeking participants in a study called *Cultural Relevance in Kenyan School Curriculum*. I further explained that the purpose of the study was to collaboratively explore the possibilities of tapping the local resources to enrich curriculum in Kenya, so that teachers can begin to use both materials and human resources, which are locally available and culturally relevant to meet curriculum goals. I would therefore appreciate the opportunity to carry out my study in her school and invite the teachers to participate in the

study.

During our first meeting, I explained to teachers broadly what the research was about, how the research idea had evolved and where it was going. I also explained what the research would mean to them in terms of time and personal commitment. This idea concurs with feminist research, which encourages honest and responsible methods, which do not just include protecting anonymity but also respecting the "informants." It includes letting people know exactly what the research is about and particularly to avoid the practice of "tricking" people into exposing themselves; intentionally luring them into contradictions; using one "informant" to expose or contradict another; manipulating people to obtain the "truth" and the "facts" (Hale, 1991). This meant allowing the teachers to share only what they wanted to without exerting undue pressure. At the end of the meeting, I gave each teacher a consent form to take home and then return to me signed when they were ready to. All the teachers returned the consent forms the following week and the principal wrote to me a letter of approval allowing me to carry out the research in the school.

The invitation of teachers to be collaborative partners was my attempt to break down the established power roles between researcher and participants,

Collaboration seems to have become aligned with the idea of equal participation, responsibility and representation—all subsumed within a comfortable, friendly community of persons engaged in a mutually interesting project or endeavour. (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993. p.393)

Collaboration frequently enhances communication, builds relationships (Peterat & Smith, 1996) and ensures that everyone's point of view will be taken as a contribution to resources for understanding (Winter, 1989). Though collaboration can cause tension, frustrations, dis-comfort, and dissonance (Peterat & Smith, 1996) and often makes people toil together under conditions of distress or trouble, making them exert their body and mind in ways which are sometimes painful (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993), it initiates an interactive process which Freire (1970) refers to as dialogue.

Opening the Dialogue

Each teacher volunteer was interviewed at the beginning of the study. These interviews were conversational and dialogical, involving non-directive, open-ended questions. The purpose of the interviews were two-fold: a) to explore the beliefs, conceptualizations, and practices of the teacher and b) to explore the reasons for initiating change in curriculum materials and the questions that arise in the process. The idea of "dialogue" came from Freire's concept of initiating an interactive process in

research.

Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanised, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" of ideas in another, nor can it be a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. (Freire, 1970, p.59)

Freire views this interactive process as establishing the participants as the subjects of their own history and encouraging shared control and generation of knowledge (1970). The understanding that emerges through this research process is constructed jointly by researcher and participant and which I believe is appropriate for people whose voices have seldom been heard or documented (McCaleb, 1994, p.58). By inviting teachers to engage in dialogue with the researcher, they begin to feel that their experiences are important and valid. Teachers begin to realize that their words and experiences merit a valuable place in the making of curriculum. They also begin to realize that, by sharing their personal experiences, they can help their students and others to understand new and old ways of viewing the world.

Sharing Skills and Knowledge

A dialogue group was formed to discuss questions of mutual concern, to identify ways and means to address those concerns. The intent of these discussions was to bring the teachers together to talk with each other about the issues that had arisen in the interviews. Even though much of what the teachers said was important to the general understanding of the problems currently facing the education system, I carefully steered the discussion towards the problem of lack of cultural relevance in the existing curriculum and their perceptions. At this point, I realized I had to take the role of an "initiating facilitator" in the manner of participatory action research (Reason, 1994). Taking this direction was a risk because at this point teachers had not fully internalized cultural relevance as a problem. It was a "risk" I felt was worth taking. Lather (1986) argues that critical theory research responds to the social reality of people without power. It is research *for* rather than *about* people. It "aims to foster a reflexive and critical consciousness, enabling a critical understanding of social reality" to initiate emancipatory social action and to develop emancipatory knowledge necessary for radically improving and transforming social reality (St. Denis, 1989, p.25).

I found this way of consciousness-raising to be appropriate in the context of my research. Although it could be interpreted as hypocritical

to critique the very education that has availed me a chance of "upward mobility," I felt that the same education had provided me with the skills to challenge the structures of domination, which has continuously led to the daily struggles for meaningful existence for my people. I, therefore, felt that I had a personal responsibility and commitment to communicate carefully that understanding.

Beside my academic knowledge, I constantly found reinforcement from the popular knowledge found in the community and which I would use to draw the attention of the teachers. For instance, at one time before a group meeting, Henri Lopez the UNESCO deputy director, had been reported in the morning daily as having said that education systems that did not reflect the cultural needs of the people were bound to fail (1997). I brought this information to the meeting and we discussed the implication of such a statement and what it meant. At another time, I cut out a piece of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, again the Daily Nation in which he had been featured as warning Africa on alien languages.

Africa will remain a continent of 'nations of bodiless heads and headless bodies' as long as a small minority continues to speak in European languages and the majority in their own different communal languages. (Munugu, 1997, p. 30)

Using such information I discussed/argued with the teachers that what we have is in fact an enrichment to our culture if we are able to select skills suitable in our environment (Couture, 1978) and having the wisdom of using such skills. This is another point where I felt I could be rushing the teachers. I was biased. It had taken me over three years of graduate school to get convinced that we need not turn back the clock to reclaim our culture, that our culture cannot be described in past tense. Yet, I wanted these teachers to buy this idea within a period of less than three months, without the extensive support of critical theories that characterize graduate courses. However, little by little, I could see us developing some kind of understanding. Yes, our culture is a living culture. We can no longer teach our children the skills we would like them to have at home because the socio-economic landscape has changed. But how could we take advantage of the present arrangement of the school to equip the students with usable skills? Skills that can be used in/out of the community, skills that can enable our children to make choices.

As the study progressed, it was clear that the teachers were beginning to find the lack of cultural relevance in the school curriculum as being significant. But what did this mean to us? I knew that at this point I had to share some skills and knowledge that would enable the teachers to have the vocabulary in which to verbalize their thoughts. I began by introducing Freire's work on the "banking" concept of education. I

asked the teachers to read a chapter from Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which raised the issue of teachers assuming that they are the only "knowers" and that the students are "empty" vessels" to be filled with "communiqués." We discussed the issues raised in the chapter, trying to integrate those issues to our own teaching practices. This discussion brought out honest descriptions of classroom practices that could best be described as "authoritarian." Teachers described vividly their use of rote as the only teaching method and using evaluative practices that demand "memorization and re-production of knowledge."

However, at this point the teachers began to feel "guilty" about their classroom practices, almost succumbing to a feeling of helplessness. The teachers felt that I was negatively judging their practices. In fact, they began to get defensive about the syllabus being too wide, being expected to cover so much content in such a short time, to justify what they had identified as defective classroom practices.

For the next meeting, I again introduced to the teachers a series of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work in which he describes the inadequacy of our education system as originating from the uncritical acceptance of colonial education and adopting it for Kenyan children. The understanding of this background allowed the teachers to relax and even talk freely about the historical incidents they could remember from some education courses they took at the university or some lived experience they had. We then moved to judging our present and to question the future. What can we possibly do to change our classroom practices?

Reflective Practitioners

Reflective practice is a term aligned to action research, a process in which the practitioners show interest in asking themselves awkward and challenging questions about their practice and depending on colleagues talking to one another and trusting one another (Strauss, 1991). In this part of the project, the teachers as individuals initiated projects in their own classroom based on the knowledge and skills acquired in the first and second parts of the research project. Which projects they initiated depended on individual choice and subject area, but they used resources, which are culturally relevant and locally available. During this time, we had the option of meeting as a group to review and discuss classroom experiences. This provided an opportunity for us to explore some of the struggles, tensions and frustrations associated with research for change.

It was becoming clear to us that there was some historical background to the current classroom practices we are using. We were perpetuating colonial practices in our education, which are not just expensive, but continue to impoverish our society. Again some feeling of

helplessness began to envelop our discussions. What can we "little" people at the bottom of the ladder possibly do? We only teach what we are expected to. We have to complete the syllabus. If we don't teach what the examination council wants us to teach, our students will fail. And then we can't explain such failure to the community, administration, and even to ourselves. We assumed that those at the top know what is best for us.

I empathized with these feelings. Being a teacher and a student in this system, I was well aware that teachers' views are not solicited when curriculum changes are made. The curriculum is developed at the top and distributed to the schools for adoption with no consideration to the regional diversity of the country. For the sake of national unity, we cannot recognize diversity. What can we then do? At this point I had to take some leadership role so the teachers were not to be overwhelmed by that feeling of hopelessness and take a defeatist attitude of "nothing can be done."

Reciprocity

This term is associated with doing research with respect. It means acknowledging the valuable time that people have taken to accommodate the researcher. In some First Nations' communities, a gift of tobacco when working with elders is symbolically important (Crowchild, personal communication). When one of the teacher participants left teaching in the middle of the project, the principal asked me to be a temporary replacement on a volunteer basis to which I readily agreed. Fortunately, his teaching subject was literature in English and language, which happens to be my subject area. I was able to access a classroom and face the harsh realities of the classroom. I was no longer an out/insider observer directing an overworked group of people. I became a part of. I was immersed.

To some extent this arrangement worked well for all of us. To the principal, I was no longer an intruder taking away precious time from the overworked teachers. Besides, I was now to shoulder other school responsibilities such as attending sports, participating in parent/teacher meetings, taking students on field trips and so forth. To the teachers, I became just another colleague. I was now in close proximity to whatever the teachers were doing. We could now discuss the issues informally during tea breaks, lunch and as we walked home from school. To the students, I stopped being just a faceless body hovering around the school compound without a properly defined role. I was now the new teacher of English language and literature. A teacher, who took them for field trips, took them to sit under that tree to tell stories, a teacher who

was concerned with the day-to-day running of the school. I now belonged. I began to understand the culture of the school even more deeply. I got to share the staff room jokes; I understood relationships with administration, staff, parents and students. It was like a new life had begun. I could now view the world of teaching from many different angles. My being incorporated into the school worked well for all of us. Parents were happy because of my volunteer service.

Privileging All Forms of Knowledge

As I got re-integrated into the community activities such as clan meetings, marriage negotiations, weddings, church, fund raising, parent/teacher meetings and so forth, I found some teachers participating in the same activities and it goes without saying that we quickly developed a kind of rapport. Here were teachers with whom I shared some interests/problems/ aspirations: our children attending the same primary school in the same grade, being members of the same clan, having communal responsibilities by virtue of marriage and so forth. It is little wonder then I found myself developing stronger bonds with the non-participating teachers as my research progressed. It was quite interesting to note that we shared thoughts and exchanged ideas in a relaxing atmosphere with the non-participating teachers, in their homes when I visited or in my home when they came. Or when we just met during communal activities, which gave me a solid base for reflections. Though I did not develop a profile for the non-participating teachers, they played a very significant part in the way I understood the world of teachers, viewing things from their perspective as we actively participated in community activities, events and occasions that are close and important to us. There was no time that these individuals felt that they were part of the research project and neither did I at anytime feel that I was a researcher. Questions such as, how is your research project going on? often came up. It was only on those moments when I sat down to reflect that it could dawn on me the significance of what an individual had said during the day or I could remember a conversation that we held earlier or even something I picked being said to someone else. This information filled in the gaps or helped me raise some important questions for further discussion/ probing with the teacher participants. This also provided me an opportunity to understand the culture of the school better and by extension the role-played by each and every teacher in the daily running of the school. Here was a group of teachers who felt directly responsible for the progress of the research project. They somehow felt scrutinized and often pressured to perform certain tasks no matter how much I tried to create a relaxed environment. On the other hand, there was this group

of teachers who are technically outside the research project but who significantly participate albeit unknowingly.

Theorizing Collaboratively

As an insider researcher, I had the responsibility of analyzing data collaboratively with teachers. I could not just pack my bags and leave before we had theorized and generated knowledge together from the information we had gathered. Kushner and Norris (1980) argue that the task of understanding can only be successfully pursued when provisions are made for people to "move from merely articulating what they know (i.e., providing us with data) to theorizing about what they know (i.e., creating meaning)" (p.27). It was therefore necessary that the final part of the research process was an engagement with data analysis, where the teachers gave meaning to their experiences through discussion, creating discourses and personal reflections. This part of the research process is important because the perspectives of the teachers can only be effective if they are not forced into preconceived "academic methodologies of categorizing knowledge" (St. Denis, 1989, p.38). As Hall argues, despite the best intentions in the world, researchers cannot comprehend, much less intuitively grasp, the conditions and priorities of survival and growth in the villages — by virtue of the fact that "our class positions and our class interests, the knowledge we created about their lives was [is] bound to be in error" (1979, p.398). Teachers' interpreting the data from their perspective was an important part of the project. It meant that they gained access to "scientific" methods of generating data about their world "so that they can make the necessary changes in their world as they see it" (St. Denis, 1979, p.41).

Research as a Site of Struggle

Although academics that are insiders experience moral dilemmas as they conduct research with living persons, some of my experiences were almost paralyzing. To use St. Denis' (1989) words, in reference to community-based participatory research, this kind of research is 'messier' than 'conventional' research because it does not follow a standard research formula. Instead, it is dependent on the interpersonal dynamics of all the research participants. Dependence on interpersonal dynamics makes it difficult to pre-determine transpiring events which may influence the outcome of the research. For example, two of my research partners were unable to implement their classroom projects even though they had actively participated in articulating what they know (i.e. providing data) and theorising what they know (i.e. creating meaning). They were unable to

participate fully in transforming the reality for social change (i.e. taking action). These unforeseen human dynamics reminded me about the inevitability of working with human beings that often have diverse needs and aspirations.

Such experiences enabled me to understand the 'risk' the researcher has to be willing to take in using such research strategies. This way of doing research should not be seen as an efficient and easier way. Assumptions and ideological perspectives accumulated over a long period of time are painful to give up. It can only occur when enough time is set aside for researcher and partners to know each other well, to allow opinions, some in conflict with each other, to be heard. This way, the researcher is able to give up something in exchange of something else more useful and practical under the circumstances. In short, the researcher has to be flexible.

The Double Role of an "Insider" Academic

In this paper, I have discussed the dilemma faced by academic researchers who also played the double role of being an Indigenous "insider." The dilemma rose from the fact that social science research has invented an "other" as the object of research, which becomes problematic when the "other" becomes a researcher. However, some research perspectives such as feminist, critical theory, action and participatory action research offer some practical solutions to the dilemma of choice. Each in its own way shows a commitment to power balance between the researcher and those researched; creating self-awareness through consciousness raising leading to social change. These research strategies when used effectively can enable the insiders to answer research questions that concern them.

Doing research with the people "goes a long way toward narrowing the knowledge gap, in that it relates the production of knowledge to the process of action and to the actual experiences of the powerless group" (Gaventa, 1993, p.33). Because of setting four criteria to guide my research: 1) it must not be research on "others;" 2) it must include the shared experience of all people involved in the research; 3) it must be dialogic; and 4) and there must be sharing of skills so that the process continues long after I had left, I have found to some extent that my research was an educational process and a means of taking action for change. This research made provisions for the teachers to move beyond articulating what they know (i.e. providing us with data) to theorizing about what they know (i.e. creating meaning) and to transform their reality for social change (i.e. taking action). This way of doing research created a space for advocacy and intervention, a process feminist researchers refer to as conscious

subjectivity, in which the model of a "distanced, controlled, ostensibly neutral interviewer" has been replaced with that of "sisterhood," an engaged and sympathetic interaction between two individuals united by the fact of gender oppression" (Patai, 1991. p.143). This way of doing research is morally defensible, particularly for groups that have previously been disadvantaged by knowledge generated through social science research.

Notes

1. This term is used here to refer to those academics historically situated within traditionally powerless groups of people.
2. This word "elder" does not indicate chronological age much as it shows the respect I have for their wisdom

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