

This is the third videocast about creative research methods. The first was about arts-based methods, the second was about research using technology and mixed methods research.

And in this videocast I am going to look at the transformative research frameworks and Indigenous research methods. These have something in common in that they both explicitly aim to make research more ethical, and they try and do this by identifying, addressing, and reducing power imbalances. But they're not the same so we're going to look at transformative research frameworks first. Examples of these frameworks are feminist, activist, and participatory research. They came about from places of disadvantage really so feminist research began with women in the 1970s, women like Ann Oakley, I think she doesn't necessarily describe her research as feminist research but it seems so to me, and Laurel Richardson in the US. So Ann Oakley in the UK was looking at researching topics like housework and the way women are treated by men and Laurel Richardson in the US had similar interests at much the same time. And activist research came about from the disability rights movement, primarily people with physical disabilities, also people with mental health problems, saying "If research is going to be done about us we will do that research, because we are actually the people who know what this is like and what's going on here."

And participatory research is very much similar to that activist emancipatory paradigm. The motto, if you like the tagline, of activist research is often 'nothing about us without us' and that really sums up the whole point behind participatory research which some people regard as useful and a good way of working beyond health issues or feminist issues. So why these research frameworks are called 'transformative' is because the idea is that they will cause some kind of positive transformation through the research for people's living conditions, people's well-being, whatever it may be.

So this is often very creative research, research within transformative frameworks is often in a sense made up as it goes along which doesn't mean that it has no rigor but it is creative. Creativity in itself isn't ethical, it can be used – if you think there are some very creative criminals, think how creative the Joker is in Batman for example. But creativity can be used for good of course as well as for evil and there is evidence of a very strong relationship between creative thinking and ethical decision-making. So ethics isn't really just for research ethics committees or institutional review boards as they're known in America. I've done some other videocasts on

research ethics which are on the same website as this and go into the whole ethical side of things in more detail, but for now it does make sense to just say that in terms of transformative research frameworks, doing ethics isn't really part of that, it's a very ethical research process as a whole. And it's very much more about moving towards or promoting or trying to create social justice, rather than simply a lower baseline of doing no harm.

It's hard to do transformative research properly. It needs a lot of time, it probably needs a lot of money, there's no room for tokenism. It's got to be done, it's got to be done thoroughly and it's got to be done quite relationally. You need to take people seriously, give them a lot of respect. These ethical issues bring it into a very similar part of the research world as Indigenous research methods although as I've already said it's not the same. The key to all this is to communicate with everyone involved. Different people will have different kinds of knowledge which can be used to help the research but communicating and helping them to communicate and allowing everyone to communicate is a key to making this happen and making it work. It's also important to be realistic. While you may be able to reduce or even eradicate power imbalances within the purview of the research project, you're not likely to have a huge effect on those power imbalances far beyond the scope of the research.

There was some interesting work done with Roma communities in Europe, the nomadic peoples of Europe – the Roma, the Romani people – and some very participatory research was done with them using a specific form of participatory research called critical communicative methodology very much about everyone having something to communicate something to offer something to contribute to the research and enabling that to happen. Researchers from Barcelona developed this approach and they used it with Roma people who were initially very resistant to being involved in research because they'd experienced research as abusive, they'd experienced researchers as people who came and took data away and built their careers on it without benefiting the Romani people at all. But researchers gradually won the trust of the Romani people and worked with them to look at how to overcome problems like low employment levels within Romani communities and lower education levels, difficulties in accessing education and employment in Europe, partly because of nomadism and partly because of prejudice and for other reasons too. So this research was completed and was eventually presented at the European Parliament with Romani people as part of the presenting team and it caused changes in laws in European law so the Romani communities

have more rights to things like education, employment, health care and so on, and this was enshrined in law. So you could say that that made a real difference to the balance of power in Europe. However subsequent research demonstrated that Romani people in their day-to-day lives really didn't feel a great deal of impact if any at all from this research, which is a bit depressing but doesn't mean it's not worth doing.

It's also important to remember that using transformative research frameworks brings ethical problems with it. It can seem that this research that's participatory, that reduces power imbalances, that is set up to be so ethical, is simply marvellous and ethical by default. One of the difficulties currently in the literature is that much that is written about transformative research frameworks is uncritical, and every framework for research, every methodology, has its limitations and it's important to acknowledge and recognize those. So for example let's think about participatory research. Supposing you wanted to do longitudinal participatory research, that might sound like a marvellous idea from a researcher's viewpoint, really interesting, but how does that look from a participant's viewpoint? Someone who might be asked to take part in research not only today or this week or this month but for the rest of the year, maybe for years to come – that's a big commitment to ask from someone. How are you going to compensate them for that commitment? Will you be able to do that? This is a problem.

In terms of writing, writing is often much less participatory in that you may find participatory research is carried out in terms of much participation even perhaps in research design, context-setting, data gathering, data analysis, but when it comes to writing it tends to be delegated to one person to do that. There are examples of people writing with participants but they're fairly few and far between. And then because this type of research is so relational there is a need to maintain or at least continue to acknowledge those relationships after the research has finished, and that can be challenging again in terms of time and resource and simply being able to maintain that many relationships in someone's life.

So that's a very quick look at transformative research frameworks. Let's look now at Indigenous research methods which is similar but not the same. These methods are developed by Indigenous researchers from Indigenous communities in countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, several African countries, many other parts of the world. And there's a tradition of research in many of these countries that long predates research in the EuroWestern tradition. Some oral traditions can trace their

research activities back 40 or 50 thousand years which is a very long time, so this is a very mature and well-developed way of doing research.

It is always collaborative, it's never one person is the researcher and the expert on research method while other people are the participants. It's always done consensually and collaboratively in community. Doesn't mean it's always problem free but the aim is always to reach agreement and discuss and to continue to discuss until an agreement is reached. It's often experimental or exploratory. It's usually about finding new knowledge, solving new problems. Replicating research isn't regarded as so important by Indigenous researchers as it is in the Euro-Western paradigm as I understand it. And of course I must say here that I am not an Indigenous researcher myself and I've learned this from books written by Indigenous people and from listening to Indigenous researchers speaking about their work but I'm not really an expert, I'm just bringing this to you because I think it's hugely important. I think we all need to be aware that the Euro-Western paradigm is not by any means the only paradigm there is.

Indigenous research is highly contextualized. It's for a specific problem, in a specific place, for a specific community, and it's the community who test and approve research, not separate bodies such as research ethics committees or institutional review boards that simply come together to do that one piece of work. Often incredibly creative and yet it's embedded in tradition so it manages to have a foot in both camps, solidly grounded in the tradition of the Indigenous community conducting the research, but also very willing to look at new and different ways of doing things.

Here's a useful quote from Bagele Chilisa who is a professor in Botswana in Africa. She's talking about how literature is perceived by Indigenous researchers. So in the Euro-Western paradigm, literature is primarily written, although we're beginning to widen that out a little bit and take into account perhaps some visual elements and some other non-textual elements. However Indigenous researchers have a very much more complex and rich view of literature including things like dances and tattoos and communities' stories, you can see this here, so it's a different way of working, a different basis on which to produce and create research.

And there are other methods these are just some of the methods that come in to Indigenous research. So ceremony, some Indigenous researchers regard research as a ceremony in itself or there may be ceremonial parts to a research process. And within ceremony there is ritual and outwith

ceremony sometimes there is ritual, they're not the same thing. Ritual may also play a part in research that can be used for data gathering, or for introducing researchers from one community to another community, so on and so forth. Existing community structures are used so research approval, ethical approval will probably be given by perhaps a council of elders or similar kind of body within a community of Indigenous people. Talking circles are common structures in some Indigenous communities which can be a useful way to gather data or to plan research, to discuss research, to think about what kind of research needs to be done in the community next. Indigenous research may well involve ancestors who may not be living, because Indigenous communities have ways of communicating with ancestors and respecting ancestors, and regard ancestors as very much as part of the community, just as living people are a part of the community. And it may also involve the land which can be seen as perhaps akin to a member of a family, or a member of a community, or certainly part of a community that can teach and can learn and can take part in research activities. If we're from a Euro-Western paradigm, these kind of ways of working can feel quite alien, quite foreign, and quite different. And some Euro-Western researchers are very dismissive, all that's silly you can't talk to people when they're dead, all that's silly the land can't teach you things, it's teachers who teach you things. But this kind of way of thinking is a form of 'epistemological imperialism' or trying to dictate how knowledge exists, how knowledge is constructed, and how people can know things. One of the things that I find particularly useful as a research methods scholar myself in studying Indigenous research methods is that it opens my mind to other ways of thinking, not necessarily ways that I am going to adopt but I think it's useful to me to have the awareness. There are many ways of thinking about and of knowing the world that we live in as researchers and as human beings.