

The Community-First Land-Centred Theoretical Framework: Bringing a ‘Good Mind’ to Indigenous Education Research?

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Abstract

This article introduces an emergent research theoretical framework, the community-first Land-centred research framework. Carefully examining the literature within Indigenous educational research, we noted the limited approaches for engaging in culturally aligned and relevant research within Indigenous communities. The community-first Land-centred research framework was created by reflecting on how we engaged in research collaborations with Indigenous communities. This process of reflection led us to realize that within our research we had been developing a research framework that was culturally-aligned, relevant, and based on respectful relations that differed in important ways from other community oriented research framework. We articulate how we differentiate this framework from community-based approaches to research and discuss the community-first Land-centred research framework’s foundational principles. We draw upon lessons learned through our various collaborations over the past seven years.

Keywords: Indigenous; Land-centred research; community engagement

Précis

Cet article présente un cadre théorique de la recherche émergente, la communauté et unième cadre de recherche concernant la Terre. Examiner attentivement la littérature au sein de la recherche en éducation autochtone, nous avons noté les approches limitées pour s'engager dans la recherche culturellement alignés et pertinents au sein des communautés autochtones. La communauté premier cadre de recherches sur les Terres centrée été créé par une réflexion sur la façon dont nous nous sommes engagés dans des collaborations de recherche avec les

communautés autochtones. Ce processus de réflexion nous a amené à réaliser que, dans notre recherche, nous avons mis au point un cadre de recherche qui a été adaptés à la culture, pertinente et fondée sur des relations respectueuses qui diffèrent de façon importante des autres cadres de recherche axée sur la communauté. Nous articulons comment nous différencions ce cadre des approches communautaires de recherche et de discuter des principes fondateurs de la communauté et unième cadre de recherche concernant la Terre. Nous nous appuyons sur les leçons apprises à travers nos différentes collaborations au cours des sept dernières années.

The Community-First Land-Centred Theoretical Framework: Bringing a ‘Good Mind’ to Indigenous Education Research?

Sharing Our Journey

In this article, we are introducing a new theoretical framework that is designed to address the complexities that arise when Indigenous¹ and non-Indigenous research collaborations are formed. It has emerged out of our own struggles with these complexities and the questions that we had to engage as part of those struggles. It is offered as a starting point for further conversations about research and research collaborations and as a sharing of where our mutual journey has taken us.ⁱ In our journey we have reflected on what it means to “bring a good mind” and/or do things in a “good way” regarding research and intercultural collaborations. We have questioned who gets to define these terms and in what ways they are expressed. This article does not provide an intensive analysis of the theoretical framework, but rather, is focused on the foundational principles upon which it is informed. We examine the ways Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers may collaborate and engage the concept of ethical space identified by Willie Ermine (2007). This concept, we believe, is central to successful collaborations. These ways of collaborating and engaging are addressed specifically from the perspective of the partnership between us as an Indigenous researcher and a non-Indigenous researcher, who have been working collaboratively together for over seven years.

Our collaboration has grown over time and been informed by our understandings of *Land*ⁱⁱ in its various forms as well as our relationship with and our responsibilities to Land and all our relations. It is important that we locate ourselves both in terms of

recognizing the traditional lands on which we stand and the backgrounds informing our perspectives. We are on the traditional territory of initially, the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nations and subsequently the Six Nations Confederacy (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora). As an Indigenous researcher, Author resides on Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, a First Nations community located in Southern Ontario. As a non-Indigenous researcher, Author identifies herself as a white woman who is a several-generations-removed immigrant to the ancestral lands upon which she resides. Together, we been challenged to reconsider concepts related to Indigenous research and explore the tensions, challenges, and possibilities associated with Indigenous and non-Indigenous research collaborations.

Through our joint and independent research, we have continued these conversations. We have spoken about the historical imbalances within Indigenous research where non-Indigenous researchers have problematized and misrepresented Indigenous communities and conducted research *on* rather than *with* those communities. According to Ermine, Sinclair, and Jeffery (2004) researchers tend to problematize or use a “pathologizing” (p. 12) lens within Indigenous research contexts. His views are grounded in his understanding of Smith’s (1999) position that “the word research is believed to mean, quite literally, the continued construction of Indigenous Peoples as the problem...and that problematizing the Indigenous is a Western obsession.” (Smith, 1999, p. 91-92). In the context of Indigenous and non-Indigenous research collaborations, the question that needs to be asked is how can “two knowledge systems work together in an ethical manner from a place where both traditions are respected?” (Ermine, Nilson, Sauchyn, Sauve & Smith, n.d., p. 35). Solution-oriented and strength-based research is emerging with increasing frequency, and collaborations that balance the two knowledge

systems, in an equitable and ethical manner, have a chance to contribute to that growing body of scholarship. We also recognize the challenges posed by collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers as they experience unique challenges and tensions as identified by Smith (1999):

While researchers are trained to conform to the models provided for them, Indigenous researchers have to meet these criteria as well as Indigenous criteria which can judge research as not 'useful', 'not indigenous', 'not friendly', 'not just'. Reconciling such views can be difficult. The Indigenous agenda challenges Indigenous researchers to work across these boundaries. It is a challenge which provides focus and direction which helps in thinking through the complexities of Indigenous research. (p. 140)

The community-first land-centred theoretical framework opens up opportunities to engage in Indigenous research through respectful relations. We have designed it to work as a full theoretical framework when all of its core concepts are adhered to and all its tenets are embedded within the research. If it is only used in part to inform research then it should be referenced as informing the research and not cited as the theoretical framework underpinning the research. It operates as a principled approach that must be customized to the specific research context in which it is engaged and is premised upon the purposeful and mindful creation of ethical space. While not minimizing or erasing the realities of historical and contemporary tensions and power struggles inherent in these relations, its principles provide guides for how Indigenous and non-Indigenous

collaborations can be accomplished in respectful, meaningful, and equitable ways, whilst contextualized to the realities and needs of those involved.

We acknowledge that there are many culturally aligned research methods and theoretical frameworks that are grounded in the understanding of respectful and meaningful relations (see Archibald, 2008; Bishop, 1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Jiménez- Estrada, 2005; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Author, 2008; Toulouse, n.d.; Wilson, 2008). While we hold many of principles in common, these methods/theoretical frameworks are primarily designed for Indigenous researchers doing Indigenous research, whereas the community-first land-centred theoretical framework focuses specifically on Indigenous and non-Indigenous research collaborations. Several of these methods/theoretical frameworks engage issues around power-sharing and the potential involvement of non-Indigenous researchers. They have informed our understanding and conceptualization of culturally-informed research including the following: power and privilege, insider/outsider positionality, decolonizing approaches to research processes, and privileging Indigenous ways of knowing. It is also important to note that while issues around the possible involvement of non-Indigenous researchers are considered by some of these theorists, several of the methods/theoretical frameworks draw upon ceremony and other intimate cultural knowledges which are not appropriate for use by non-Indigenous researchers. Through our own experiences attempting to work with some of these methods/theoretical frameworks in an Indigenous and non-Indigenous research collaboration, we found that there were some places that the non-Indigenous researcher could not and should not go while the Indigenous researcher could and did. We noticed that our approach evolved to address those tensions and it made us aware of various power-relations that we had not been engaging consciously.

This was the catalyst that encouraged us to explore models for balanced power-sharing and to consider how we might address those issues within Indigenous and non-Indigenous research collaborations.

Community-First Land-Centred Theoretical Framework

In laying out our conceptualization of the community-first Land-centred theoretical framework, we are offering to share own struggles with issues around collaboration and engaging related issues of power and privilege. In some ways, we see ourselves as creating our own treaty agreement—our own *wampum*. We are drilling and threading the beads; we are creating our own story. Our relationship to each other and what we are modelling within the theoretical framework is as sovereign nation to sovereign nation in so far as we each represent in some ways those traditions of knowing and bring them together in respectful and receptive ways that promote equitable power-sharing in the research processes. It is not about privileging either the Indigenous or the non-Indigenous researcher in the research process but about finding an equitable balance and braiding together the knowledges. As Alfred Metallic (as cited in McLean, 2010) stated, it is possible for knowledges to “co-exist without having to compete for voice” (p. 3) and we believe that this co-existence and the inherent equitable balance that can be created are essential components of Indigenous and non-Indigenous research collaborations. In addition, the imagery and conceptualization of two parties holding wampum is essential as it communicates the responsibilities that each has to the relationship that is being formed and nurtured as well as the depth of trust that each is giving and receiving. It is helpful to think of the associations that wampum holds, “Norman Jacobs, who was the keeper of belts for the Hodenosaunee Confederacy,

offered that wampum was a reflection of honesty and integrity, and that the approach of someone carrying wampum indicated that they could be trusted” (Sherman, 2010, p.114). This trust and willingness to take on these responsibilities by working through the tensions and challenges together is the foundation of the theoretical framework proposed in this article.

We believe that all collaborators need to be cognizant of the challenges and tensions associated with braiding together two knowledge systems. More specifically, the non-Indigenous collaborator needs to be mindful of the ways they are implicated in colonial relations and the impact this has had and continues to have on the Indigenous collaborator. The Indigenous collaborator must frequently walk in two worlds, while the non-Indigenous collaborator retains the protections and privileges of the dominant society and can check-out in a way that fails to recognize the Indigenous collaborator’s lived reality—in effect putting the relationship on hold or containing it in a box until the non-Indigenous collaborator is willing to re-engage. This creates an unequal power relationship. In contrast, choosing to remain together in spaces created by these tensions and consciously and mindfully creating ethical space together is what moves these collaborations forward in ways that balance community realities with dominant systemic structures while always placing relationships in a position of prominence and being willing to question our “unquestioned answers” (Wilson, 2008) within the context of the relationships.

Willie Ermine (2007) describes the creation of ethical space as the “space between the Indigenous and Western thought worlds” (p. 94). We draw upon his metaphor of two men sitting together as representing two sets of intentions (Indigenous and Western) poised to confront each other and extend it further to think about our

theoretical framework as a two-party (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) theoretical framework with each party bearing certain responsibilities in terms of engaging and nurturing the relationship. Each must be willing to remain together and deal with the space as tensions and power relations emerge until that ethical space is created in a mindful way. That space must include the recognition that the Indigenous party is not responsible for dealing with the colonial baggage that has been left behind from historical colonial relations and research—that is the non-Indigenous party's responsibility. Each collaborator has a responsibility to deal with the fallout of the colonial relations in a way that brings internal balance as well as balancing and restores restoring the collaborative relationship. Both are responsible for their willingness to engage with their own preconceived notions and to consider how what the other is introducing into the space might inform or shift those notions. This relationship is not something that can be put in a box on a shelf until it is convenient to engage the tensions, challenges, and power relations. We see it as a continuous engagement wherein strength is created through the act of pushing through and staying engaged. It is essential to address the questions that have not previously been asked that cause us to reflect on how we know what we know and how others' ways of knowing may both challenge and inform our perspectives and taken-for-granted assumptions.

Relationships are central. Wilson (2008) has described Indigenous research as ceremony that centres on the development of relationships and on maintaining accountability to those relationships. Our approach to research is grounded in the development of relationships and shaped by the responsibilities we have to those relationships. It is based on the elements of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility introduced by Kirkness and Bernhardt (1991) in relation to First Nations

and higher education that has since been extended by researchers to apply within research contexts. This has commonly been referred to as the four R's of research but we prefer to use the five R's as we believe it is essential to include relationships. Relationships are fundamental because respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility are grounded in an understanding and acknowledgement of interconnected relationships and are expressed through those relationships.

Community consultation is often identified as part of doing research in a “good way.” However, the centrality of relationships must be respected within potential collaborations. Part of the work that must be done is to define what consultation means within the context of the collaboration. For some, consultation means having the community approve a research plan developed outside of the community while others see consultation as community input and involvement in every stage of the process. The Tri-Council Policy Statement 2nd Edition (TCPS2) acknowledges that the nature and extent of community engagement should be determined collaboratively and may take various forms. However, while the TCPS2 provides some examples it does not address the potential range in defining consultation nor does it set a minimum level of engagement. We agree with the TCPS2 in that consultation should be jointly determined by the community and researcher and contextualized, but as a bare minimum it must involve establishing egalitarian and collaborative relationships within the community. When consultation occurs without first establishing relationships, then we assert that it is not representative of the complex meanings embedded in the term bringing a “good mind” to research. We recognize the term “good mind” as based on the three principles of peace established by the Peacemaker to the original five nations of the Hodenosaunee Confederacy. The power of a good mind was one of the three principles and as such is

grounded in very old and sacred knowledges reflecting a particular way of knowing and being that should not be misappropriated. While we generally choose not to use the term “good mind” as we frequently find it to be misappropriated, we have used it in the title to call attention to this tendency to misappropriate Indigenous thought and turn the associated terms into buzzwords. We choose instead to deeply reflect on our principles and ways we enact those principles in our collaborations and research.

The community-first Land-centered theoretical framework is premised on the idea that the parties will work from their respective areas of strength so that equitable balance is created. This strength-based approach means that each may be prominent at different points in accordance with their areas of strength and at other times the collaboration may be more equal in terms of the prominence of the parties. The theoretical framework is not only emergent and responsive in terms of community needs and the research, but also in terms of consultation. Consultation is not a static process but rather is responsive and emergent, evolving with the collaboration as all the members build and enhance their strengths and skills. As the relationship progresses, so, too, should the nature and intensity of the collaboration. Thus, it is constantly in flux: Periods of withdrawal and more intense engagement should be expected with members of the collaboration, collectively and individually, as they work through internal tensions and challenges triggered by their own growth within the relationship. There are pivotal points in the relationship where things could go either way and it is the ways members of the collaboration choose to engage those moments that shape how the relationship will continue or dissipate.

The theoretical framework is provocative. In the words of Wilson (2008), “if research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right” (p. 135). It is

transformative because by following its principles, collaborators are brought to a place where they are exposed to experiences throughout the collaboration and called on to make a choice to embrace those experiences along with the associated transformation, or repudiate them. This often occurs as a series of pivotal moments that can bridge one to the other, or allow collaborators the space to disengage and then reengage, or act as the ending point for the relationship. As previously discussed, relationship is central and the other R's are grounded within the understanding of relationships and our responsibilities to those relationships. They serve as guiding principles within the theoretical framework and are interconnected with the framework's two primary interrelated elements, namely community-first and Land-centred that also open up opportunities that can lead to transformation.

Community-first seeks to transform the ways we think about and do research because it causes us to reorient and reprioritize previously held assumptions; for example, the distinction between research on a community and research with a community. By incorporating Land-centred we seek to shift the ways researchers think about relationality by exposing them to thinking about Land, not solely as a geographical and material place, but as a spiritual and relational place where "the world of spirit is interconnected with the world we see and interact with on a daily basis" (Haig-Brown & Hodson, 2009, p. 168). As such, it may offer a decolonizing approach to research. These elements form the name of our theoretical framework as they are the central underpinning of the framework while the five R's serve as its guiding principles. Together, they act to provoke, challenge, and bring to the surface complex tensions related to various issues around colonial relations and assumed privilege, connected through systemic structures

and may be enacted in Indigenous and non-Indigenous research collaborations. We have chosen these terms with careful attention to their implications and meanings.

In developing our community-first Land-centered theoretical framework, we carefully examined why the tendency for others to identify us as community-based research did not adequately capture what we were doing (see Author, Author, Bennett, & Bomberly, 2009). Ermine (2004) identifies the current methodological trend in research with Indigenous populations as being “primarily qualitative, participatory, collaborative, and community-based”(p.12) in character. In identifying our research as being community-first research, we differentiate it from community-based research and associated research approaches. The main distinction being that community is recognized first in all aspects of research and associated collaborative relationships and this positioning is enacted throughout the research.

While the term “community-based research” has strong community connotations and does generally refer to research involving community partnerships where research is situated in a community and may be around an issue of importance to the community (see Centre for Community Based Research, 2007; Israel et al., 2005; Israel et al., 2003), it does not always emphasize the relational position of community in the way that community-first research does. Community-based research tends to apply the following principles: work to establish equitable partnerships in all stages of the research; recognize the community as a separate identity; ensure that knowledge generation has a mutual benefit for all partners; focus on issues that have relevance to the community; employ a cyclical/iterative process in conducting the research; build on community strengths and resources; allow time to develop relationships and commitment to sustainability; be aware of social inequalities and work to empower communities and develop power-

sharing processes; and, ensuring all partners are both involved in the dissemination process and recipients of the dissemination materials (Israel et al., 2005; Israel, et al., 2003; Postma, 2008). There is usually an emphasis on the co-production of knowledge and social action with community (Postma, 2008).

Postma (2008) describes community-based research as a “strategic approach to increasing the relevancy, acceptability, and usefulness of evidence-based scientific findings”(p.17) and is frequently conceptualized as benefitting *marginalized* communities. Characterization of communities as being marginalized problematizes the community and moves away from a power-sharing model into a deficit-based model. This is particularly troubling for Indigenous communities as such communities are frequently described as marginalized and engaging in relationships from that perspective not only decentres the community but also sets up a framework where the principles may be positive and directed at empowerment but the fundamental structure and processes are operating from a deficit-based approach that implicitly positions the community as being less than other partners and stakeholders in the research. This makes power-sharing models ineffective because the necessary base of assumed equality is absent. In addition, the idea of empowering a community is fraught with contradictions as the idea that one group or individual can empower another group or individual is also based on implicitly assumed inequalities grounded in colonial relations.

Using the terminology *community-first* is essential to indicate that our approach does not implicitly position the community as deficient, unequal, or less than other partners, but rather, explicitly places the community first. This recognizes our awareness that researchers tend to problematize or use a “pathologizing” (Ermine, 2004, p. 12) lens within Indigenous research contexts and that this can contribute to research that may be

perceived as being done in a *good way* while it is actually based on implicitly assumed inequalities, colonial relations, and imperialist positioning. Our explicit positioning of the community as primary also marks our willingness to engage in the power differentials and struggles that continue to exist and may be triggered by bringing together disparate world views. By designing our theoretical framework as a decolonizing approach, we seek to expose researchers to the complex challenges, tensions, and shades of resistance that are embedded in collaborative relationships, and to the engagement that occurs while negotiating the ethical space created by the clashing of disparate world views.

Researchers working within community-based paradigms may be actively engaging some of these same tensions but the critical difference between community-first and community-based is that within community-based approaches, research can be done without engaging the tensions because it is not an explicit requirement of the approach. In contrast, community-first explicitly requires the active engagement of ethical space and the ongoing negotiation of tensions between worldviews and any baggage (e.g. assumptions, mistrust, interaction patterns) associated with those views.

Other approaches are often paired with community-based research and often have promising elements but not explicit commitment to engaging the relational tensions in a meaningful way. Participatory research and action research are commonly paired with community-based approaches (Giese-Davis, 2008; Shore, Wong, Seifer, Grignon, & Gamble, 2008; Silka, Cleghorn, Grullon, & Tellez, 2008; Stoecker, 2008). One of the most common pairings is between community-based research and participatory action research (PAR). PAR has been characterized as an approach conducive to research with Indigenous peoples because it aims to be non-intrusive, to promote equal relationships, to be empowering, inclusive, community centred, and flexible (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Bishop

& Berryman, 2006; Castellano, 1993; Dickson & Green, 2001; Ermine, 2005 Green, et al., 1995; Hudson, 1982; Jackson, 1993; Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008; Smith, 1999; Webster & Nabigon, 1993). However, as discussed in relation to the community-based approach, the idea of empowerment is flawed because it implies an inequality and power differential that positions one partner as superior and able to bestow power, and continues to foster unequal power relations.

Ermine (2005) identifies the current methodological trend in research with Indigenous populations as being “primarily qualitative, participatory, collaborative, and community-based” (p. 12) in character. He indicates that the hallmarks of research within Indigenous populations are as follows: the inclusion of one or more members of the community in a role of importance on the research team; Native involvement in the research design and delivery; explicit outline of the usefulness and benefit offered by the research to the community; cultural relevance of the research; and research based within authentic collaboration and partnership. These elements of research have also been identified by other Indigenous researchers (Bishop, 1996; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Smith, 1999). It should be noted that the hallmarks identified by Ermine and others should be considered as minimum requirements that need to be addressed. Community-based research and PAR often meet many of these hallmarks, but if they are based on flawed concepts of empowerment and do not engage relational tensions then they are not well suited to research within Indigenous contexts and will have difficulty achieving the collaborations and partnerships described by Ermine.

While community-based and PAR might work well within many different community-based contexts, Indigenous communities have particular relational contexts which are addressed by our proposed theoretical framework. Many Indigenous

researchers have identified community-based and PAR approaches as appropriate for Indigenous communities because they are seen to be more sensitive to community needs and more likely to include power-sharing aspects—but in many ways this has been an identification of what might constitute a good choice out of the available options. Our approach provides a different option in that it emerged in response to lessons learned working with Indigenous peoples and communities and being open to new ways of doing research. The community-first Land-centred approach pushes against the established and accepted normative boundaries in traditional mainstream ways of *doing* research. The community-first aspect of this theoretical framework pushes against these margins by requiring researchers to explicitly put community first and to respectfully and responsibly immerse themselves in the research elements inherently embedded in that positioning. Specifically, researchers need to actively engage the ethical space created within their collaborations, negotiate tensions and power differentials as well as constantly and consistently redefine shared terminology, relationships, and the responsibilities of those relationships through consultation and collaboration.

Having addressed the community-first aspect of our theoretical framework, we now explore the importance of the Land-centred research component. We have incorporated Land into our theoretical model since the importance of Land for Indigenous peoples as the central underpinning of all life and its relational nature has been recognized and embraced across the ages. We have chosen to capitalize Land when we are referring to it as a proper name indicating a primary relationship rather than when used in a more general sense. For us, land (the more general term) refers to landscapes as a fixed geographical and physical space that includes earth, rocks, and waterways; whereas, “Land” (the proper

name) extends beyond a material fixed space. Land is a spiritually infused place grounded in interconnected and interdependent relationships, cultural positioning, and is highly contextualized.

Let us begin by asking ourselves whose traditional lands are we on? As we sit and write we are cognizant that we are on the traditional territory of firstly, the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nations and, subsequently the Six Nations Confederacy (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora). We are also conscious of the relationships between readers and this story (which is at once us and yet not us directly) and as such we ask that readers also reflect on whose traditional lands they are located on as they read this text. Wilson (2008) asserts that there is a reciprocal relationship that develops between the storyteller (author), listener (reader), and the ideas being presented. Haig-Brown (2009) writes that “long before it [land] was disrupted by cities and sprawling suburbs, this land was and continues to be a gathering place of Indigenous peoples with *complex histories of dwelling and travelling*” (p. 5). As such First Nations communities are woven into a complex web of historical and contemporary relationships with urban and rural landscapes. These vistas form intimate and storied connections with the First Nations people who were born, lived, travelled, and died on these landscapes since time immemorial. Their stories may lie beneath layers of colonial settler encroachment and occupation mounds of concrete and asphalt, and be eclipsed by skyscrapers; nevertheless, their lives were and are assiduously recorded in the land and waterways. For Elders in the Isi Askiwan research project, ancestral connections to Land are spiritual relationships between the natural world and human responsibility (Ermine, Nilson, Sauchyn, Sauve & Smith, n.d.). According to Wilson (2008) “all knowledge is cultural and based in a relational context” (p. 95) with Land, ancestors, and ecology;

therefore, a theoretical framework is required that can be accountable to those relationships. The Isi Askiwan Elders write that community centres on the values, beliefs, stories, ceremonies, knowledges, and languages that are grounded in Land.

Land from an Indigenous perspective carries with it the idea of journeying, of being connected to, and interconnected with, geographic and spiritual space—in other words a deep sense of identification through a cosmological and ecological connection to both natural and spiritual worlds. This connection and identification lead us into a discussion of land-based research as a model for sovereignty and self-determination whereby community is the privileged voice that dictates and guides the research and academia is a respected but marginalized voice. Land has traditionally been considered a sacred, healing space where anyone who is connected to a place can find what he or she needs to maintain, sustain, and build a healthy life. Land-centred research moves beyond the boundaries of traditional mainstream conceptualizations of research and is, therefore, in essence a decolonizing journey into a space where community protocols, norms, voice, needs, values, knowledge, traditions, and stories are privileged and centralized within a culturally aligned theoretical framework. It is a space whereby the community mentors, teaches, and guides researchers in ways to conduct research within their space, on their land, and under their terms. The researchers willingly and humbly place themselves in the role of non-expert and allow the community to be the experts in the research processes. This is particularly crucial for non-Indigenous researchers “because the Indian people are the scientists to their own land” (Ermine, Nilson, Sauchyn, Sauve & Smith, n.d., p. 33). Our theoretical framework has been informed by Haig-Brown and Dannenmann’s work on land as the first teacher (see Haig-Brown, 2005; Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002; 2008) as well as the Indigenous scholars mentioned above.

Applying the Community-First Land-Centred Theoretical Framework

As previously mentioned, our community-first, Land-centred theoretical framework is a principled approach based on the five R's that must be contextualized to specific research contexts. It is premised upon the purposeful and mindful creation of ethical space that is constantly shifting as collaborators (re)engage difficult questions, and navigate the space where two worlds come together. Our theoretical framework can be used either as a full theoretical framework, in which the framework is embedded in all aspects of the research or to inform research. The theoretical framework provides the opportunity to engage in a transformative process and requires collaborators to embrace the multi-layered experience. Collaborators need to choose their levels of engagement and commitment and decide whether they will engage with the process by having their research informed by the theoretical framework or by choosing to embrace the full theoretical framework, working through how to embed it into all aspects of the research.

Collaborators who choose to use our community-first Land-centred theoretical framework to inform their research should meet certain core criteria but do not have to apply the principles of the theoretical framework throughout the entire research process. Instead the core concepts of the theoretical framework inform the collaboration but an alternate method such as PAR or Action Research may be used within the research process and would also inform the analysis and as such the approach to dissemination may vary. In practical terms, this means that in establishing and nurturing the collaboration, the core principles or the five R's (Relationships, Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility) together with the interconnected components of community-first and Land-centred, inform and guide the collaboration to promote

transformation and lead to decolonizing approaches to research collaborations.

Collaborators should be aware that tensions are likely to arise between the decolonizing approaches to research collaborations that are provoked by the framework and the use of alternative methods that may be informed by colonial relations. These tensions arise as the collaborators engage in creating ethical space within the collaboration, which results in an increasing awareness of colonial influences and associated treacherous undercurrents leading collaborators to become more aware of the colonial underpinnings and related assumptions that may be embedded in their chosen method.

Thus, collaborators engage in a transformative process, whether choosing to employ the full theoretical framework or using it to inform their research. It is essential to remember that as it is intended to be a transformational process, the level of awareness and the willingness to engage may vary between collaborators. It is highly unlikely that an Indigenous collaborator would be totally unaware of colonial influences; however, it is possible that a non-Indigenous collaborator may be largely or completely unaware of colonial influences. A non-Indigenous collaborator may be entering into the collaboration with good intentions but without an understanding of what the core principles really mean when they are enacted on a daily basis and without an appreciation of the depth and insidiousness of colonial relations. This is not the latest, sexy approach to doing research, it is based on ancient relevant knowledges and offers a different way of collaborating that takes into account the shifting ground that must be navigated when engaging in meaningful, respectful, and equitable collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers.

The choice to use our community-first Land-centred theoretical framework requires that collaborators commit to applying the principles and the interconnected

components to inform and guide the collaboration and throughout the entire research process. The theoretical framework will be embedded in all methods or approaches to analysis and dissemination used within the research. Every aspect of the research process will be informed and guided by the community-first Land-centred theoretical framework. The challenge is not only in the commitment to the theoretical framework, but also in the contextualization of the theoretical framework. Each of the core principles and the interconnected components provoke challenging questions that guide collaborators in establishing what each means in the current context. For example, consider the following challenges: deciding what reciprocal looks like in a particular context; navigating what is meaningful or relevant to whom and in what ways; learning how to show and earn respect; establishing the multilayered responsibilities triggered by the collaboration; understanding responsibility within relationships and ways to nurture respectful relationships; recognizing community as first and conceptualizing the multitude ways to enact that positioning; exploring the conceptualization of Land going beyond geographical and physical space and making connections about how Land can inform and be enacted in research and collaborations. As indicated by these challenges, our theoretical framework provokes, challenges, and brings to the surface complex tensions related to various issues around colonial relations and assumed privilege that are connected through systemic structures and may be enacted in the research collaboration. The mindful and purposeful creation of ethical space provides a place to engage these tensions and challenges the collaborators to maintain the space and collectively navigate the tensions keeping in mind that each collaborator may have different and shifting levels of awareness and willingness to engage.

As previously mentioned, this article does not provide an in-depth introduction to our community-first Land-centred theoretical framework, but rather has focused on its core principles (the five R's - Relationship, Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility) and its interconnected components (community-first and Land-centred). While the concept of a *good mind* was not central to our framework, its principles, based on ancient relevant knowledges, form the foundation for the 5 R's that underpin the core principles and interconnected components outlined in this article. Once again, we caution against the tendency to misappropriate Indigenous thought by turning Indigenous concepts into buzz words, such as *good mind*, that become devoid of meaning through their widespread and ambiguous use. We are challenging readers to think about the implications of our theoretical framework and to consider how it might be enacted through collaborations and research processes. It is also essential to note that our theoretical framework does not ignore the power imbalances between community and university researchers, but rather, is designed to move beyond colonizer/colonized and academia/community binaries in ways that offer an approach to ensuring imbalances, struggles, and associated tensions are mindfully and purposefully engaged. The detailed description of our theoretical framework and its implementation goes beyond the scope of this article but will be forthcoming through another medium.

Concluding Thoughts: Sharing Our Wampum

Throughout this article we have spoken generally about research, but our theoretical framework was developed through our experiences with educational research. While we assert that the theoretical framework can be used in any type of Indigenous research, it has a particular affinity for educational research having emerged out of

educational research contexts. It lends itself to the active involvement of youth and children in collaborations and research processes while providing guiding principles that will inform and nurture the involvement. Furthermore, the educational context often calls for multiple levels of collaboration and is one of the primary historical and contemporary sites of struggle and resistance involving colonial relations. As such, it requires theoretical frameworks that can offer decolonizing approaches to research processes and collaborations that require meaningful and deliberate considerations of underlying currents and associated assumptions expressed through daily interactions. The core principles and interconnected components of the theoretical framework encourage collaborators to create ethical space where these assumptions can be explored and challenged, having implications for transformative practices.

We have discussed the many ways this theoretical framework is our own wampum. In sharing our learning, we have drilled and threaded the beads forming particular patterns that are continuing to emerge throughout our journeys. Each enactment of our theoretical framework in varied research contexts will continue to weave a wampum story with common threads (core values and interconnected components) and unique emergent and intricate patterns (contextualization) that can be shared.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Our collaborative writing of this article does not lend itself to a clear title of ownership as it is collectively and not individually held, and our mutual journey is offered up to others. We actively resist and reject the imposition of Western concepts around authorship. When we write, we do so collaboratively and stating that our authorship is equal does not fully capture the collaborative nature of our writing. Our work together is best captured by the concepts associated with circularity rather than by linear or mathematical concepts such as equality and order. As current publishing practices tend to be linear in regards to authorship, within that structure we content that the order of authors as interchangeable. In reference lists readers must reference the article twice noting each author as first author. In-text citations must be done as follows: (Author & Author, 2012; Author & Author, 2012) for single citations; multiple citations must consecutively alternate authors throughout.

ⁱⁱ In this article we have chosen to capitalize Land when we are referring to it as a proper name indicating a primary relationship rather than when used in a more general sense.