FOCUS ON METHODOLOGY

Enriching research practices through knowledge about Indigenous research methodologies

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Introduction

Learning about Indigenous research paradigms and methodologies offers insights and reflexive opportunities for those who seek to improve their research practice. This paper explores how research at the "interface" can enrich scholarly inquiry across the academy. Whilst a single paper cannot do justice to the sophistication and nuance of Indigenous methodologies, as an authorship team of one Indigenous and two non-Indigenous academics and through our established relationship and subsequent conversations, we present in this paper seven distilled methodological learnings that can enrich standard qualitative research practice. We predominantly explored the work of Indigenous scholars worldwide and, where relevant, have drawn on non-Indigenous scholars when there may be "interface" compatibilities. We also build off some of our previous work, such as Andrews (2020a, 2020b, 2021) and Bolton and Andrews (2018).

It is very important to clearly state that we are not suggesting readers, particularly non-Indigenous readers, use this paper as a template for Indigenous research or as a guide for conducting research with Indigenous peoples and communities. Rather, our intention is to share our personal learnings about Indigenous research with a view to bridging methodological understanding to achieve high quality qualitative research. Indigenous researchers have sought to navigate the interface between Indigenous and western research to generate new knowledge that reflects the interests, values and priorities of Indigenous peoples. The last 25 years has seen significant effort by Indigenous scholars across the globe to establish an Indigenous academic research agenda and pioneer change in research practices. The interface between Indigenous and western knowledge systems has much to offer research as a basis for the generation of new knowledge (Durie, 2004; Martin, 2008). It is at this interface, or intersection between two knowledges, that we make connections and offer our insights.

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This paper is divided into four sections: Beginning, Middle, Reflective End and New Beginnings, a framework drawn from our work. Within these four sections are seven key methodological reflections under the subheadings understanding place in research, positionality, worldviews in research, privileging knowledges, relational accountability, storytelling as methodology and circular research processes, and at each subheading are our key learnings. This is shown in Figure 1, noting the arrows grow in size as we approach "New Beginnings" as a way of illustrating the enriching of knowledges and practices as the learning process loops iteratively.

Figure 1

Enriching Research Practices Through Knowledge About Indigenous Research Methodologies
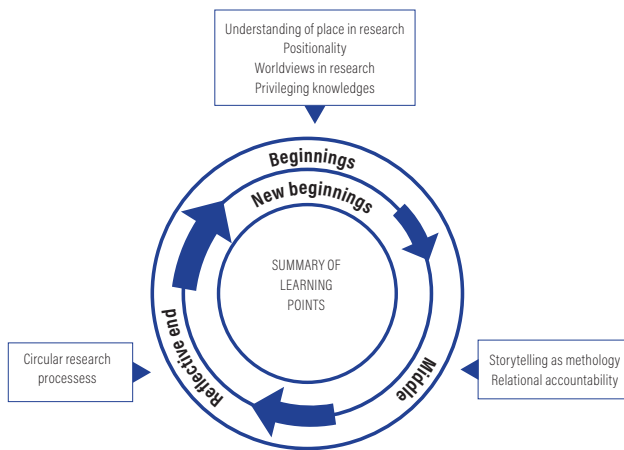
Beginning

This section includes four sub-sections: understanding of place in research, positionality, worldviews in research and privileging knowledges, which we viewed as essential to the sharing of research knowledge at the interface.

Understanding of place in research

This paper was developed and written on Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Gunai Kurnai and Yuggera Country. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of these lands and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and acknowledge continuing connection to place, waterways, skies and culture on unceded lands across Australia.

Acknowledgement of Country is a small but significant gesture of critically analysing one's own place within the research process. Distinct to notions of Country, however, is the understanding of place and how it provides context to research in numerous ways. Encounters of place are complex and perceptive and embody relationality in ways

that are layered and compellingly real (Seamon, 2018). The Aboriginal constitution of place creates opportunity for the interrogation of colonialism but, importantly for all researchers, it creates opportunity for important connections with people, land, environment and ideas.

Key learning #1

Acknowledging Country and the places in which research is conducted is an Indigenous cultural protocol that has wider implications for how research is considered. Indigenous conceptualisations of land and place (Ganesharajah, 2009) can offer much to critical questions of inquiry across the research spectrum. Research design and methodology can, importantly, address place and define it explicitly and politically (Tuck & Mckenzie, 2014). We invite the research community to consider that all research in Australia is taking place on Aboriginal lands and to reflect on how this may inform your thinking and writing about your research practice.

Positionality

Consistent with the principles of Indigenous research methodologies, we acknowledge the importance of paying attention to and critically reflecting on our positionality as a process of relational accountability (Martin, 2003; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Martin (2003) says that "the protocol for introducing one's self to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established" (p. 204). Some readers may be familiar with the conceptualisation of positionality as "the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study" shared in the *SAGE Encyclopaedia of Action Research* text (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 627). We recognise that our identities are not separate from the way in which we individually relate to our research. Within educational research, there are "strikingly different ways of looking at social reality … [and] … correspondingly different ways of interpreting it" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 5). From how we consider a research question and conceptualise it to how we engage with the literature, who we read and how we analyse it, the entire research interaction is grounded in the positioning and worldview of the researcher (Reich, 2021).

We engaged in a critical discussion about our positions for this paper and decided that as a collaborative "interface" discussion paper, an intertwined positioning was most appropriate for this context. While we have much in common, we note the deep differences in our worldviews, lived experience and subsequent social and political understandings. We share with the reader that we have cultural identities that include Australian Indigenous Palawa Trawlwoolway, Anglo-Indian and non-Indigenous Australian with Scottish and German ancestry. We all identify as cisgender health professional female academics working in academic research, teaching and specialist roles.

We are mothers to seven children, collectively, and have shared identities as daughters, sisters, aunties, partners and friends to our families and communities. While we, now, all work in different roles in different areas and institutions within the academy, we have worked together for the last 10 years in teaching and learning and related research. Much of our collective work has been focused on Indigenous health teaching and cultural safety in the health professions (Bolton & Andrews, 2018; Remedios et al., 2018). Through this work, we have gained much insight into processes of positionality and relational accountability and have developed mutual trust and respect for each other through our learning and sharing.

Key learning #2

It is common to be asked "where are you from?". When it is asked by a non-Indigenous person, it usually refers to your place of birth or where you were raised. When asked by an Indigenous person, it is laden with nuance and many embedded layers of meaning, and it generally means "*who* are you from?". Often called positioning, this self-location reveals information about family, kin, identity, community and accountability. This information is of particular importance to the research context, and such positioning is a central tenet to relational accountability (Wilson, 2008).

Worldviews in research

Shawn Wilson (2008) outlines and defines Indigenous research paradigms as the "interrelated concepts of ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology" (p. 33). He defines ontology as "what is real?", epistemology as "how do I know what is real?", methodology as "how do I find out more about this reality" and axiology as "what part of this reality is worth finding out more about?" and "what is it ethical to do in order to gain this knowledge, and what will this knowledge be used for?" (pp. 33–34). The concepts of epistemology, ontology and axiology have been cited to be "important if somewhat neglected topics in health professions education scholarship" (MacLeod et al., 2020, p. 995). Indeed, a recent descriptive quantitative study of health professional education (HPE) research papers found that 84% of HPE research papers of the sample (77/90 papers) did not report an epistemological approach, and of the small number of papers that did report an epistemology (n = 12), it was exclusively social constructivism (Han et al., 2022). Considering that "research methodologies represent assumptions about knowledge and ways of knowing" (Han et al., 2022, p. 3), this study suggests a problematic trend that HPE research currently operates from a "limited variation in epistemological approaches and research designs" (Han et al., 2022, p. 22).

It has been noted that "as HPE investigators, we are steeped in ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies within which we have been trained. … Think about what we might learn if we embraced other paradigmatic approaches and principles as valid and important" (MacLeod et al., 2020, p. 995).

In the *First Knowledges* series, Lynne Kelly, a non-Indigenous co-author, reflects "Why, oh why was I taught nothing at school about Aboriginal intellectual achievements? Why was I taught nothing about memorising my lessons using song, story, dance and bringing to life the landscape all around me?" (Neale & Kelly, 2020, p. 1). She goes on to reflect, discuss and share her learning journey of Indigenous knowledges and how:

> My world view is now much richer than it was before. I have lost none of the love I have for books and technology, but now I have a swag of new tools to learn in a different way. … I will never stop learning. (Neale & Kelly, 2020, p. 17)

Key learning #3

Worldviews are central to how research is conducted. "Every researcher constructs a research question or study based on a particular epistemology" (Thomas et al., 2020, p. 990), and "for those seeking to do good research, it is important to understand and declare the philosophical understanding that one aligns themselves with" (Ajjawi, 2022, p. 70). Engaging purposefully with your own worldviews and being open to learning from others can enhance both you as a researcher and, by extension, your research practices. Considering multiple ways of knowing, being and doing to enable a deeper, fuller understanding of a phenomenon can bring researchers to the interface of knowledge systems that can richly benefit their research. Careful engagement with other worldviews is of course critical. "Learning from" is the important message here rather than adopting or appropriating.

Privileging knowledges

There is growing international Indigenous-led discourse regarding Indigenous research paradigms. Sitting central to this are Indigenous research methodologies and intellectual sovereignty as forms of knowledge production agency (Fredericks, 2009). This work examines fundamental questions about who "owns" the knowledge, how the knowledge is generated, who can conduct the research and who benefits from the research (Martin, 2003; McCarton et al., 2022; Nakata et al., 2012; Smith, 2012). As part of a broader project of decolonisation that requires deconstruction of pervasive western epistemologies, intellectual sovereignty supports the construction and application of Indigenous and other knowledge systems that have been systematically "othered" by the academy (Fredericks, 2009; Ribeiro, 2020). Privileging Indigenous epistemologies in Indigenous research approaches, such as Kaupapa Māori, or enacting Indigenous data sovereignty principles determines very different pathways and places for research. The common adage "by Māori, for Māori, with Māori" when considering Kaupapa Māori research shifts the power and control imbalances (Curtis, 2016; Wilson et al., 2022, p. 382). In terms of data sovereignty, the Lowitja Institute's Research Pathways: Information Sheet Series Indigenous Data Governance and Sovereignty outlines "the right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations to maintain, control, protect, develop, and use data as it relates to us" (Lowitja Institute, 2021, p. 2). An

implication for researchers is the need to reconsider how we privilege the knowledge of participants, the ownership of "data" and how we disseminate our interpretation of people's stories for diverse readerships.

Not all Indigenous researchers prescribe to a strict Indigenous research paradigm, most in fact sit at the research interface (Durie, 2005). Macfarlane et al. (2015), for example, draw on Kaupapa Māori principles to demonstrate the culturally bound nature of knowledge systems, however western and Indigenous knowledge systems, they argue, need to be positioned within a third space (the interface) such that one is not privileged over another. To illustrate this, Macfarlane et al. (2015) offer a model using a "he awa whiria" (braided river) metaphor that sees two streams of knowledge connect and converge to maximise the benefits of each system, strengthening each system and balancing power relations. This metaphor, along with others, offers an opportunity to all researchers to "harness the energy from two systems of understanding in order to create new knowledge that can be used to advance understanding in two worlds" (Durie, 2005, p. 306).

Key learning #4

There is a deep Eurocentric history within the academy that is clearly evident yet not always acknowledged. "Health professions education (HPE) is built on a structural foundation … based on Eurocentric epistemologies" (Paton et al., 2020, p. 1107), and often "we have been conditioned not to question why we think we know what we know, or why we think some ideas are 'core' to the curriculum while others are not" (Paton et al., 2020, p. 1110). Whilst this paper does not offer advice on how to conduct research in Indigenous contexts and on Indigenous topics, it does offer a sharing at the research interface, noting the exclusion and othering of Indigenous knowledges in the academy but the richness with which it is being applied by Indigenous scholars and the learnings it can offer in enriching research practices within the academy. The researcher would benefit from reflecting on whose knowledge is being privileged, how it is being privileged and why.

Middle

With the foundations of the beginning of the story laid, we explore here, in the middle section, relational accountability shared through storytelling as methodology.

Storytelling as methodology

This paper is written, to this point, predominately through synthesis and analysis of published literature. In the following subsection, we use storytelling through recorded and transcribed conversations that we, as the authors, include to demonstrate the use of storytelling and relational accountability. We acknowledge the Indigenous concept of yarning, which is a distinct Indigenous relational methodology, demonstrated in Barlo et al. (2021) in which they "include excerpts of Stuart's reflections through the article, to elaborate on important aspects of the methodology" (p. 41). The inclusion

of our edited conversations also acknowledges Shawn Wilson's (2008) "Research Is Ceremony" text, in which he identifies relational accountability as levels of stories and the circles of relationships within research that hold its integrity. Finally, this style follows a similar "in conversation" method that lends itself to interface discussion, such as that demonstrated in Nakata and Maddison's (2020) *Griffith Review* article "Working Through the Problems: Negotiating Friendship, Producing Results". As Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, respectively, Nakata and Maddison reveal the power-sharing of relational accountability through storying in their conversation. In a similar style, we have employed a storytelling methodology to sharing our collective learnings as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics.

Key learning #5

It is important to clarify two things about storytelling. First, that "Indigenous stories need to be led by Indigenous people" (Behrendt, 2021, p. 89) and, second, the stories we tell should not perpetuate the "dominant perspective that has assumed the right to tell the stories of the colonized and the oppressed that they have re-interpreted, re-presented, and re-told through their own lens" (Tuhiwai Smith, cited in Achibald et al., 2019, p. xi). This key methodological learning is not about taking others' stories and re-presenting them but rather considering if and when respectful and appropriate use of storytelling may enrich research processes. Some readers may be familiar with the concept of "story, not study" by Lingard & Watling (2021), where the authors ask researchers to not "lose track of the story" in their writing as a powerful "scientific storytelling approach" (Linguard & Watling, 2016, p. e12). As a collaborative authorship team, we elected to use this approach in the following section.

Relational accountability

Some readers may be experienced with research design methodologies that consider relationships as integral to the research approach, such as autoethnographies, participatory research and codesign research approaches, or some readers may be qualitative researchers, which is known to be "inherently relational" (Ajjawi, 2022, p. 69). Similar to these conceptualisations, Indigenous research paradigms rest on the idea that "Indigenous ontology and epistemology **is** relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they **are** reality)" (Wilson, 2008, p. 7). We discussed this idea and how it informed our thinking about our own research.

> Shawana: *"A lot of Indigenous research is drawn from an age-old process of engagement, and this is something that all researchers can learn from, and thereby enhance their own research. The idea of building the relationship is that it is in fact part of your epistemological framework and scaffolding for thinking about research. I went down the path of phenomenology, and so I adopted some of those terms such as 'horizons of knowledge', but also used some Indigenous thinking around that, which brought*

me to the research interface, such as Yolngu concepts of Ga̱n̲ma, of bodies of water, freshwater and saltwater coming together to produce new knowledge. It was a process of acknowledging the knowledge of the subjects, the knowledge of the researcher, the process of interpretation, and then what comes from their mergence."

Jo: *"What I'm learning from you, Shawana, is that relationships were key, and that perhaps you won't know until you start forming those relationships about how things might be most appropriate in this context, with this community, with these people. And from listening to you share your work, it's showing me that research is a journey, and that as a researcher, we need to be prioritising those relationships first and foremost, and that the relationships are the reason that you're involved in the research. So you need to be agile as a researcher, and be open to changing things as you go to respond to participants' insights and preferences."*

Shawana: *"I think therein lies a really important part of the message, which is that you actually put yourself in what is probably a scary situation for some people, in that you don't know where it's going to take you. Shifting the balance of power is important. It's not yours to control, in terms of the direction of the research, and the complexity of that relationship unpacks multiple stories. So there's stories within stories that unpack the nuances of the research focus. That idea of giving up control and putting an accountability lens to it such that the community that you're engaging with, or the people that you're engaging with, has more agency in the research and therefore more control over the direction of it."*

Louisa: *"I'm thinking this issue of the work of the researcher, how you position yourself, certainly in terms of qualitative work. It really is giving some nice guidance to different ways of thinking about yourself as a researcher, and how you enact and listen—how you select stories, and people having the right to not share stories, so the knowledge you gather is partial. What's also really interesting to me about what you're talking about Shawana is that shift around 'the accountability conversation'. For me, it is usually around rigour, and who judges the quality of the work, and so it's shifting attention away from that classic assumed epistemology and the way methods are enacted. And it's helpful to be using similar but different language and using the language as a different lens and a different way of thinking about it. Who are you accountable to when you step into research? It's not the peer reviewers; it's actually the people who are sharing their data with you."*

Shawana: *"Yeah, exactly. And even reframing that. It's people who are sharing their lives with you, and their story, and their lived experience. It's data, but it's a story, isn't it? So it's a story to be held with care and respect. And if we think about Shawn Wilson's work, Jo, how do you then hold a story noting that Aboriginal people have held stories for generations, thousands of years. It's the same concept, isn't it? Whether we refer to it as data, information or stories, you've got to hold it with care because it can inform*

generations to come, or it can inform change, or both. So it's reconceptualising our ways of knowing that it's something precious to be held rather than thought of as objective data to be analysed and just put out in whatever way. It's a substance of change, or a substance of renewing or informing the way we consider the world around us."

Louisa: *"And when you talk about generations to come, the typical way of describing that would be 'disseminating findings to your colleagues', but it's so much more respectful and forward thinking beyond just 'you've done your work when you've published it'. It's about that respectful sharing of story, knowing that it's going to go onwards, knowing that the story is not going to stop at the first publication, that other generations are going to take that story to use, hopefully respectfully."*

Shawana: *"Yeah, if we think about Traditional knowledge holders, in all respects they are researchers. They are engaging with the world around them; they're charged with the responsibility for holding that knowledge; and they're also responsible for knowledge translation, sharing that to the rest of the community, and to younger generations, which is done through ceremony. So relational engagement underpins the sharing of knowledge both across and through generations, and it's the research participants, the storytellers and sharers to whom accountability must be afforded."*

Key learning #6

We encourage researchers to consider how they could build deeper relational accountability with co-researchers and/or research participants in their research processes, during the formation of research questions, research design, data collection methods, data analysis processes and dissemination. Through deep relational accountability, the role of the researcher shifts, as does the power balance. Regulating relationships of power and inequity, the origins of relational accountability reach far into ancient Indigenous social and political systems. Relinquishing control as a researcher is a difficult thing to do, but building equity into research through relational accountability offers a stronger ethical frame to the work.

Reflective end

A reflective end is, in fact, not an end at all. Reflecting on and translating the learnings from our research offer new understandings and horizons that can shape humanity and all that we are connected to. Dr Moana Jackson (2008), a legal scholar and pioneering Māori activist, described:

Whakapapa [genealogies] as being a series of never-ending beginnings. A person may die but then someone else is born and so the whakapapa continues in this process of never-ending beginnings. For me stories are like that. If they are to help us work towards improving the nature and extent of our interconnectedness, if they are to help us to find and nurture those relationships, then they have to be continually in that process of never-ending beginnings. (p. 27)

This notion of continuity and connectedness can also be applied to research and the process of cyclical learning and relational engagement.

Circular research processes

It may seem slightly at odds to introduce the notion of circular relationships under the ending section. To clarify, we don't do this to suggest it is a "final thought", rather to offer a brief but important point that highlights the way in which the aforementioned key methodological learnings are connected.

Indigenous intellectual traditions have shown their temporal endurance in maintaining cultural continuity. Indigenous inquiry and the knowledge it generates is held in stories within stories across generations. Tafoya (cited in Wilson, 2008) states:

> Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles, because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. (p. 6)

Understanding the nature of research as a human endeavour for learning and building knowledge necessarily requires the circumnavigation of ideas.

Key learning #7

We encourage the research process to be thought of as a circular journey, gaining deeper insight within each research activity and allowing for growth in a cyclical fashion rather than a linear one. Thinking of research practice as a series of never-ending beginnings, within a circular, iterative process of listening and learning would open us to being shaped by our research, adapting as relationships deepen and being more responsive to learnings without feeling that we are on a linear journey towards "an end" but rather to new beginnings.

New beginnings

Our concluding comments for this paper focus not on the end but the new beginnings that are created by research. The ongoing nature and application of learning through research across lifetimes and through generations are a series of never-ending, or new, beginnings. Each cyclical process offers new knowledge and new horizons with which we can understand ourselves and the world we live in.

We reiterate here that we do not write this paper as advice on how to conduct research in Indigenous contexts and on Indigenous topics. We are aware of the longstanding traditions of extraction of Indigenous knowledges to benefit colonial systems (Smith, 2012). Rather, we consider this piece as a sharing at the research interface, foregrounding Indigenous research practices that have benefitted our own qualitative research with a view to providing key learnings with which to critically understand our research practices.

We acknowledge that there are many ways in which research can be conducted and disseminated, and that the choices a researcher makes are influenced by many factors, some of which we have explored briefly in this paper in seven selected key learnings. Through the writing of this paper, we consider that where the research is taking place (understanding of place in research); who the researcher is, and their relationship with the research area (positionality); worldviews in research; the systemic social and political conditions within which the researcher works (privileging knowledges); understanding "data" as story (storytelling as methodology); relational accountability; and a circular and iterative research process are factors that shape how research can be conceptualised, conducted and learnt from.

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