“*Reflectelling*”  
Reflection and Storytelling in Research

Assignment #5

Submitted by:

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Abstract

The proposed research project started with a straightforward research question inquiring as to the nature of the relationship between Indigenous communities and glaciers, both historical and contemporary. The readings and studies have led me to realize this question is, in actuality, a project of many parts. Historical research is only one part. By looking at contemporary, ethical considerations encouraging land-based research, and research through the arts and film, my ideas for this project feel validated and timely. Art making in intergenerational groups near to glaciers, followed by reflection and storytelling can be a way to encourage dialogue about our changing world at the community level. Anxieties and fears can be eased by connecting with a group and feeling a sense of purpose in the face of uncertainty. By using the framework of traditional research methods such as narrative analysis and phenomenological interpretation, the collected data can be explored. By using a preliminary lens of new research approaches, ways of looking and learning can be refreshed and renewed. Perspectives can be multiplied by incorporating creative freedom into the research planning process.   
 Of utmost importance will be working in collaboration with the participants in specific places to discover how this research project can best serve their knowledge needs and build this into the plan. Looking at how the research can support change in oppressive policy and environmental degradation practices can be cocreated in each place in relationship with the people and the land.

Introduction  
 The Indigenous oral history contains ecological knowledge built up from thousands of years of experience and experimentation. In this time of witnessing changes in climate and the destruction of natural spaces, a resource with knowledge about where we have come from and how we can respect and value the environment may create positive meaningful change. There is a need to talk about the changing climate and share stories, both historical and contemporary, about the environment and weather. By hearing oral history about our relationship with glaciers, we can provide a greater context for understanding our experience; potentially creating a sense of meaning, and for rediscovering ways of interacting with the natural world that don’t bring about mass destruction.   
 In the face of flood events and forest fires, feelings of anxiety are intensifying. We hear about eco grief with regularity and see the urgency and desperation that people, particularly the young are trying to bring about changes to the way we treat the earth environment. It can help to mitigate feelings of hopelessness by getting involved. The effects of this can be seen in the worldwide protests and marches in support of a new way of being. Sharing in a common task during social struggle and suffering, can bring about feelings of comradery, belonging to a group, and even providing meaning and purpose in life. All of these factors can counter feelings of anxiety and fears around death and annihilation.

Ethnohistory  
 Our relationship with glaciers has been a changing one over thousands of years, so researching the Indigenous oral history about glaciers in Canada is an important place to start. In preliminary searches and readings, I have already been struck by interesting perspectives that had not been aware of before. For example, here in British Columbia, there are 14,000 glaciers, so plans of travelling and working near to all of them to bring awareness will not be possible in a lifetime. Reading about glaciers advancing in the 1500’s in stories was initially shocking to me because in my life context, and reality, glaciers have only been retreating. I also read stories about the importance of respectful behaviour and language due to the sensitivity of areas around glaciers. This awareness came about when a young woman brought shame to her community through her words and the glacier advanced destroying the village before it could be moved. The evidence of powerful glaciers growing and destroying places is undeniable when looking at our rock formations and lake placements; but in current day it feels hard to believe that glaciers can grow. When trying to reimagine what is possible for this world, it would be very helpful in expanding the imagination to hear of inspiring events of the past. There is much to learn from our historical relationship with glaciers. Some of the keywords I will use in preliminary searches will be, indigenous, glaciers, oral history, traditional ecological knowledge, storytelling, ethnohistory, anthropology, natural resources, climate change. The preliminary research for this project will be based on the guiding question of: *Through an ethnohistorical lens, as shared through traditional ecological knowledge, how do Indigenous Peoples perceive glaciers?*

Art-Based Experiential Research  
 Bringing the historical research into present day, I propose repeatable community events. In the spirit of giving in reciprocity to the community near to the glacier, a specific plan could be cocreated with each community in relation to the needs of ‘place’ for them. By place I refer to all the relationships in the community, land, animal, people, climate (Chambers, 2017:100). Generally, we can coordinate an intergenerational art making event in close proximity to the glaciers; involving seniors, elders, and young people working together, and learning form each other. The art responses would be a part of the qualitative, subjective study. Stories, experiences, perspectives and ideas could be shared through the art making process. Specifically, communities may have different ideas about how they can benefit from the research. For example, an opportunity for elders to share their stories may be needed, or a place to connect with others out in nature. Maybe they would like the emphasis on the art show to bring about awareness and have a presentation series, or connection with the schools in an educational component. The project could adapt to each place, each time it happened. This project could be recreated with a new group in a new place, in relation to a different glacier repeatedly.   
 After the art-making-at-the-glacier event, the data could be shared through film and art show in the community. Film would have the ability of sharing stories and experiences in the person’s own words. The art will be able to visually share the entirety of the experience simultaneously; something the written format can not do.  
  
Research Methodologies   
 Sometimes invented verbs can enliven and invigorate research projects by capturing the essence of what is occurring in the searching and discovering of knowledge. I have come up with proposed research methods in an attempt to capture the essence of what is being done. This was a very important part of the process because it helped me to understand that I was actually imagining my research question as a multi-stage event.   
***Artstanding***. (Art + Understanding) This is a proposed method of making art to gain a deeper understanding of the subject or topic in relation to oneself.   
***Grandpainting***. (Grandparents + Painting) This research method involves seeking knowledge through painting with grandparents.   
***Reflectelling***, (Reflection + Storytelling) which is a proposed research method that involves a time of reflection followed by story telling.   
***Glaciarting*** (Glaciers + Art) is most direct in its approach and simplicity; artmaking in close proximity to glaciers to better understand our relationship with each other through exploring our relationship with the changing land.   
 In relation to my initial research question of, *Through an ethnohistorical lens, as shared by oral tradition and traditional ecological knowledge, how are glaciers perceived by Indigenous Peoples?* the Griffin & May (2017) reading was very inspiring in understanding how narrative analysis can be a tool and research methodology for learning about people’s subjective experiences through stories, historical oral tradition, and first hand accounts of contemporary events. Arts-based research conducted outside would be in alignment with connecting and respecting the relationship with the land and glacier. This approach would allow the original voices to be heard instead of ‘translated’ through the words of the researcher. The design for the project will be in collaboration with each community participating, to ensure an intention of giving back and reciprocity by discovering how it can serve the community.  
 Initially I had anticipated that phenomenology would be a fitting research method for my proposed project because I was looking to learn about the ‘lived experience’. My proposed project has two parts; studying the stories of glaciers both historically and in a contemporary context, and then reflective art making by participants in relation to, in response to, and in close proximity to the glaciers. It seemed a response in art making could be appreciated through the lens of phenomenology, particularly from the perspective in van Manen’s writing, “Pathic understanding requires a language that is sensitive to the experiential, moral, emotional and personal dimensions of professional life.” (van Manen, 2007:22).  
 In the Giorgi (2012) articles on phenomenology, the process of ‘description’ in practice being precise and leaving out interpretations and additions; just sticking to the facts (Georgi, 2012:8) felt like a non-judgemental way of looking at the art, but it did not fully capture how to look at the first half of the research and hear stories and traditional ecological knowledge in the oral history of people living near to glaciers. I tried the next Giorgi (2014) reading hoping for a perspective that would more closely align with my vision for research. In this reading he describes Husserl’s phenomenological method. This method starts with the researcher practicing phenomenological reduction, a kind of leaving out our own assumptions. It then requires describing the phenomenon to determine the essence. The essence can be discovered or uncovered through the process of description and what he calls, free imaginative variation (Giorgi, 2014). This methodology seemed appropriate for looking at the art and exploring the act of participating in the art making event, but it seemed cold or inappropriate to use when listening to people’s stories. When listening to people’s experience and stories about their perceptions of glaciers, it seemed there may be a better methodology.  
 I then looked to the reading on narrative analysis and interpretive phenomenological analysis (Griffin & May, 2017). This seemed like a combination of methods that could really be a tool and method for looking at the entire project as a whole and to analyse the collected data. These methods are typically used for analysing texts and visual materials, so this could fit very well with looking to understand the stories and oral tradition as well as the contemporary art making. They both incorporate case studies and a person-centred approach which would allow for both refection and respectful inquiry. By looking at the stories as whole narratives and within a context, a respectful position is built into the research design.   
 Both methodologies also look at how language and social action are a part of the framework of social power dynamics (Griffin & May, 2017:511). Like other methods of interpretation, we are trying to discover meaning and gain a sense of understanding. By studying how people speak about specific events and topics, it also illuminates the social perspectives on the topic.   
 Narrative analysis can study the narrator, the audience, and recognize a sequence of events or a plot. I wonder if this will allow for an opportunity to look at this project within the broader global context and earth’s storyline plot of climate warming and glacial freezing and melting. By listening to the stories within this context we may be able to hear the past, present, and thoughts for the future. This method offers the freedom to look at the content of what is being shared but also the context within which it is being shared. Understanding our world on a personal level and from a localized perspective is valued in this research and could potentially illuminate our human relationship with these ancient ice forms.   
 I am also inspired to include an ‘epoché statement’, which is a statement with the intention for transparency outlining the phenomenological researchers’ assumptions going into the research (Griffin & May, 2017:519). For this particular project, this statement could include my assumptions about global warming, glaciers, and Indigenous perspectives.   
 The lens of narrative analysis combined with interpretive phenomenological analysis will be a comprehensive research methodology to capture all the elements of this research and arts-based project. By incorporating respectful approaches to working with individuals and Indigenous communities a collaboration that is ongoing and beneficial through film and storytelling can be co created.   
 New and experimental research methods were also studied with the intention of broadening the field of imagination, peering behind the traditional research walls, and inspiring freedom in ways to gain knowledge. First looking at ‘troubling’ the boundaries of research were dismantled, but the approach was not an ideal fit with my project. In searching for another methodology than ‘troubling’ that would feel like a better fit with my intentions behind the research idea, ‘diagramming’ as described by Davies and Scalway (2018) seemed appropriate. In this approach to research, the ethnographic intersects with geographic. In a two-dimensional depiction, the interplay of lives being lived and interacting with a physical space can be captured and explored in a new way. In this way, new meaning can be found (Davies & Scalway, 209:2018). This also incorporates a recognition of the power of words whether through poetry or word art. The aspect that resonates the most for me is the idea that the diagram created is intended to encourage further dialogue and feedback. This connects with my project idea in the showing and sharing of the art created with community for further discussion. The public response to the art show or film becomes a part of the research itself. Diagramming as an approach to research also shares my values about going to the actual location where the research is taking place, to remove it from the academic institution and conduct in place among people incorporating active observation. As with art and the diagram, all aspects can be seen simultaneously allowing for a depth of understanding and an opportunity to find new meanings.   
  
Ethical Considerations   
 Working with a relational approach will be essential to building relationship with communities, people, the more-than-human environment. Being in right relationship can be approached by being respectful and planning in a collaborative way that recognizes the need for reciprocity (Wiebe, 2019:20). This research project will need to incorporate space for cocreating the specific plans based on the needs of the participants and community involved. If this project were repeated in a variety of locations, some of the planning needs to be done in place to ensure a response approach that benefits those involved.   
 A new idea that has emerged from the readings is the value in documenting the art making through film. Originally, the idea was to have participants onsite, respond to the glaciers through writing, painting; a community engagement art making event. The intention is for this to have a focus on intergenerational sharing in a common experience. Initially, an art show seemed a way to showcase the learning and sharing by showcasing the art or “data” to the community. But now I can see the importance of the stories and experiences to not be translated by the researchers. Maybe, like Wiebe’s (2019) project, film might capture the community art response as well as the story telling about Indigenous relationships with glaciers both historical and contemporary, while inviting community collaboration. Wiebe explained how the researcher acts as witness, to learn, to envision, and to bring about change through their work in relationship with a community. Traditionally researchers have acted as translators, but through mixed media arts, space can be made for the voices themselves. Wiebe emphasizes the importance of appropriate, invited, and collaborative participation in Indigenous communities as part of the research process of engagement. The importance of reciprocity between researcher and community is a shared experience co created over a long time period. With an awareness of these needs and ethical considerations, ways that the projects can give back and continue in relationship with the communities and participants will be at the forefront of planning. Before starting in each location, meetings could be had with community members to discover and hear what will benefit them and how would they like the research to be used. The research plan could then be adapted to incorporate the generated ideas.   
 Wiebe’s writing outlined the need to use research to speak back to oppressive policies towards people and environment. This part of the design process could be discussed in these initial meetings. In this way, the research could be used to “speak back” to oppressive policy and stand against environmental destruction in specific ways that benefit the community which is being engaged. I anticipate this will be a sensitive area for dialogue during the meetings since diverse groups may have opposing ideas about what social change they want to move towards.   
 The Chambers (2017) article was also very helpful in understanding how to perceive the subjects of the research. I became aware that there are two components in this project; the glaciers and the Indigenous communities / participants. He explained that when referring to “place” in Indigenous research methods, we are talking about, “a network of lived relationships” including human persons, the land, other-than-human persons, meaning plants animals and climate and that the knowledge gained is dependant on the relationship between these (Chambers, 2017:100). The article has a warning to not treat Indigenous Peoples as objects and to put an end to doing research ‘on the other’. This is also known as extractavist research, referring to researchers going to Indigenous communities collecting data, taking it away out of the community, then not reciprocating the benefits.   
 I am hoping that by incorporating Indigenous oral tradition, and contemporary Indigenous community members in collaborating on the design of the glacier art projects, that this will anchor the research in a respectful recognition of the traditional ecological wisdom around glaciers and climate change, and not treat the people nor the glaciers as objects. I am anticipating this awareness to grow and deepen as I further learn how to be respectful from participants and the land.   
 Chambers points out that for research and academic institutions to be decolonized, the place in which research occurs must be rethought. Multiple sites in a research project should be used especially out in nature because knowledge is gained through relationship with place and land (Chambers, 2017:106). This concept appeals to me and plan to find even more ways of working outside the traditional frames of research.  
 The readings have helped me to incorporate a more respectful approach towards the people and the glaciers themselves, viewing them not as inanimate objects of ice, but as more-than-human. The idea of researching out in nature beside the glaciers has been validated as well as the art as research approach. By always being open to learning the awareness of ethical considerations in relationship with the participants and land, this project can move forward with conscience and connection.

Conclusion   
 Providing space for sharing and exploring our experiences in a changing climate can encourage awareness, behaviour change, positive relationship building with others and the natural world and a chance to express our feelings and fears. An art making space is one in which change can be imagined and created. It is a positive and motivating way to look at dynamics and relationships. By creating art as a group and showing it, allows for a collective voice in which all individual voices can be heard in the context of the whole. This will inherently inspire interest in the situation with the melting glaciers.   
 Dialogue for change can happen safely through art in a group about our fears and worries for not just the future, but for the present. Children need a space for their voices to be heard amongst the adults on this topic. By creating art in an intergenerational group, all perspectives can be respected and integrated. By connecting the young and the elder in a shared common experience, the past can be brought into the present, and a new cocreated way of being can move us into the future conscientiously and courageously.

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