

Ethical foundations and principles for collaborative research with Inuit and their governments

Fondements et principes éthiques pour la recherche en collaboration avec des Inuit et leurs gouvernements

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Article abstract

Academic research in Canada involving Aboriginal peoples has changed dramatically during the last 20 years. From an academic researcher's perspective, the changes have recently become formalised in the release of the 2nd edition of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethics in Human Research*. In this article we examine similarities and differences in the way ethical review is constructed and approached from university, Aboriginal and, in particular, Inuit perspectives. We begin our argument with a general comparison of research ethics as expressed in academic and Aboriginal sources in order to find areas of commonality, difference, and potential ambiguity between the two perspectives. We then briefly review our own experience with a multiyear research project involving several Inuit governments of different spatial and administrative scales. We conclude with discussion of a common issue arising from academic research, including our own work with Inuit and the research ethics board chaired by one of the authors. It concerns how to address potential tension between critical inquiry associated with Western scientific paradigms and respect and use of Inuit knowledge within a collaborative research process. In conclusion, we offer some "best practice advice" to academic researchers who face such a dilemma.

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Lawrence F. Felt*, David Natcher**

Résumé: Fondements et principes éthiques pour la recherche en collaboration avec des Inuit et leurs gouvernements

Les recherches universitaires au Canada impliquant des peuples autochtones ont spectaculairement changé au cours des 20 dernières années, et ces changements ont été récemment formalisés par la publication de la 2e édition de l'*Énoncé de politique des trois Conseils: Éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains*. Dans cet article, nous examinons les similitudes et les différences de construction et d'approche des questions éthiques du point de vue des perspectives tant universitaires qu'autochtones, et en particulier, inuit. Nous commençons par une comparaison générale de l'éthique de la recherche telle qu'elle se dévoile dans les sources universitaires et autochtones afin de percevoir leurs points communs, leurs différences et les ambiguïtés que pourraient potentiellement recéler les deux perspectives. Nous présentons ensuite brièvement notre propre expérience au sujet d'un projet de recherche de plusieurs années dans lequel étaient impliqués divers gouvernements inuit d'échelles spatiales et administratives diverses. Nous terminons en exposant un problème commun dans la recherche universitaire, incluant nos propres travaux avec des Inuit et le comité d'éthique de la recherche présidé par l'un des auteurs. Il s'agit de résoudre les tensions potentielles entre l'investigation critique relevant des paradigmes scientifiques occidentaux et le respect et la mise à profit des savoirs inuit au sein d'un processus de recherche en collaboration. Pour conclure, nous proposons quelques «conseils de bonne pratique» aux chercheurs universitaires confrontés à un tel dilemme.

Abstract: Ethical foundations and principles for collaborative research with Inuit and their governments

Academic research in Canada involving Aboriginal peoples has changed dramatically during the last 20 years. From an academic researcher's perspective, the changes have recently become formalised in the release of the 2nd edition of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethics in Human Research*. In this article we examine similarities and differences in the way ethical review is constructed and approached from university, Aboriginal and, in particular, Inuit perspectives. We begin our argument with a general comparison of research ethics as expressed in academic and Aboriginal sources in order to find areas of commonality, difference, and

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potential ambiguity between the two perspectives. We then briefly review our own experience with a multiyear research project involving several Inuit governments of different spatial and administrative scales. We conclude with discussion of a common issue arising from academic research, including our own work with Inuit and the research ethics board chaired by one of the authors. It concerns how to address potential tension between critical inquiry associated with Western scientific paradigms and respect and use of Inuit knowledge within a collaborative research process. In conclusion, we offer some “best practice advice” to academic researchers who face such a dilemma.

Introduction

Academic research in Canada involving Aboriginal peoples has changed dramatically during the last 20 years. Contemporary “best practices” have recently become formalised in the 2nd edition of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethics in Human Research (TCPS2)* (CIHR et al. 2010). The TCPS2 document provides binding guidelines that all university researchers must follow to receive funding from any of the three major Canadian research funding agencies. The inclusion of Chapter 9, devoted specifically to research involving First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples, provides a new set of standards. Drawing upon ethical protocols for Aboriginal health research dating back to the 1990s, as well as numerous Aboriginal consultations, Chapter 9 codifies these standards in response to calls from Aboriginal communities and organisations that academic research be more respectful, egalitarian, and participatory. While the TCPS2 document is a welcome step in this direction, it nonetheless only recommends guidelines for researchers and various academic regulatory bodies, such as Research Ethics Review Boards (REBs). The guidelines typically have to be implemented through some form of negotiation that applies to a specific research setting. Despite such specificity, common ethical issues continue to arise from the perspectives of university researchers and from those of Aboriginal peoples and their governments.

In this paper we examine similarities and differences in the way ethical review is constructed and approached from university, Aboriginal and, in particular, Inuit perspectives, as encountered on a large university research ethics board (REB). By way of illustration, we compare and contrast respective ontologies and epistemologies of Western scientific inquiry and *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*¹ (‘Inuit traditional knowledge’).

¹ *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* is a widely used Inuit term throughout the Eastern Canadian Arctic and in Northern Labrador. The term is derived from the verb root *qaujima* meaning ‘to know’ and has a more general translation as ‘that which has been long known by Inuit’ (Jean Briggs, pers. comm. 2011). Originating in Nunavut, it denotes a more comprehensive, holistic alternative to “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” (TEK) by embedding specific knowledge and understanding within a larger complex of

In light of our own experiences as academic researchers collaborating with Inuit peoples and their governments as well as the first author's chairmanship of a university REB, such an emphasis is particularly useful for academic researchers and the Inuit. Our focus is largely that of an academic researcher although we strive to understand and fully embrace not only our guidelines as outlined in the TCPS2 but also the extensive literature and resulting best practices articulated from an Aboriginal perspective.² Our work is best understood as an attempt to bridge the two research cultures in the quest for effective and respectful practices in research with Aboriginal peoples, particularly the Inuit.

Our arguments in this paper are drawn from our own research experiences, the organisational records of university Research Ethics Boards (REBs), and the three major Canadian granting councils. REBs operate under a mandate that all Aboriginal-related research at the signatory institution shall comply with the TCPS2 and such relevant supporting documents as *Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People* (CIHR 2007). As signatories to "Memorandums of Understanding" through which REBs are created, universities must implement the guidelines to receive funding from the three granting councils.

We begin with a general comparison of research ethics as expressed in academic sources and in Aboriginal documentation in order to find areas of commonality, difference, and potential ambiguity between the two perspectives. We then briefly review our own experience with a multiyear research project involving several Inuit governments of different spatial and administrative scales. We conclude with discussion of a common issue arising from academic research, including our own work with Aboriginal and Inuit peoples and the REB chaired by one of the authors. The issue is how best to reconcile potential tension between critical inquiry and respect for Inuit knowledge. In utilising information from the REB, we generalise experiences to avoid identifying particular researchers. Only examples from our own experiences are hence identifiable. In conclusion, we offer some "best practice advice" in the spirit of both TCPS2 and Aboriginal perspectives.

Definition and application of research ethics in the TCPS2

In the Western enlightenment tradition, ethics refers to a philosophy of human character and conduct that includes distinguishing right from wrong and any associated moral duty or obligation to a people and/or community (New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus 1991: 137). The descriptor *research* specifies the area of human activity that such moral considerations govern. The TCPS2 begins with three reinforcing core principles: respect for persons; concern for welfare; and justice (CIHR et al. 2010: 8).

Inuit values, beliefs, culture, language, social organisation, and spirituality in an ever-changing environment (see Thorpe et. al. 2001: 4; Wenzel 2004: 240-241).

² For First Nations, Inuit, and Métis materials in this regard, see Castellano (2004, 2008, 2010); ITK and NRI (2007); NAHO (2007a); Nipingit (2010); NRI and ITK (2002[1998]).

Respect for persons means recognising the basic and inalienable rights all humans possess and the moral obligation researchers have to embrace and protect these rights when interacting with research participants (*ibid.*: 8-9). Concern for human welfare means showing sensitivity to all dimensions of a person's life, including those that matter most to that individual (*ibid.*: 9-10). Welfare comprises several dimensions, including physical, mental, and spiritual health as well as the person's social and economic circumstances. The TCPS2 specifies several determinants of welfare including, but not limited to, housing, personal security, employment, family life, and community membership. It then mandates that researchers and research ethics boards should do their utmost to protect the welfare of potential participants by providing sufficient information on the risks and benefits of proposed research for them and, where relevant, for the larger group to which they may belong. The final principle, justice, means the obligation to treat participants fairly and equitably (*ibid.*: 10-11). Fairness requires that all participants in the research process be accorded equal respect and concern. Equity demands that the risks and benefits from any research be distributed in such ways that no individual or group disproportionately benefits or suffers.

These three guiding principles subsume the original TCPS guiding principles, including respect for human dignity, free and informed consent, vulnerable persons, privacy/confidentiality, and respect for justice and inclusiveness. The TCPS2 summarises the interrelationship of these three general principles as follows:

The importance of research and the need to ensure the ethical conduct of research requires both researchers and REB members to navigate a sometimes difficult course between the two main goals of providing the necessary protection of participants and serving the legitimate requirements of research. The three core principles that express the value of human dignity provide the compass for that journey (*ibid.*: 11).

The new TCPS2 has a separate chapter on guidelines for applying principles of research ethics to Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Many of the core principles are derived from CIHR guidelines for health research involving Aboriginal peoples (CIHR 2007). The CIHR guidelines are, in turn, the culmination of several years of negotiation and experience dating back to early First Nations and Inuit "Regional Longitudinal Health Studies" that first formulated such core principles as ownership of, control over, and access to research and resulting data (NAHO 2007a, 2007b). Chapter 9's preamble acknowledges that many research initiatives, largely by non-Aboriginals, have not always been sensitive to or respectful of local Aboriginal people and their culture. Nor have these initiatives always benefited Aboriginal people and their communities. The new chapter is presented in a spirit of respect as a guide to academic researchers in undertaking research as well as building trust and respect with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

Chapter 9 acknowledges the legal and cultural distinctiveness of all Aboriginal peoples in Canada, defining it as communal and individual in nature. The text shows particular sensitivity to, and respect for, Aboriginal peoples' unique knowledge and

understanding of themselves and the relationship to the world around them that they have acquired over many generations. Thus, researchers are urged to build trust and respect in their relations with Aboriginal research partners so that this knowledge and understanding is represented at all stages of the process, from pre-research consultation through methods development, data collection, analysis/interpretation, and dissemination of results. Given the shared nature of such knowledge, Aboriginal community participation or engagement is essential. In the language of the TCPS2 document, “The guidance provided in this chapter is based on the premise that engagement with the community is an integral part of ethical research involving Aboriginal peoples” (*ibid.*: 107). Only through this collective engagement, according to the TCPS2, can there be a fair and equitable balance that is relevant to researchers and participants alike.

Chapter 9 reflects the tone and intent of the larger TCPS2 document by stressing general principles and guidance. The specific form(s) that implementation might take is best left to specific cases. Article 9.2 cogently states this approach to community engagement: “The nature and extent of community engagement in a project shall be determined jointly by the researcher and the relevant community, and shall be appropriate to community characteristics and the nature of the research” (TCPS 2:111). Chapter 9 provides some guidance on specific points: desirability of written research agreements or contracts covering data use; ownership; access (Article 9.11); respect for community customs, codes, and review processes, including the necessity to honour and abide by decisions of all local Aboriginal review processes (Article 9.8); and respect for engagement with Aboriginal governing authorities (Article 9.3).

Aboriginal construction and articulation of research ethics and protocols

Research ethics and, more generally, research protocols have become increasingly relevant to Aboriginal people over the last 15 to 20 years, with the latter gaining wider legitimacy and greater organisational and political empowerment to address issues and problems of greatest concern to them. Research, particularly by “outsiders” in university, government, or private consultation firms, has often bypassed Aboriginal peoples and led to experiences with disproportionately few tangible benefits, fragmented communication of outcomes, and little meaningful involvement in and control over the research itself. As indicated earlier, health research appears to have been the first to articulate and incorporate Aboriginal concerns and remedies (e.g., Castellano 2004; Inuit Tuttarvingat and ITK 2010; NAHO 2007a, 2007b). More recently, research procedures in education, resource management, social and economic development, and virtually any other sphere are covered in Aboriginal research guidelines and by associated review committees. Arguably the most comprehensive document has been published by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami in cooperation with the Nunavut Research Institute (ITK and NRI 2007). This awareness of research ethics clearly appears in the following definition by Inuit Tuttarvingat, the Inuit-specific centre of the National Aboriginal Health Organization:

Ethics is a term that captures the values of society that tell us how to behave appropriately and treat each other with respect. Ethical research means that researchers understand and respect that Inuit have their own protocols for behavior. Ethical standards and requirements are set out in documents called ‘guidelines’, ‘protocols’ or ‘codes’. Researchers must follow guidelines to make sure their work is honourable and respectful. (Inuit Tuttarvingat 2010).

In support of ethical research, information materials have also been released under the auspices of Inuit Tuttarvingat, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and Nipingit, the National Inuit committee on Ethics and Research. Of particular relevance here are nine “fact sheet” posters covering research, confidentiality, participant rights, informed consent, information on research careers, and other Inuit-specific information about research involving Inuit peoples and regions (Inuit Tuttarvingat and ITK 2010).

These initiatives are best understood as part of a recent and ongoing effort to codify Inuit ethics as well as related legal conceptions and texts. In daily interaction, Inuit have always assessed the appropriateness of other people’s behaviour and, in fact, possess a rich vocabulary for inappropriate conduct, although this kind of judgment was in the past seldom if ever expressed overtly, even within the immediate family (Briggs 1998). As a result, at least to the Western outsider, it was difficult to detect a separate sphere of ethics. Without excessively romanticising the point, we cannot say that ethical appropriateness was deduced from a separate set of “moral and ethical” principles. Rather, it arose from the totality of everyday life and the responsibilities to other people, animals, and innate objects that defined everyday life. Any moral imperative of appropriateness was embedded in a holistic and seamless understanding of the surrounding world of which one was a connected and interdependent part (Armitage 2009; Nadasdy 2003, 2007; Thorpe, et al. 2001; Wenzel 1999, 2004; Wilson 2008).

This seamlessness is changing, to be sure, as younger Inuit leaders arise, are educated in Western institutions and exposed to Western culture, and strive to develop ethical principles grounded in traditional values as a visible and distinct guide to inform their own actions as well as those of outsiders operating within historical Inuit homelands. Even today, however, it remains difficult to articulate a term or phrase for the noun “ethics” or the adjective “ethical” in Labrador Inuttut,³ although several words are suggestive, including the word *tungngavet*. *Tungngavet* literally means “foundations” or, more literally, “principles” as in those upon which to build a relationship (Douglas Wharram, pers. comm. 2010). We have been reminded of this difference when discussing research with Inuit elders in particular and then mentioning these discussions to university researchers, seasoned veterans, and nascent graduate students. The latter all too frequently consider research ethics to be separate from

³ Nunatsiavummiut call their language Inuttut. The Nunatsiavut dialect of Inuktitut is called Nunatsiavummiutut by linguists, or often in government documents Labradorimiutut. Prior to 1949 and provincial control over schooling, it was widely spoken throughout northern coastal Labrador. It has a distinct writing system used by German missionaries from the Moravian Church when they settled in Nain in 1771. They adopted an orthography originally created by their Greenlandic colleagues (Dorais 2010: 175).

research itself, i.e., a hurdle to be “jumped” before research funds are released, rather than a transparent element of a knowledge creation process. This view makes it difficult to promote a research culture that gives ethical considerations a critical and integrative place.

One of us first encountered this distinction soon after assuming the chair of a university ethics committee. While talking with two respected Inuit elders known by the new chair through common membership on several government resource management committees, he attempted to convey what a research ethics committee was and did. Both elders spoke fluent Inuttut, but one spoke appreciably better English than the other. It soon became apparent that neither of them fully grasped the exact purpose of the committee. Several words, including *qaujimajatuqangnit* (‘that understanding which is known for a long time’) and *nipingit* (‘Inuit voices here and everywhere’), were offered by the elders or Inuit government leaders but neither word really captured the meaning of ethics in Western language and culture, let alone its utilisation by research ethics boards. After nearly 30 minutes the elder more familiar with English suggested something to the effect that ethics was everywhere and everything and therefore did not require a separate word. An interesting corollary is the lack of the word “ethics” in the titles of the many Aboriginal research review boards that have arisen over the last 10 years. A non-random sample of 42 Aboriginal and Inuit community research boards in Canada suggests that while all materials, regardless of language, discuss and reference appropriate (i.e., ethical) research practices, formal use of the term “research ethics” appears largely restricted to documentation in English or French.

Although there is no clear equivalent for the Western term “ethics,” Aboriginal research review boards have a duty to communicate local priorities, rules on data ownership and use, and engagements linking university, Aboriginal community and individual participants. In this role, Aboriginal research review boards act as educator, gatekeeper, and enforcer in speaking to both researchers and their own Aboriginal constituencies. For Aboriginal people, the boards communicate information on what ethically “best practice” research involves, as well as individual and community rights in determining the degree of meaningful participation. Aboriginal research review boards also play an important role in mobilising the community to ensure that local concerns and priorities are clearly and formally articulated to researchers and reflected in their work. Where this role has been successfully performed, the resulting research is meaningfully collaborative throughout, addresses local priorities, builds trusting relationships and, through these processes, promotes mutual respect and understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parties.

In the case of Inuit research review boards, the legal capacity to meet these and related conditions has arisen with the ratification of land claims agreements that give the Inuit and their governments considerable authority and power over research, management, and general governance that directly affects them. Research has thus become much more a matter of negotiation among equals than a more traditional, hierarchical process that provides local people with little capacity to direct and

participate, even when the research is of great consequence to themselves and their communities. This multiplicity of roles involving educator, promoter, and gatekeeper/enforcer is well captured in the preface to *Negotiating Research Relationships with Inuit Communities: A Guide for Researchers* published by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Nunavut Research Institute⁴:

Northern researchers are ever-aware of the growing expectations on them to ensure that northern communities are involved in, and benefit from, research. But what are researchers really being asked to do? How can community members participate meaningfully in research? What level of involvement is appropriate in a given project? What are the best ways to communicate with local people? How can researchers initiate and maintain a meaningful relationship with community members? [...] This guide presents some core 'universal themes' in communication and relationship-building that apply to natural, physical, biological and social scientists working in the Canadian North (ITK and NRI 2007: 1).

History of a collaborative research relationship

When research partnerships are negotiated between outside researchers and any specific Aboriginal organisation or community, they will have special, arguably even unique, features due to the nature of the research and the parties to it. As such we offer an example from our own recent experience to illustrate the issues addressed above. The research involves a community-based, participatory study of selected wild or country foods traditionally important to the Inuit of Nunatsiavut, Labrador.

Beginning in 2003, one of the authors served on several consulting committees that provided the Canadian government with advice on fisheries management. On a committee dealing with Atlantic salmon was an Inuk representing initially the Labrador Inuit Association and, after 2005, the newly created Nunatsiavut government, an Inuit body that was the outcome of nearly 30 years of land claims negotiations (Procter et al. in press). During an important workshop in July 2005 on Atlantic salmon in Labrador, representatives from the recently proclaimed regional Inuit government of Nunatsiavut expressed interest in negotiating a contract with researchers from Memorial University in key research areas specified in the newly signed Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (LILCA 2003). There was particular interest in establishing baseline domestic harvest levels for several wild marine and terrestrial species that are central to the cultural, economic, nutritional, and spiritual life of Labrador Inuit, as specified in chapters 12 and 13 of the LILCA.

The LILCA called for quantitative estimates of past and current harvest levels for approximately 147 traditionally important species in order to establish Inuit Domestic Harvests (IDH) and an Inuit Domestic Harvest Level (IDHL), the latter to be used as a minimum harvest level to protect access and use by beneficiaries in times of significant

⁴ This document builds on an earlier statement entitled *Negotiating Research Relationships: A Guide for Communities* (NRI and ITK 2002[1998]).

resource decline. While consideration was also given to *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*, historical records, and other sources, the claims agreement specifically made *quantitative* estimates a priority. The new Inuit government, fearing a bias toward quantitative information that scientists and managers would provide on behalf of outside interests, wished to develop an independent capability for this kind of information. Without rejecting more traditional ways of assembling and communicating non-quantitative Inuit knowledge (Fienup-Riordan 1999), the new government felt that collaboration with university researchers was strategically useful to acquire control and capability over quantitative types of resource information and their use in resource management.

During the summer of 2006, we and Nunatsiavut government representatives co-developed a joint research proposal entitled “From the Minds of Elders to the Policies of Government: Incorporating Inuit Environmental Knowledge into Resource Management Policy.” The document emphasised a commitment to multiple sources of knowledge derived from Western academic approaches and from Inuit experience. The document promised that:

Inuit environmental knowledge will be treated as a distinct intellectual tradition and not merely an adjunct to western science. Our approach will draw from site/species specific, contextualized knowledge generated by community members through personal observations and experiences as well as quantitative undertakings. Our results will be derived through a process of co-discovery involving university researchers and students, Inuit elders, government resource managers and general members of the Inuit population (Natcher and Felt 2006-2007: 3).

In September 2006 we travelled to Goose Bay, Labrador, to discuss the proposal with Nunatsiavut representatives. Baseline harvesting as prescribed in the LILCA was a specific priority of the Inuit representatives. Among species of interest were arctic char (*ikaluk*) barren-land caribou (*tuttuk*) and Atlantic salmon (*kavisilik*). Over several additional meetings and email exchanges lasting four or five months, we assembled sampling frameworks and a probability sample of land claims beneficiary households in the five coastal communities within the land claims settlement area. In mid-winter 2007, there came an opportunity for additional funding from the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) through the local CWS biologist stationed in Goose Bay, a beneficiary under the LILCA. The project would now have to include a number of sea birds of interest to the CWS.

This last initiative would require government-to-government funding transfer rather than direct grants to individual researchers. All parties decided that the most appropriate strategy would be for the government of Nunatsiavut to use the CWS funds to hire individuals from each community as researchers under a multi-month contract and pay for the costs of bringing them to Goose Bay for training by the authors. Additional funding was earmarked for travel to coastal communities by researchers from Memorial University to explain the research, to establish local advisory committees in each community, and to negotiate specific forms of engagement and

collaboration. Funding was solicited from the CWS, and money released to the Nunatsiavut government in late spring. Researchers and an advisory committee, in cooperation with Inuit government officials, drafted job descriptions, advertised and hired community researchers, and designed an interview survey form in consultation with local communities, as well as associated materials such as information scripts and participant consent forms. Where considered necessary by the advisory committee and local municipalities, fluency in Inuttut was made a condition of employment and all information was translated for household participants.

The extra funding allowed the harvest study to expand. A population saturation procedure replaced a method of numbering all households in each coastal community on a community map and approaching a random sample of them. We decided to follow the new procedure to collect information from all households but, if it should prove unworkable for any reason, the interviewed households could be treated as a random sample and the findings generalised to each community using tools of statistical inference. Additionally, we expanded the scope of the study to include a 20% sample of land claim beneficiaries living outside the settlement lands in Goose Bay and environs, thus adding another 113 households for a total of approximately 800. All 800 received the same survey interview schedule.

Once CWS funding had been assured in April 2007, a research contract agreement was signed on April 7 by the Inuit government and Memorial University, with us being designated as lead researchers. The written contract was to cover a two-year period from November 1, 2006 to October 31, 2008 with extensions permitted as necessary to cover the costs of pre-research communication and meetings for meaningful collaboration. At the time of contract negotiation and signing, the new Inuit government had a draft contract template that came from other Inuit jurisdictions and reflected the government's own philosophy on research within its new jurisdiction (a formal template was issued in 2008). At this time, the Nunatsiavut government had little legal or fiscal capacity to offer research grants as funding councils do. A high-ranking Nunatsiavut official informed us that all of their research undertakings up to that time had been done under contract. An Inuk research officer was in place but it was not until 2008 that the new government established a formal review committee (Nunatsiavut Government 2008). Other than the clear requirement of Inuit engagement in research, the specific forms(s) were left to be negotiated between researchers, the advisory committee, local government, and citizen advisory committees in each community.

By the time this research started, there was wide promotion of the idea that Aboriginal people should own, or at least co-own, and control data resulting from collaboration with them. Inuit and their government told us that they owned research about them and for their benefit, so it was logical that they should also own the resulting information. The contract thus stated that all data from the research would remain the intellectual property of the Inuit regional government and its people. Intellectual property was defined as information, ideas, or other intangibles. The contract then provided researchers with the following use rights:

Activities carried out under this Agreement or other contributions towards the project may be used by the Investigators, with the consult of the government, for the purposes of this project, reports, management plans, government programming and scholarly publications arising out of the research. In the event that public dissemination has been agreed upon, joint authorship between the Investigators and representatives of the government will be assigned (Natcher and Felt 2006-2007: 2).

This language was clarified in subsequent discussions with the advisory committee and government representatives attached to the project to include the right of researchers/investigators to retain a copy of all data, notes, and statistical/graphical output relevant to future academic publication without any time restriction. Out of professional courtesy and respect, it was agreed that the Inuit Research Review Committee would review all publications and a conflict resolution protocol would be put in place to resolve disputes over publication of particular reports, papers, or presentations. The protocol provided a range of solutions from discussing and resolving areas of dispute to formal acknowledgement of any disagreement in the publication with an offer for the government to state the nature of its concern/opposition at the beginning or end of the document. In recognition of academic culture, support for publication would not ordinarily be withheld unless there were clear and identifiable instances of disrespect, error, or professional malfeasance. Both the Inuit government and Memorial University further stipulated that the university's REB would review and approve the research proposal. Initially, the university was hesitant to surrender intellectual property rights. It finally agreed after discussion and inquiries had established that this sort of requirement was increasingly common in academic/Aboriginal collaboration.

Did restrictions on ownership lead to different outcomes in research implementation, publishing, or control of information? From our own experiences, we do not believe ownership has had any negative effects but has rather been an important integrative element in the developing research partnership. We would add, however, that the nature of data access and use should be clarified for everyone's benefit. At least three events point to the positive effects of meaningful research collaboration. First, in July 2010, the government of Nunatsiavut designated our research partnership as a "best case" example and we joined Inuit government representatives in Edmonton (Alberta) for a workshop on best collaborative research practices where other Aboriginal governments and academic researchers gave presentations. Second, we have recently authored a volume on Nunatsiavut that draws on much of the research data and has a foreword kindly written by the President of the Inuit government. Third, government leaders and officials see us as another "voice" and frequently call us for advice on data analysis and other research support.

Although our relations have sometimes been ambiguously defined, we have always attempted to maintain an egalitarian and respectful relationship with the coastal Labrador Inuit and their local and regional governments. In fact, each of us has developed an egalitarian and collaborative research style within the informal and personal relationships that we have maintained with other groups and communities,

though not always Aboriginal ones. This style has undoubtedly helped us in engaging Inuit governments and citizens. It is also rapidly spreading through most of the social sciences, in contradistinction to past hierarchical and asymmetrical relationships with research participants. Aboriginal research represents the ultimate example of collaboration as local Aboriginal advisory boards assume greater roles in coordinating research activities and ensuring respect for their priorities and requirements for engagement. Time commitments are substantial and time lines ever extended in this new research style. And yet, it is critical to have time to learn, know, respect and, eventually, collaborate if research is to be understood and accepted at local and regional levels. If one adds the considerable turnover in Inuit leadership and departmental personnel, the time commitments become even longer. Sometimes, there seems to be always a new event that requires discussion and negotiation (Edwards et al. 2008; ITK and NRI 2007), and consultation never ends.

Balancing scientific critical inquiry and respect for *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*

Arguably, the most difficult issue researchers and research review boards alike face in undertaking or approving research is the balancing of critical inquiry and respect for traditional knowledge. Critical inquiry, as understood within a scientific paradigm, may be defined as a formalised curiosity that questions unconfirmed conceptions of the world around us by using agreed-upon procedures and rules of evidence. Such procedures and rules are derived from a generalised approach, commonly referred to as the “scientific method,” and evidence confirmation or rejection on the basis of falsifiability. With the last 20 years and the rise of “social constructionism” (Hacking 1999: 24), naïve and unswerving faith in science has been roundly criticised, if not dismissed, as a positivist ideology. Nonetheless, core elements remain, such as the postulate of an external reality that can be analytically disaggregated from the larger whole through some form of measurement, and the notion that falsifiability or empirical disconfirmation is the ultimate test of validity. These elements still dominate the process of creating and assessing scientific understanding in contemporary Western society, particularly in academia (Bryman 2004: 11-23; Kuhn 1970).

Critical inquiry promotes a scepticism that challenges interpretations unless evidence is defined and assembled according to strict and specific conditions. As such it is a core principle of the scientific method and its associated ontology and epistemology. Moreover, the explanatory adequacy of data is determined by criteria provided by the scientific paradigm and not necessarily by holders of alternative knowledge claims. Where “acceptable” data is unavailable for whatever reason, alternative ways of knowing are, in the worst cases, dismissed as unscientific or sympathetically “interesting” anecdotes or stories that may lead to real knowledge but only when reformulated as scientific propositions and tested with appropriate data. While scepticism itself is common to every ontology and epistemology, the enthusiasm, legitimacy, and commitment typically associated with its scientific

application often endow practitioners with an evangelical certainty that directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally devalues other forms of knowing.

Given the textual and personal basis of many forms of alternative knowledge, including *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*, it is a challenge to narrow the cultural divide, let alone bridge it, even for the most sympathetic scientist. While the gap appears clearest in the natural sciences and their emphasis on quantitative design, it can also be found in more qualitative, social scientific research designs favoured by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, social geographers, and feminist researchers, since a majority, though certainly not all, embrace some level of sceptical inquiry, even where accompanied by greater empathy for and understanding of the beliefs, values, and worldviews of their research partners and participants (e.g., Furgal et al. 2006; Harding 1991; Usher 2000).

The TCPS2 recognises and endorses the fundamental importance of critical inquiry and implicitly seems to acknowledge a potential tension with respect to local people and communities, their culture, and their particular epistemologies. In Chapter 3, Article 3.6, the general point is made that,

[w]here social sciences or humanities researchers seek knowledge that criticizes or challenges the policies and practices of institutions, governments, interest groups or corporations, researchers do not need to seek the organization's permission to proceed with the proposed research [...]. If institutional approval were required, it is unlikely that research could be conducted effectively [...]. Important knowledge and insights from the research would be forgone (CIHR et al. 2010: 35).

The Tri-Council policy statement also identifies the need to show sensitivity and respect when one is partnering with Aboriginal and Inuit peoples on research involving their communities, activities, and cultures. Following the above quote, the reader is referred to Chapter 9, Articles 9.4 to 9.8, which specifically address critical inquiry and respect/engagement with Aboriginal peoples. Articles 9.7 and 9.8 deal specifically with critical inquiry in an Aboriginal context. Article 9.7 states:

Research involving Aboriginal peoples that critically examines the conduct of public institutions, First Nations, Inuit or Métis governments, institutions or organizations or persons exercising authority over First Nations, Inuit or Métis peoples may be conducted ethically, notwithstanding the usual requirement of engaging community leaders (CIHR et al. 2010: 117).

The Article then goes on to remind researchers to ensure that cultural norms are respected, the safety of participants protected, and potential harms to the larger community minimised as much as possible. Article 9.8 offers more specific guidance and is worth citing:

Researchers have an obligation to become informed about, and to respect, the relevant customs and codes of research practice that apply in the particular community affected by their research. Inconsistencies between community custom and this Policy should be

identified and addressed in advance of initiating the research, or as they arise (CIHR et al. 2010: 117).

The TCPS2 then addresses the application of Aboriginal research review committees and their associated codes of research practices. The document suggests that custom might restrict observation, note taking, and recording of certain events without the specific approval of individuals or groups.

Our own experience as well as inquiries received through the Memorial University REB suggests that Western critical inquiry invariably has to be balanced against respect for local knowledge and culture when the topic of Inuit knowledge or *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* is a component of the research. While its content, terminology, and contextuality are specific to the Inuit and their experiences, *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* shares many features with the situated, experiential knowledge of other Aboriginal peoples in drawing understanding from its embeddedness in cultural insights and values that emphasise the interdependency of all elements of one's world.⁵ *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* is collectively produced and shared through some individuals, particularly elders, and may acquire more detailed and extensive forms. It is expressed in stories and anecdotes, being difficult for a variety of ontological and epistemological reasons to translate into Western scientific paradigms. For *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* to inform policy in areas such as resource development, renewable resource management, and climate change, it must be understood and used in juxtaposition with Western forms of understanding. In short, some type of "translation bridge" is needed to narrow epistemological gaps and to recognise and respect the distinctiveness, context, and origins of such knowledge when used alongside Western science.

But exactly how might Inuit knowledge be used respectfully? Could or should it be subjected to Western criteria such as falsifiability? How far, if at all, can Western researchers, who typically have minimal competence in local language, history, and culture upon which understanding is based, proceed to extract "testable propositions" for their own use while retaining respect? Or indeed, should such a strategy even be considered in the first place? In our view, there are no easy answers in written documents, Aboriginal and academic alike, to guide researchers. Indeed, academic researchers, particularly though not exclusively natural scientists, even when wishing to respect and use experiential knowledge, feel unsure of how to proceed. They most often proceed by "borrowing" local understandings and relationships for study within their own methodological and interpretive frameworks. While we have encountered few academic researchers who outright dismiss alternative forms of knowing, a majority of natural scientists and significant numbers of social scientists feel most comfortable doing research "their way" and hope that they are minimising disrespect, distortion, or worse by using such knowledge to extract hypotheses that may be generalised or tested.

⁵ For an overview of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*, see ITK (n.d.); Wenzel (1999, 2004). For First Nations, see Armitage (2009); Ellis (2005); Nadasdy (2007); Thorpe et. al. (2002).

Our own view and the one that has come to dominate the university ethics board through which our work has been reviewed is a middle position consistent with Wenzel (1999, 2004), Armitage (2009), and an increasing number of researchers. In this view, *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* and other forms of vernacular knowledge offer a path to alternative and potentially insightful understanding. Wenzel (1999) notes similar features in both epistemologies despite profoundly different origins that offer possibilities for cross-utilisation of relevance to academic researchers. Our university board promotes this approach by always having at least two or three board members who have much experience in collaborative research with Inuit or other Aboriginal peoples. Workshops, led by Aboriginal guests, have been held to introduce board members and the research community to *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* and other forms of traditional knowledge. The board chair maintains continuous communication with the chairs of several Aboriginal review boards and has arranged several joint workshops in which Western scientific approaches are presented, compared, and contrasted with other forms of knowing. This has been the case with such issues and venues as climate change advisory committees and resource management boards. The board also works to develop pre-research relationships with Aboriginal communities and residents as a precursor to collaborative research.

Conclusion

As with all forms of collaborative, community-engaged research, success will ultimately depend upon the understanding, transparency, respect, and resultant trust that characterise the relationships between academic and Aboriginal participants. There are three important principles to acknowledging and utilising Inuit knowledge for meaningfully collaborative research and thus beginning an ongoing process of building respectful and heuristic bridges between the academic researcher and the Aboriginal knowledge holder.

The first principle is to build relationships with Aboriginal research partners before or during the earliest stages of research formulation. It is critical that all parties to any research understand and respect each other. When discussion of research begins, there should be exchanges about each other's approaches to knowledge. We have found that research partnerships require openness and honesty to accept alternative ways of knowing, and interest in and understanding of how they work. We have also learned that traditional and Western systems of knowledge share many similarities. Information that does not "work" must be assessed and possibly rejected whether the test is a statistical confidence level or a failure to find animals to harvest. One of the author's most insightful experiences happened during a multiparty discussion of when and why Inuit hunters dramatically changed hunting styles. Such discussions help to identify similarities as well as starting points for different ways of knowing without favouring one view over another.

The second principle builds on the relationship by promoting a collaborative research process. The TCPS2 encourages such collaboration, which seems to work

most effectively when grounded in a reasonable degree of collegiality and understanding, and in how the parties each see and understand the world around themselves. All elements of the research process are thus shared, from question formulation through interpretation and writing.

The third principle is to admit that use of all forms of traditional knowledge in research will inevitably compartmentalise these forms and, in so doing, isolate and distort elements from their larger contexts and meanings to satisfy particular research objectives (Armitage 2009; Nadasdy 2007). The greater the Western scientific orientation of the research, the greater this disruption is likely to be. While this criticism seems inevitable, it should not minimise the insights and understandings that can result from such research cross-fertilisation. Nor should it automatically devalue the knowledge and its larger context.

Guidelines and protocols, whether Aboriginal or the TCPS2, are at best proximate guides to the complex process of building relationships and thence negotiating specific research activities. They take us only so far. To carry out collaborative research that features meaningful engagement, such as that envisioned in the TCPS2 and increasingly articulated by Aboriginal and Inuit research review boards, all parties will have to invest considerably in the research process. Guidelines and protocols are best seen as means to promote equality, equity, and trust between all parties. Until such time as the above principles become seamlessly part of both research cultures and the minimal requirements demanded by research participants, such boards and committees are likely to be prominent and critical.

Such a time will have been reached when all parties understand and respect different approaches to research, and when they acknowledge that divergent epistemologies, such as those found in the scientific formulation of critical inquiry and *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*, are to be treated cooperatively rather than competitively. Such appreciation requires time, patience, empathy, and a sense of equality among all parties. Guidelines and protocols are useful means to this end. They are not, however, a substitute for the requirements reviewed in this article for review boards, academic and Aboriginal alike, as well as researchers. These requirements are ultimately the foundation of a best practice academic-Inuit research partnership.

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