



Community-Based Indigenous Learning: Implementing Action Research

Advancing the Public Administration Discipline

Robert Shepherd, Carleton University

Katherine Graham, Carleton University

The paper is based on a seven-year research partnership, funded by the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). It engages Indigenous youth, First Nations and regional partners using a multi-disciplinary team of academics. It uses a community-based and community-led research approach with the goal of fostering youth resilience and empowering them to prosper as leaders in their communities. There is also a policy component that connects community understandings to larger policy considerations at the federal and provincial/territorial levels.

A key question guiding our research is: How can we bring together Indigenous and Western knowledge to achieve positive change? In this respect, the project relies on action research approaches guided by various principles, including mutual respect, co-production, open and transparent communication, and community ownership and direction over the research endeavour.

As the project is now in its second year and work with communities is in full-swing, we are now dealing with the challenges of designing and implementing the action component of the research and connecting it with our research questions. The paper attempts to identify these challenges, and provide a theoretical approach for dealing with them. Therefore, this paper has three main purposes. First, it will identify and address some of the challenges that accompany community-based research, by drawing on the action research literature. These range from data capture and organization for particular communities and across participating communities to the intellectual tension between action and reflection. Second, it will examine ethics challenges in an action model. Such ethical dilemmas can be anticipated given lessons learned in the academic literature, but often involve strategies having to be developed while the research is in process. Finally, the paper will examine challenges related to deriving research results from a project that is operating in an increasingly complex, dynamic and sensitive policy and program environment. The paper is intended to provide a theoretical context for action research, and discuss the practical approaches that could be used to address the various challenges highlighted.