Research Article

Iktomi Methodology

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Abstract

This essay responds to narrative analysis and other Indigenous Methodology skeptics who question the legitimacy of storytelling, oral tradition, and narrative analysis as legitimate forms of data and research. Iktomi Methodology (named after a Lakota character in oral tradition) is not only decolonizing, but is forward thinking, not only documenting what has happened in the past, but what could potentially happen in the future. Iktomi Methodology uses Tribal Critical Theory to legitimize Indigenous storytelling as valid forms of data and analysis of how to treat Indigenous students. The essay then uses a version of narrative analysis that incorporates a specific Native American character that arises often in stories on how to behave when it comes to dealing with challenges, "Iktomi" becomes the vessel through which educators can question current policy and practices to think differently about supporting Indigenous students in postsecondary education.

Indigenous scholar Smith (1999) describes the term "decolonization" as the process for conducting research with Indigenous communities that places Indigenous epistemologies and voices at the center of the research process. Battiste (2001), Kovach (2010), Lavallée (2009), Smith (1999), Wilson (2008) and other Indigenous scholars have argued that Western research results in "oppression" toward Indigenous communities if the research is not decolonizing in some way, that is, does not center Indigenous lived and intellectual experience. As such, following Eve Tuck and Yang's (2013) suggestion, this article will address the need for different, and decidedly Indigenous frameworks to address new ways of pedagogically engaging students, and approaching research.

Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) cogently state that the supremacist architecture of current research practices, particularly in the social sciences, have erased other bodies of knowledge and have become the "reigning white ideological methodology" adhered to and defended by the academy. Through their critique of current practices both researchers argue that it is not the use of unified quantitative methodologies per se that are under attack [rather] it is the way categories are established, used and interpreted by "white logic." This understanding is corroborated through the research of other Indigenous scholars (Pavel, 1992; Tierney, 1991) who argue that quantitative methods alone actually serve to hold the "regimes of Man" in place by centering "white logics" and erasing "othered" epistemologies. Qualitative methodologies have often served as the counternarrative to the hegemonic position of quantitative research.

There is no one approach to qualitative research, and often people use the term "qualitative" as an umbrella term for any type of research that is not quantitative. I propose an approach to research that goes beyond quantitative analysis to illustrate/analyze the subtle nuances associated with biculturalism and how it affects students' experiences.

According to Root (1992), qualitative studies are the most frequently used methods to capture the experiences of diverse groups of individuals and communities. This is because qualitative methods allow for nuance and complexities that differ from the nuances and complexities that quantitative studies are capable of and add an intimacy of details that may be difficult to extract from more conventional quantitative methods (Corbin, 1998). As such, "The qualitative approach incorporates much more of a literary form of writing, computer text analysis, programs, and experience in conducting open-ended interviews and observations" (Creswell, 2005, p. 22).

Tribal Critical Theory

While other frameworks are used here, Tribal Critical Theory (TribalCrit) provides the overarching epistemology. It acknowledges inequities and oppressions that are

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embedded in non-Native institutions. Prior to TribalCrit, Critical Race Theory critically examines the intersections between race, law and power within the context of society and culture. TribalCrit builds on the work of Critical Race Theorists. However, it adapts the techniques and ideas found in Critical Race Theory—such as the use of counter-story telling as a research methodology—to the specific conditions of Indigenous populations.

TribalCrit, was developed to include a specifically Indigenous lens to Critical Race Theory when it comes to issues concerning Native Americans and other Indigenous populations. The first four tenets set the stage for the fifth tenet, which is more closely related to the goals and purposes of Iktomi Methodology. The fifth tenet troubles current mainstream notions of culture, knowledge, and power and offers an Indigenous lens (Brayboy, 2005, p. 434). It is a lens that is rooted to the lands in which we all now reside and have long-standing notions of what it means to navigate this space, a lens that is lacking in current western/European notions of culture, knowledge, and power. TribalCrit defines knowledge as having the ability to recognize change, adapt and move with the change. There are at least three forms of knowledge according to TribalCrit. The first, cultural knowledge, refers to an understanding of what it means to be part of a tribal nation, including the tribes' traditions, issues, and ways of being and knowing that make an individual fit into the larger community. The second, knowledge of survival, is an understanding of how and in what ways change can be achieved and the ability and desire to change, adapt, and adjust in order to move forward both as an individual and a community. Third, academic knowledge, refers to knowledge that is gained from educational institutions. Brayboy argues that cultural knowledge and academic knowledge do not need to be in conflict, rather, they complement each other in powerful ways. As it pertains to this study on colonial education, this means that students need to attend to all of these forms of knowledge by not only knowing and understanding what it means to be a part of a tribe, team, and/or cohort, as well as knowledge of survival, but also knowledge gained within the academy. The blending of these forms of knowledge creates knowledge that is essential to survival, or to use Vizenor's (1999) term "survivance," meaning students who attend college do not just survive, they also resist, and in doing so open the door to create change within the educational system itself. If the change is positive, then this is an example of giving back via the seven generations philosophy, as it helps the next generation of Native students navigate the system.

The sixth component of TribalCrit is recognizing that governmental and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples have been oriented toward a goal of assimilation (Brayboy, 2005, p. 436). Early treaties claimed that Native Americans would be provided "appropriate" education, the relative term "appropriate" being problematic as the meaning was up to interpretation by officials at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which often assumed education that eradicated "Indianness" and/or promoted Anglo values and ways of communicating. TribalCrit rejects full assimilation in educational institutions for Native American/American Indian students. Assimilation requires the student to replace cultural knowledge with academic knowledge, negatively influencing a student's ability to succeed in an educational setting, and within a tribal community, according to TribalCrit. This is a critical component as it can illustrate the ways in which Native peoples navigate and deal with a systems designed from their inception to be assimilative.

The seventh component emphasizes the importance of tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future (Brayboy, 2005, p. 437). Honoring the adaptability of groups, while recognizing the differences between people can provide a foundation from which to analyze school (and other colonizing forces) practice and policy concerning Native Americans. Indigenous ways of knowing are often framed in a way that promotes cooperation, rather than the Western educational institutions that often frame discussions of competition as what is valued, rather than cooperation, which can be interpreted as an inability to work independently and be self-sufficient.

The eighth tenet of TribalCrit honors stories and oral knowledge as legitimate data and ways of being, instead of focusing solely on "scientifically based" research as the only justifiable form of research (Brayboy, 2005, p. 439). Stories help make up theory and serve to orient oneself toward others and the world. They are moral tools with psychological implications that help remind people of particular ways of being. They are the foundations on which Indigenous communities are built. Compare this to the academic standards of writing, and many Indigenous students have been viewed as deficient, having been newly exposed to a different way of transmitting culture and knowledge. TribalCrit recognizes that certain ways of communicating are prioritized by colleges and universities but does not agree that story-telling should be devalued. TribalCrit also makes a clear distinction between "hearing" a story, and simply "listening" to one. Hearing a story involves attributing value to it, as well as understanding the nuances. When a story is heard, it leads the hearer to think about the range of possibilities of what could happen and what has or may have happened previously. This is the spirit behind the methodology, using Iktomi stories as the mode of representation for the data gathered. Critical Race Theory introduced the use of counter-stories. Counter-story telling is often referred to as a research method but is not often developed in detail and can mean many things. According to Richard Delgado (1989) there is a difference between writing stories and writing *about* stories or writing *about* narrative theory, specifically individuals from "outgroups," or

marginalized and oppressed groups (p. 2412). The author does not believe that inequalities exist due to inadequate enforcement of laws or cultural lag, although both might be true. Rather, he believes it is because of prevailing mindsets through means of which the dominant society justifies the inequality as it is. Stories are ways to destroy these mindsets (p. 2413). Counter-stories, or stories that challenge the status quo (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414), are collected and presented as data, illustrating the challenges and successes experienced by Native students in post-secondary education. TribalCrit took it a step further and introduces an approach that is more relevant to Native traditions. Iktomi stories is what I introduce here, as a mechanism to tell these stories.

Finally, TribalCrit believes there needs to be a component of action or activism, or a way of connecting theory and practice in ways that are explicit (Brayboy, 2005), p. 440). For researchers, this means that the research being conducted should make active change in the community or context they are researching by identifying and deconstructing social inequalities. In this case, the use of counter-stories and Iktomi can be used to examine the lived experiences of Native students without focusing on solely the negatives. In this sense one can identify certain challenges faced by Native students while not making it the focus of the study, to follow Eve Tuck's (2009) criticism that most research on Native populations are damage-centered. Rather than focusing on the suffering, Iktomi methods can identify the suffering and strength simultaneously, to transform future potential suffering of others.

Storytelling and Narrative Inquiry

In *Mapping a Landscape of Narrative Inquiry*, Jean Clandinin and Jerry Rosiek illustrate specifically what it means to do narrative inquiry. In critiquing positivist and post-positivist research designs, for a narrative inquirer, altering the phenomena under study is not necessarily a problem, whereas a positivist approach would seek to avoid this. A positivist would clarify the nature of an external reality, that is fixed and describable. "Whereas post-positivists seek a description of a reality that stands outside human experience, the narrative inquirer seeks a knowledge of human experience that remains within the stream of human lives" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 44). This means that post-positivists seek to describe a phenomenon as it sits, not taking into account the context upon which that phenomena came to be. This is where the narrative inquirer steps in, taking into account the fact that the phenomena came to be as a product of history and context that also needs to be recognized. Some traditions will even fictionalize their case studies, as their end goal is not necessarily to document accurately what happened with each case study, rather, the "fictionalized" case study is to be used as a tool to help people think about possibilities and unforeseen challenges.

Iktomi and the Story of Wolfe

The following is an example of Iktomi Methodology in action. I interviewed 25 Native students at the University of Oregon and created composite narratives, one of which is named "Wolfe." Wolfe is a member of a California tribe who readily admits that she has a light complexion. Any of the following text that are in italics are direct quotes from students' interviews.

During the interview, I asked how school was going for Wolfe. *Umm. . .things are fine, school is fine.* I asked what "just fine" meant. *I mean yeah. I just had a thing recently, I tried to meet a speaker and didn't feel welcome.* At the time of the interview, I had been the acting Native American Retention Specialist, so I worked fairly closely with the Native students, and knew of some of the speakers we had that year. I clarified which speaker. "*Yeah, I went in to meet her, and (Iktomi) the uh, director or coordinator or whatever of the space told us. . ."* It was here that she trailed off, took a few moments to gather her thoughts before going full throttle into the situation at hand.

This was one of Wolfe's first interactions with this particular center, one dedicated to supporting under-represented students. Iktomi was the coordinator of the space. The center was having a closed caucus group for women of color to meet with the speaker after the speaker had given her presentation to a large audience. Wolfe reported that she and two friends (one who identified as a white male) arrived 15 min before the meeting was going to start. Iktomi came up to the group, looked specifically at Wolfe and her male friend and told them that this was a closed group for women of color "*. . .and like stood there waiting for us to leave.*" With a rapid pace, Wolfe illustrated how she did not want to explain to the director of the space that she wanted to be a part of this "*. . .regardless of how you are choosing to profile me.* "She voiced her distain for Iktomi, the coordinator of the space, to assume her identity based on her features". *. . .from that moment I was like 'I am not coming back here'. Yeah, I dunno. It's weird, too, because then he does still occasionally see me around, but I know he doesn't remember that at all. And I think he probably still thinks I'm white, is the other thing. It's weird."*

The stereotype of the Native American reaches beyond the traditional stereotype of brown people living in tipis and being uneducated. White passing Natives find their own challenges navigating through systems sometimes built to support them. In this case, Iktomi assumed that Wolfe was not Native, and excluded her from the opportunity to speak with an Indigenous scholar whom Wolfe had

genuine interest in. Wolfe, a person who had proven herself as someone more than capable of navigating the academic waters, found challenges in areas that weren't necessarily the class, but still impeded on academic progress via not making social and professional support networks.

The story of Wolfe is not about this one isolated incident that happened to this student. This is an exercise in allowing existing institutions to think about supporting a larger spectrum of students (in this case, a white passing Native). Within TribalCrit, tenet 7 asserts that tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples. Tenet 8 asserts that stories are not separate from theory and are therefore legitimate forms of data. Indigenous philosophy and traditions will be drawn upon here and stories will be used to remind people of more promising ways of being in the world. Eva Garroutte and Kathleen Westcott (2013) introduce new ways of engaging narratives in *The Story Is a Living Being, Companionship with Stories in Anishinaabeg Studies.* Like Rosenblatt's (2005) Reader Response Theory, Garroutte and Westcott argue that engaging in narratives in a way that allows the reader or listener to generate their own meanings from the story or narrative will allow the story itself to take on a life of its own. Instead of becoming occupied with hidden meanings and morals, they suggest that a narrative should be open to interpretation. As such, engaging stories in these ways allows the stories to work co-creatively with the reader or listener. The purpose of engaging in narratives in this way is not to accurately portray one real event. Rather, it is a way to describe possible meanings. This research approach highlights the consequences of the research being generated, not necessarily the accuracy of re-presenting an event. For Native Americans in schools, narrative analysis can help uncover things that have yet thought about.

Reader Response Theory/Story Telling and Narrative Knowledge as Data

Louise Rosenblatt (2005) is often credited for what is now known as "Reader Response Theory," in her book *Literature as Exploration.* The theory highlights the idea that meaning of a particular literature is formed at a particular moment, and is formed by the text itself, the reader and all of their emotions and backgrounds. This allows flexibility in terms of what kinds of meanings are generated from a reading at any given time. This leaves the door open to the meaning of literature, or in this case, stories, to be continuously shaped and re-evaluated based upon time, experience, and emotions of the reader(s). By this rationale, having one single fixed or concrete "morale" of the story is impossible, as each reader will take whatever experiences they have, whatever current contexts upon which they face, and apply the story and whatever meanings are possible, to their current situation.

Debrah Appleman (2015) created this diagram (below) that ". . .illustrates the principles of Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reader response" (pp. 35-36). The diagram below shows that meaning is generated under an umbrella of context and is influence both by the text and by the reader themselves.

This closely aligns with the oral tradition that I grew up with as well as Garroutte and Wescotts' (2013) ideas of a story having a life of its own. The difference here, is that there is a jump between hearing the story and reading the story in a book or article. The analysis process is the same, you take what experiences you have had, add onto the moment you read the literature at hand (or hear the story), and come up with your own conclusions based on the context (historically, culturally, linguistically, economically, whatever).

Iktomi and Storytelling

As an Oglala Lakota, I grew up on Iktomi stories. Iktomi took human form, although he has taken many forms, traditionally. Robert Bunge (1984) compares and contrasts European stories to Iktomi stories. The trickster Iktomi is immortal, just as deceit and treachery are immortal. Because he is immortal, his stories continue, and Iktomi often represents an example of what not to do, but not always. He is capable of taking many forms, therefore, even after he finds himself in trouble with one community, he may easily be accepted by another, until again, he breaks all taboos and finds himself in trouble again. This is different from more dichotomous characters of good or evil. While Iktomi often seems to share traits with more evil or villainous characters, he also exhibits traits that should be valued, for instance the story of Iya, the giant cannibal, and how Ikto fools him, keeping Iya from consuming a village (Bunge, 1984, pp. 49–50).

In chapter 3 of An American Urphilosophie, Robert Bunge (1984) describes six epistemologies for the Lakotas. The first is "ordinary knowledge." The second he describes as "Indian Empiricism and Pragmatism" and he provides a detailed account of the pragmatic value of certain forms of knowledge. The third kind of knowledge is *Wicowoyake*, or True Stories. This is historical knowledge, or knowledge that makes claims of historical fact. Examples would include accounts of famines, or attacks by neighboring tribes, and so forth. Creation stories would fall under this category. These stories are different (according to Bunge) from *Ohunkankan* stories, or stories told in the evenings only, and that are typically full of giants, monsters, and Iktomi (often). There are values implicit within these stories, but they are not necessarily regarded as historical narratives. It is important to understand Lakota epistemologies
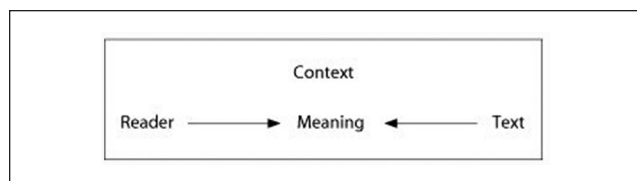
Figure 1. Transactional theory of reader response according to Appleman (2015).

as they draw knowledge from multiple locations, using pragmatic values, fact, and narrative forms (mostly oral, but I would argue that written narratives are encompassed here) to make my next claim. Narrative Analysis should be considered a form of Iktomi story and should be read as such. I am using the idea of Iktomi stories in a very broad sense. Iktomi has the capacity to take many forms and Iktomi lives within everyone. To think of an individual as completely good or evil is mistaken, in my view. By that rationale, everyone has the capacity to make mistakes *or* critique the works of others. Furthermore, Iktomi stories have the capacity to change. While other stories may have the moral explicitly stated at the end, Iktomi stories typically have an implicit moral message, that vary depending on who is listening, or reading it, to refer to Rosenblatt as well as Garrotte and Westcott. Maybe the story is about what to expect when you arrive at a predominantly white institution. Maybe the story is about being more sensitive to the needs of a new Native American freshman in the class you are teaching. Maybe the story is about not always seeking the easy way out. The morals drawn from an Iktomi story are dependent upon who you are and where you are in life. The moral, like the individual, is contextually located in space and time. Iktomi is the form of narrative used here, and hopefully there are lessons to be learned by these stories that are not so explicitly stated, but still offer value.

Iktomi is actually a published author. Looking at the cover of America Needs Indians!, it states that the author is Iktomi himself. Iktomi, a fictional character in Native American lore (and children's books) wrote a book that was published in 1937. The first words of the book are as follows:

> As neither Iktomi nor a human could be exactly right and too certain of "anything or anybody" in Indian or Government matters, be aware that this is only a conscientious collection of samples of the "whole truth" assembled with his honest conclusions and logical suppositions by a prehistoric nut, whose original brain is being replaced by fossilization. (Iktomi, 1937, p. 1)

It is possible that someone named Iktomi wrote and published this book. It is also possible that this is merely an alias. I have heard that it is the former, but the fact is that there is a precedent for Iktomi being an author. One can use Iktomi as a way to set the cultural and contextual stage for the narrative to take place. The third person narrator could provide the analysis and bring the narratives back to previous literatures.

An Iktomi story methodology would include composite narratives, a mashup of different Indigenous students' stories. One can argue that parts of this could be "fictionalized" but every aspect of the narrative was based upon the true lived experiences of the students' lives. Garroutte and Westcott (2013) argue that the stories live in the lives of students, but are not reducible to the individual lives, as such, sticking closely to the real facts of the students' stories will be important. They are not the researcher(s)' stories, rather, they are stories that live in the world through people (the participants, and the readers/listeners of these stories).

These stories should invite educators to think differently about how they are supporting Native students. The purpose is not to describe things in the final fashion, nor is it to disassociate the researcher from the research for a "more objective view" of what is happening, rather, it is to transform experience for the students attending postsecondary education, and also for practitioners and policy makers who work with said students now so they all can prepare for challenges of the future. It should also invite them to engage in more complex, supportive, non-stereotypical relationships with Indigenous students, and should ring true for the Indigenous students engaging with the stories as well, providing insight as to how to reach out to support systems while attending predominantly colonial institutions. These stories should also open up discussions as to how differing value systems might influence notions of "success" and whether or not these institutions are providing all students with the resources and experiences necessary to achieve this.

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