Understanding Methodologies

Indigenous Research Methodologies
Master Class 2010

Dr Maggie Walter

Copyright A Professor Margaret Walter, UTAS & IRMMM
Methods versus Methodologies

Methods and Methodologies distinct – but often mistakenly used interchangeably.

- **Method** = technique for gathering research information or data
- **Methodology** = theoretical lens/paradigmatic frame of reference through which the research is conceived, interpreted, designed, conducted, analysed and presented
- Method is just a part of methodology
- This session focuses on the underpinnings of methodologies
Importance of Understanding Difference

Knowing difference between Method and Methodology vital in for 2 reasons:

1. Allows us to see methods as just tools – for us to select all or part of, adapt, re-define etc

2. Theoretical lens understanding of methodology allows us to see why and how Indigenous methodologies emerge and how they can and do fit within our own research practice
Qualitative and Quantitative

• Most common methodological divide often simplistically understood

• Quantitative—focus is on identifying statistical relationships between different key concepts from large populations or sources of data

• Qualitative – focus is on identifying how individuals and/or small groups make meaning of or understand of key concepts

• But methodologies much broader than just qual or quant. Basic split only
Qualitative/Quantitative Debate

- Pointless debate sets up qualitative methodologies as diametrically opposed to quantitative approach
- Arguments ensue of ‘superiority’ of 1 methodology over the other
- Each major methodological classification brings different strengths and outcomes to research
- Much social research now uses triangulation – combination of different methods and approaches
An essential understanding applicable to methodology is that all research and all knowledge is a social and cultural product.

Undiscussed in most western research approaches is that our topics, questions, the theories that make sense to us, do not emerge from nowhere.

Informed by the world views, assumptions, values, perceptions and circumstances of the researcher and or other entities involved in the research ie universities, funding bodies etc.
Recipe for a Methodology

Lens thru which the world, research question and concepts are by viewed by the researcher. Shapes how research is approached and undertaken.

This lens is made up of:

- Our Standpoint:
  - Our social positioning
  - Our Epistemology
  - Our Axiology
  - Our Ontology

- Our theoretical conceptual framework and paradigm

- Our Method
Standpoint: Social Position

Social and Personal position:

- Who we are
- our cultural, social, economic and personal identity.
- As Indigenous people fundamentally different from non-Indigenous
- but we are not all the same – age, gender, life experiences, community, country differ

Copyright A_Professor Margaret Walter, UTAS & IRMMM
Standpoint: epistemology

Epistemology:

• How we understand knowing, define knowledge, hierarchy of knowledge.

• Western epistemology permeates research – it is presumed and hierarchical by expertise and social structural elements.

• Indigenous epistemological differ by peoples but share a commonality of perspectives that know knowledge is relational – with others, country, and spirit and embody these.

Copyright A_Professor Margaret Walter, UTAS & IRMMM
Standpoint: axiology

Values are extrinsic and intrinsic in research process. To clarify our axiology need to ask:

1. Why this topic?
2. What this particular research question?
3. What implicit and explicit values are in this research?
4. How are values of influencing entities reflected?

- Value free or subjective research not possible. Research occurs in a social reality in which moral, political and cultural values are central.

Copyright A_Professor Margaret Walter, UTAS & IRMMM
Standpoint: ontology

The nature of being; how we understand existence to be

- What is reality? Norm of western social research is that there is only one reality – the observable

- BUT our perceptions of reality, our understanding of the world, our own position within it are irretrievably entwined in specific social, cultural, personal and moral milieus

- Indigenous ontological perceptions significantly different. Less wedded to presumption of humans as separate/distinct from other life and the earth
Theoretical/Conceptual Frame

• Conceptual framework
  The specific theories that inform our research. Can be existing, a combination, or one adapted by us for our purposes

• Theoretical paradigm alignment
  The major theoretical paradigm most closely aligned with our theoretical approach

• Plus our Method
  Quantitative, qualitative, textual analysis, narrative analysis etc etc.
Paradigm busting

Knowing what underpins our own research exposes how such underpinnings central to all research practice – but often unacknowledged.

Feminist researchers broke ground here in 1970s in relation to ‘male as norm’ underpinnings.

Kuhn exposed resistance to challenging paradigmatic frameworks in physical sciences.

Dominant theoretical paradigms are immensely hard to challenge because they protect privilege, prestige and status of ‘experts’.

Copyright A_Professor Margaret Walter, UTAS & IRMMM
Paradigms

Do the elements of a researcher’s methodology mean we all have different methodologies? Yes and No

Yes – each researchers frame of reference will be at least slightly different

No – because methodologies classified under core categories based on their similarities - Paradigms

• Indigenous methodologies can be classified within the Indigenous research paradigm because all share standpoint underpinnings.

• This shared basic approach differentiate IR from other methodologies
Indigenous Methodology – It's not easy

Tensions and contradictions that need managing:

• Indigenous ambivalence towards western research and those educated in system

• Ambivalence of universities towards Indigenous knowledges and role of Indigenous intellectuals

• Academy expects members to speak from theory

• Community expects us to speak from experience

• Academy expects research and intellectual rigour

• Community expects us vigorous activism
Three Vital Understandings

1. Range & breadth of Indigenous methodologies is diverse and sometimes divergent.

2. BUT all centrally grounded in Indigenous subjectivities and experiences of everyday life. This means that redefinition and reframing of traditional research meanings.

3. Vigorous and active field of knowledge production – new methodologies are emerging and need to be developed to take us where we need to go.
Methodologies NOT Methodology

• Indigenous methodologies innovative and flexible
• Cannot work within closed paradigms
• Be wary of paradigms/methodologies becoming orthodoxies – stifle scholarship
• In many ways field is wide open– this is exciting
• But Indigenous methodology are not just any methodology used by an Indigenous person
• Methodology is approach - about doing not just theorising about approach
An Indigenous epistemological tradition shapes all facets of Indigenous research

Martin (2003) provides 4 principles

1. Recognition of our worldviews, knowledges and realities as research framework
2. Honouring our social mores essential
3. Emphasise social, historical and political contexts which shape our lives
4. Privileges Indigenous voices and experiences
The Field

The field of Indigenous methodologies is broad, diverse, emerging and international.

All share central paradigmatic underpinning principles but adaptive to fit both particular Indigenous peoples and the research need.

- Kaupapa Maori – Maori oriented/owned and culturally aligned research

Copyright A Professor Margaret Walter, UTAS & IRMMM
The Australian Field

Aileen Moreton-Robinson – Indigenous Women’s Standpoint
Martin Nakata – Indigenous Standpoint Theory
Karen Martin – Relatedness
John Maynard – Indigenous Historical methodology
Irabinna Rigney – Indigenist Methodology
Maggie Walter – Nayri Kati

We need more!

Copyright A_Professor Margaret Walter, UTAS & IRMMM